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ALDOUS HUXLEY'S DEATH CONCERN

by

GLENN D. DESMOND

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the University of Omaha in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

Department of English

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The phenomena of life may be likened unto a dream, a phantasm, a bubble, a shadow, the glistening dew, or lightning flash; and thus they ought to be contemplated. - The Buddha, in The Immutable Sutra.

Whatever is here, that is there; what is there, the same is here. He who seeth here as different, meeteth death after death.

By mind alone this is to be realized, and [then] there is no difference here. From death to death he goeth, who seeth as if there is difference here. - Katha Upanishad, iv. 10-11 (Swami Sharvananda's Translation).

Against his will he dieth that hath not learned to die. Learn to die and thou shall learn to live, for there shall none learn to live that hath not learned to die. - Toure of all Toures: and Teacheth a Man for to Die. The Book of the Craft of Dying. (Comper's Edition).

Thou shalt understand that it is a science most profitable, and passing all other sciences, for to learn to die. For a man to know that he is to die, that is common to all men; as much as there is no man that may ever live or he hath hope or trust thereof; but thou shalt find full few that have this cunning to learn to die. . . . I shall give thee the mystery of this doctrine; the which shall profit thee greatly to the beginning of ghostly health, and to a stable fundament of all virtues. - Orologium Sapientiae.

All from The Tibetan Book of The Dead.

INTRODUCTION

In the long course of his restless career, the informed and articulate intellect of Aldous Leonard Huxley has concerned itself with every major aspect of human fortune, but with none more intensively than the ultimate experience of death. This constitutes for many his greatest indictment.

Critics continue to argue that he has become so obsessed with infinity he has abandoned mankind, but this accusation must be weighed against his impressive and by no means completed literary record. It is true that he has turned from his early, impertinent appraisal of the human heart to a present preoccupation with eternity, and there can be no real doubt that he knowingly addresses himself to the narrowest of possible readerships, but the fact remains that he still writes to the human race, even though to only a fraction of it and from a considerable distance removed. Like Swift, into whose unreasoning rages he is frequently betrayed, Huxley exhibits a plain contempt

for general mankind but no clear sign that he can let it alone. He has wandered from the main area of world affairs to the esoteric outer perimeter of eclectic Mysticism, where he pursues Hindu studies under the tutelage of an enlightened Guru; yet, between isolated and meditative silences, he maintains a vitriolic one-way correspondence with a race he chiefly disdains but cannot entirely forsake.

This correspondence, as it bears upon the single aspect of death, is the subject of the following paper. The death thesis was chosen because of its obvious and extensive influence on Huxley's authorship. Huxley himself was chosen for two primary and interrelated reasons: first because of his importance in the literature of this century, second because of the novelty of his approach to a subject which too often has been tritely or indifferently explored by writers before him. Almost all of Huxley is subjective and the major portion of his fiction is allegorical, but above all, and despite some claims to the contrary, it is literary at the same time that it is philosophical. All the elements of literary excellence are present in the surface texture of a Huxlian work and it is even quite possible to enjoy him without any hint of what he is basically saying, but beneath the superstructure of the plot or within the pattern of imagery and sentence structure lies the essential point of a writer who has turned the full illumination of his brilliant talents on the profoundest questions that

beset mankind. Therein resides the allegory, the basic motive for the action which follows, and only when that point is clearly seen is it possible to fully enjoy and properly adjudge the proficiency with which the work is carried to its conclusion. As the following paper is intended to show, quite frequently the subject of that allegory is death.

CHAPTER ONE

A PROPHECY IN THE DUNGEON

In the opening pages of *After Many a Summer Dies the Swan*, an English historian, summoned to the United States on a three-months' research assignment for a California multimillionaire, alights from a streamliner at Los Angeles, where he is greeted by his employer's uniformed chauffeur and escorted into a waiting limousine.

Their destination, the chauffeur informs him, is the millionaire's estate, miles out in the San Fernando Valley. As they motor through downtown Los Angeles and out into the suburbs, they pass through a gauntlet of insistent and garish road signs, advertising a freakish diversity of products ranging from a super gasoline to a super-modern cemetery, which happens to lie only a few miles away. The signs are all fascinating to the historian, who has been accustomed to the comparatively inhibited advertisements of the British, but only one awakens any discernible interest on the part of the Negro driver. It is the cemetery advertisement, which has reappeared several times along the way.

"'That's ours, too,'" he says proudly, as he waves his hand toward the billboard.

"'You mean, The Beverly Pantheon?'" asks the historian.

"'Finest cemetery in the world, I guess,'" replies the chauffeur. "'Maybe you's like to see it. It wouldn't hardly be out of our way.'"[1]

The historian gives his assent; they turn onto Sunset Boulevard, cross the outskirts of Beverly Hills, speed for a few miles along a palm-studded road and mount a hill at the edge of the mountains.

There before them, on the top of a hitherto-concealed summit it shares with a two-hundred-thousand-dollar Tower of Resurrection (a full-scale reproduction of the Leaning Tower of Pisa, except that it doesn't lean), a six-foot neon sign proclaims that this is the "Beverly Pantheon - The Personality Cemetery," the one undeniably of the signs. And as the limousine winds along what may be presumed to be an excellently paved road between the graves, the scholar looks out on the most incredible display of twentieth-century mortuary art he or anyone else has ever witnessed.

High above the checkered pastures of the San Fernando Valley, the burial place is a giant and opulent denial of death, a bizarre and defiant euphemism in hedge and stone and precious metal.

To the strains of an automatic Perpetual Wurlitzer issuing from concealed loudspeakers around the acreages, the historian sees it all: a Pet's Cemetery, where lie the lamented remains of the cats and dogs of the wealthy;

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[1]Aldous Huxley, After Many a Summer Dies the Swan, pp. 10-11.

a miniature Stratford-on-Avon, complete with a replica of Shakespeare's tomb; a tiny reproduction of the Taj Mahal; a sumptuous Bride's Apartment, redecorated in the style of Norma Shearer's boudoir in "Marie Antoinette" (from which one may be married as well as buried); an exquisite black marble Vestibule of Ashes and a neighboring crematorium with three super-modern oil-burning mortuary furnaces always under heat and ready for instant service; a children's corner with its statues of Peter Pan and the infant Jesus and groups of alabaster babies playing with bronze rabbits near a fountain of rainbow music; a Garden of Quiet, thoughtfully installed for dignified meditation or grieving in the most expensive of surroundings; an Old World Cemetery, representing mortuary art of the Baroque; and, finally, the culminating glory, the luxurious and monumental mausoleum from whence the name of the cemetery is derived, the Beverly Pantheon itself.

It is a massive memorial, dedicated to the proposition that death is the end of nothing, except of mediocre pleasure, but the beginning of an ageless epoch of unimaginably ecstatic and purely carnal joy. There, flights of black marble stairs ascend past a pink-floodlighted replica of a Rodin statue to a spacious columbarium, seven stories high, where tier on tier of slab-sealed tombs and the bronzed and silver urns of the cremated, "like athletic trophies," stretch along endless galleries under splendid stained glass

windows. And there are the hundreds of statues, "the sort one might expect to see in a high class brothel in Rio de Janeiro," all females, and all nude except for tight belts and fetching sandals, all intensely and invitingly in motion - crouching, reclining, stretching, writhing, stooping to tie their sandals, using their hands to be modest, some with doves or panthers, others with upturned eyes symbolic of the soul's awakening, all in exotic and animated reply to the scrolled message which asks at the entrance to every gallery, "Oh Death, where is thy sting?"

And to other scrolls which proclaim, "I am the Resurrection and the Life. The Lord is my shepherd; therefore shall I want nothing," Huxley replies:

> Nothing. Not even Wurlitzer, not even girls in tightly buckled belts. "Death is swallowed up in victory" - the victory no longer of the spirit but of the body - the well-fed body, forever youthful, immortally athletic, indefatigably sexy. The Moslem Paradise had had copulations six centuries long. In this new Christian heaven, progress no doubt, would have stepped up the period to a millennium and added the joys of everlasting tennis, eternal golf and swimming.[1]

In this scene and in the novel which follows it, Aldous Huxley has written a prophecy which appears again and again in his authorship, vindictive, insistent, and essentially unaltered to this day. It is, in inescapable lucidity, a prophecy of doom.

As the opening scene suggests, After Many a Summer is a portrayal of man's reaction to the awesome promise of bodily death. This reaction, Huxley clearly implies, throws

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[1] Ibid., P. 16.

full illumination on man's accompanying reaction to life.

Huxley displays an earlier obvious interest in this theme - and there is imagistic evidence to suggest that it is present in latent form in his very first volume - but the full preoccupation appears with the publication of _After Many a Summer_. This, it is submitted, is his first full-blown pronouncement on the death attitude of twentieth-century man. And as the following paper is intended to disclose, it is a pronouncement which derives from and continues in an advanced preoccupation with death on Huxley's part. The macabre appears in considerable detail in _Brave New World_ and in _Eyeless in Gaza_. It is decidedly present in both _Grey Eminence_ and _The Devils of Loudun_. It continues in somewhat quieter fashion in _Time Must Have a Stop_ and is carried to its present extreme in _Ape and Essence_. But the prolonged documentation of man's hysteria toward death that appears in _After Many a Summer_, where the theme burgeons and sets the pace for all the rest, makes this a key volume in Huxley's death concern. One remembers the death conditioning in _Brave New World_; the cynical dissertations on death in _Eyeless in Gaza_; the retreat of a disembodied spirit in _Time Must Have a Stop_, the orgiastic descent to the tomb in _Ape and Essence_, and the victorious transcendence of death in _The Devils_. But in none is the attention centered for such a prolonged and illuminating interval on the extreme brute emotions of death - as it is in _After Many a_

Summer, where these emotions - for the first time as a primary theme of a complete volume - are spelled out in intimate, epic, and vitriolic detail. Mention Huxley's death concern and the first volume to come to mind is almost invariably After Many a Summer.

The alternative to death in After Many a Summer (a retreat to the dungeon) is rephrased in Brave New World, where it becomes a retreat to soma; in Time Must Have a Stop, where it becomes a retreat to the womb; and in Ape and Essence, where it is a plunge, full-tilt into the grave (and these are alternatives to life as well as to death). But the accent in these latter volumes is primarily on the response to the emotions, not so much on the emotions themselves. A full share of emphasis is given to both in After Many a Summer, but it is the merciless stress on the visceral fear of death which renders this novel so memorable, which therefore most lucidly defines, in basic allegory as though in basic English, Huxley's fixed opinion toward mankind's death attitude, which all these other volumes augment.

The towering hysteria in After Many a Summer and its ultimate horrible choice look, at first glance, like sheerest hyperbole. As one continues through Huxley's authorship, however, the realization occurs that they are nothing of the kind. They are merely the slightest exercise of prophecy on Huxley's part, based on what he believes to be a predictable factor - the gross unregeneracy of man.

This authorship, as it supports that prophecy of self-imposed death for the human race, is the object of the following study.

Throughout his writing, Huxley has drawn a diversity of human personalities, either from his own productive imagination, for use in his fiction, or from his broad, perceptive reading and observation, for use in the several biographies and biographical sketches he has authored, but in dealing with the single topic of death, he has divided his subjects into three main and vastly dissimilar, although not mutually exclusive, types. For the moment, one may be described as the ascendant, one as the descendent, and the third as the level. The one looks to the eternal; the second to the sub-human temporal; the third to nothing above or below but merely beyond himself on the plain level of time and mortality. They all appear at one time or another in every form of Huxley's prose - in his novels, his short stories, his plays, his essays, and his biographies. All three appear - two as a kind of personified antithesis - in _After Many a Summer_. Because each has an important place in the Huxlian thesis of death and because each is an arch-type, drawn with arresting and dramatic lucidity, it is essential to know precisely what they represent.

The Beverly Pantheon, clearly the fictional counterpart of the fabulous Forest Lawn outside the real Los Angeles, is only one of an immense number of holdings

in the possession of the multimillionaire, Jo Stoyte. He owns, among other things, a string of finance companies, vast orchards and oil lands and general real estate, coal and railroad stocks, a chain of over two thousand filling stations in California alone, each staffed exclusively by college graduates, and an enormous palatial estate, whose most striking adornment is a super Gothic castle, complete with moat, donjon, battlements, sundeck, swimming pool, and a regiment of servants.

Pordage, the historian, is only a temporary employee. He has been hired at what he considers a grossly generous fee to spend three months on the Stoyte estate going over the Hauberk papers, a collection of British family documents which Stoyte has bought for reasons at first obscure to Pordage. There are others, however, who are more permanent members of the Stoyte entourage. They are the sardonic and brilliant Dr. Obispo, Stoyte's full-time personal physician; Peter Boone, Obispo's young and idealistic assistant; and Miss Maunciple, a voluptuous young blonde, whom Stoyte calls "Baby." The importance of each to Stoyte is clear. Obispo and Boone are retained for the single purpose of keeping him above ground as long as possible. Miss Maunciple is his mistress. The actions of all three revolve around and are prompted by the actions of Stoyte, who is the dominant figure of the novel and one of the figures in the antithesis just described. The other figure

in that antithesis is William Propter, Stoyte's life-long acquaintance, who lives in a bungalow adjoining the Stoyte estate.

Propter is Stoyte's friend (the only one of his schoolmates fifty years before who hadn't taunted him for being fat) but Stoyte's attitude toward the relationship is an ambivalent one. He admires Propter and likes to be near him - so much so that he deliberately places his estate where it is, because Propter lives on the adjoining property; yet he resents him and, in his unreasoning way, wishes Propter wouldn't give him so many reasons to dislike him. He resents especially Propter's human sympathy (displayed, for example, when Propter suggests that Stoyte ought to raise the wages of his itinerant orchard workers). He envies Propter's scholarship and indifference to money, but his main anger, one feels, results from Propter's air of inner security, which reminds Stoyte of his own lack of that quality. It is clear that Propter understands Stoyte, and it is equally clear that Stoyte fails completely to understand Propter, in whose composed presence he is either ill at ease or trembling and shouting in the throes of a temper fit.

Only Peter Boone comes close to an understanding of Propter, or, rather, of what Propter stands for, and before the young idealist dies at the hands of Stoyte, who shoots him by mistake during a jealous rage over Miss Maunciple,

he has begun his conversion. Propter's long and rather tiresome conversations with Boone about eternity shortly before the boy's death serve as a clear and rather thorough illustration of what the nature of that conversion was to be, and more important, they afford an excellent insight into the nature of Propter himself, for Propter _is_ his philosophy, and the philosophy, in turn, is Huxley's. Propter is a mystic, and to the angry, uncomprehending intellect of Stoyte his dissertations are most disturbing, albeit meaningless.

Unmistakably, Propter's major utility in _After Many a Summer_ is his role as the author's personal spokesman, a device which Huxley does not always bother to employ when he wants a particular message delivered (he frequently strides right into the middle of his own text to deliver it himself), but if Propter seems to constitute an intrusion most of the time, as he almost certainly does, he atones for himself in a decidedly organic way as the opposite ego of Stoyte, whose image, through contrast, is thrown into full and merciless illumination.

It is an arresting contrast. On the one hand is a man in possession of a superhuman tranquility that detaches him from greed and fear and all but the essential appetites of ascetic mortality. Beyond and impervious to the level of time and craving, he looks upward and outward and is enthralled by what he sees. The vision before his eyes is the outer light of the great and beatific void of

eternity. On the other is Stoyte - in the grasp of a paralyzing fear that plunges him into prolonged and erotic lust and a desperate, repulsive attempt to avoid the grave. Unavailable to any but the level of brute mortality, he looks downward, ever deeper into the abyss toward which his fear impels him. The vision he sees is that of the tomb and beyond it, the Last Judgment and the leaping agonizing flames of eternal Hell.

Stoyte suffers from an almost pathological terror of death, an advanced thanatophobia which twists him into a monster, and impels him into subhuman excesses of every lustful kind and degree. His bed role with Miss Maunciple is largely left to the reader's imagination, but even its surface nature is pronouncedly erotic. Huxley makes it plain that Miss Maunciple is Stoyte's "Baby" literally and sexually. In effect, Stoyte, forty years her senior, is recalling his own youth by committing what amounts to a modified form of incest. The fact that Miss Maunciple enjoys the relationship, yet allows herself to be regularly seduced by the handsome, Machiavellian Dr. Obispo, is a commentary not on Stoyte's deficiency as a lover but on the quantity and degree of lust with which he surrounds himself. Like the egoists Propter refers to, or rather as _one_ of them, Stoyte literally wallows in sensuality, and his closest associates wallow with him. As it has been seen, Boone's sensuality is of another kind, that of

misguided idealism, which persists until his meeting with Propter, and in Propter's opinion, is just as destructive.

Dr. Obispo enjoys his particular place in the Stoyte household because it enables him to devote all his time (except for the few ministrations he must make to his patron and exclusive patient) to research aimed at increasing human longevity, a project which, of course, has the hearty blessing of Stoyte. Stoyte not only eagerly supplies him with all the money he asks, but in his desperation to remain alive, regardless of the cost, also serves as a willing guinea pig for practically any experiment short of vivisection without anaesthetic.

And Stoyte has reason, one which intensifies with every tick of the clock, because in spite of every frantic effort he makes to destroy it, the awful vision of death is always before his eyes. Stoyte's hysteria is amusing to Obispo, but it is also his obligation to keep the patient calm, because when Stoyte goes, so does the patronage which sustains Obispo. The choleric Stoyte is almost constantly in a towering rage against someone or something for some imagined self-righteous reason of one kind or another. And for every rage, he pays and knows he pays - in the probable resultant decline of his span and in the sure acceleration of those awful visitations of fear, in the certain immediate reappearance of the floating wraith of death that hovers always somewhere within his view and at times such as these confronts him face to terrified face.

When he gets to the danger point, Obispo chides him. Does he really _want_ to have another stroke? The next one might not be so easy, he knows. Stoyte takes the warning and desperately composes himself, reluctant as he is to forsake the bittersweet deliciousness of his own acrimonious wrath, for these choleric binges are to men like Stoyte, nothing but narcissistic flights of destructive sensuality, in the same class with gross overeating and drinking, sex orgies, and narcotics sprees.

Stoyte is a perfect example of the kind of personality for which Huxley is later to create a neologism. He is an "Adrenalin Addict," described by Huxley as follows:

> There are many people for whom hate and rage pay a higher dividend of immediate satisfaction than love. Congenitally aggressive, they soon become adrenalin addicts, deliberately indulging their ugliest passions for the sake of the "kick" they derive from their psychically stimulated endocrines. Knowing that one self-assertion always ends by evoking other and hostile self-assertions, they sedulously cultivate their truculence. And, sure enough, very soon they find themselves in the thick of a fight. But a fight is what they most enjoy; for it is while they are fighting that their blood chemistry makes them feel most intensively themselves. "Feeling Good," they naturally assume that they _are_ good. Adrenalin addiction is rationalized as Righteous Indignation and finally, like the Prophet Jonah, they are convinced, unshakably, that they do well to be angry.[1]

But for Stoyte, these adrenalin flings are immediately dangerous and indirectly costly, and when Obispo is not around, he has the warnings of his own viscera to rein him back to enforced and terrified composure. Above the sounds of his own shouting he hears the roaring in his

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[1]Aldous Huxley, _The Devils of Loudun_, p. 17.

ears and feels the hot tingle in his face that warn of rising blood pressure. Then the omnipresent visage of death swims directly before his eyes, and with it the vindictive images of the grave and the last judgment and the awful flames of hell. And he stops shouting and tries to concentrate on something pleasant, but never with more than partial and temporary success. He can sometimes force the spectre to the edge of his consciousness, but never beyond it and not even that far distant for very long. Throwing verbal salt over his shoulder, he repeats the words, "God is love. There is no death," but it is another ominous phrase, which he really sees: "IT IS A TERRIBLE THING TO FALL INTO THE HANDS OF THE LIVING GOD." The phrase is apt to appear at any time, as it does, for example, while he is crossing his estate in his limousine with Jeremy Pordage, the historian. It is a tranquil moment for Stoyte, when all is especially right with his world. He has just learned from one of his business lieutenants that he stands to make a new financial conquest that should net him another million or so, and he has just emerged from a visit to his private Hospital for Children, where, as usual, he has been showered with ego-bolstering affection from the youngsters, so there is no apparent reason for the image to present itself and every reason why it should not, but present itself it does. Suddenly and unaccountably, it is there before him, in inescapable, terrifying lucidity:

They drove on. Poised on the invisible vibration of its wings, a humming bird was drinking at the jet that spouted from the left nipple of Giambologna's nymph. From the enclosure of the baboons came the shrill noise of battle and copulation. Mr. Stoyte shut his eyes. "God is love," he repeated, trying deliberately to prolong the delightful condition of euphoria into which those poor kids and Clancy's good news had plunged him. "God is love. There is no death." He waited to feel that sense of inward warmth, like the after effect of whiskey, which had followed his previous utterance of the words. Instead as though some immanent fiend were playing a practical joke on him, he found himself thinking of the shrunken, leathery corpses of those nuns [which have happened to accompany a Spanish monastery that Stoyte has imported block by block to be installed on his grounds near the castle] and of his own corpse, and of judgment. Prudence McGladdery Stoyte had been a Christian Scientist; but Joseph Budge Stoyte, his father, had been a Sandemanian; and Letitia Morgan, his maternal grandmother, had lived and died a Plymouth Sister. Over his cot in the attic room of the little frame house in Nashville, Tennessee, had hung the text, in vivid orange on a black background: "IT IS A TERRIBLE THING TO FALL INTO THE HANDS OF THE LIVING GOD." "God is love," Mr. Stoyte desperately reaffirmed. "There is no death." But for sinners, such as himself, it was only the worm that never died.

"If you're always scared of dying," Obispo had said, "you'll surely die. Fear's a poison; and not such a slow poison either."

Making another enormous effort, Mr. Stoyte suddenly began to whistle. The tune was "I'm making hay in the moonlight in my baby's arms," but the face which Jeremy Pordage saw and, as though from some horrible and indecent secret, immediately averted his eyes from, was the face of a man in the condemned cell.[1]

The Beverly Pantheon, where he himself is destined to be buried, is a profitable investment for Stoyte, and promises even greater profit ahead, but he hates the place, and refuses to go near it if he can possibly avoid doing so. There are, however, occasions when, in the interest of

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[1]Huxley, <u>After Many a Summer</u>, pp. 42-43.

business, he cannot. On one of these, he is sitting in one of the cemetery executive offices on the top floor of the Pantheon, listening to the enthusiastic recital of additions his manager wants to install, among them, a Wee Westminister, a Poets Corner, a labyrinth of Catacombs, and a Chapel of Martyrs. Stoyte impatiently hears the recital through, and approves everything but the Chapel of Martyrs, but he is chiefly preoccupied with the vision of his own burial here in this very building, and the image is especially painful because, through an unforgivable blunder on the part of one of the minor executives, he knows precisely where his tomb is to be.

> Mr. Stoyte had listened wearily and with repugnance. He loathed his Pantheon and everything to do with it. Loathed it, because in spite of statues and Wurlitzer, it spoke to him of nothing but disease and death and corruption and final judgment; because it was here, in the Pantheon, that they would bury him - at the foot of the pedestal of Rodin's Baiser. (An assistant manager had once inadvisably pointed out the spot to him and been immediately fired; but there was no dismissing the memory of his offence.)[1]

But as the novel ends, Stoyte is given the surprising opportunity to escape the tomb, possibly for another century or two, possibly even forever, but for a singularly horrible price: He must incorporate into his daily diet an increasing portion of the raw, ground entrails of freshly gutted carp, which in effecting a steady decelleration of his metabolism, will indefinitely extend his life span, but reduce him slowly and inexorably to the psychophysiological status of a foetal ape. And in sardonic Huxlian justice, he is given

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[1] *Ibid.*, p. 233.

the chance to make his decision with its inescapable consequence crouching and gibbering right before his eyes. Acting on a clue that Pordage has uncovered in the Hauberk papers, Dr. Obispo takes Stoyte to a crumbling mansion in rural England, where they open a locked door and descend to a dungeon to find the 18th-century discoverer of the formula, the Fifth Earl of Gonister, and his housekeeper, both apes by now, both indifferent to their intruders, alternately snarling and making love in the unutterable filth of their subterranean paradise. And it comes as no surprise at all that, in spite of the gruesome augury he sees before him, Stoyte's decision will be unmistakably in favor of the Fifth Earl. He is already well along the way to unregenerate sub-humanity. His choice in the dungeon is only a logical, final step. "The process of evolution is pictured as in reverse," states Edwin Burgum. Stoyte is at least half-way back to the gorilla, and even when he sees the Earl, he "jealously mutters that the animal seems to be enjoying himself."[1]

Stoyte is a fascinating creature purely on the basis of his surface spectacle value if nothing else. He has been delineated skillfully and in large and dynamic lines. So too have the other inhabitants of After Many a Summer, all of whom have been drawn in artful detail and set in credible motion by a hand well trained in the art of dramatic-satiric story telling.

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[1]Edwin Berry Burgum, "Aldous Huxley and His Dying Swan," The Novel and the World's Dilemma, p. 156.

This appraisal is shared by James Gray, who reviewed the novel shortly after its publication. Gray does not subscribe to the basic philosophy which prompted the creation of Stoyte and the others, but he displays ungrudging willingness to give credit where he believes it is due - on the literary level at least, with the careful addendum that it is the only basis on which his full approval is volunteered. In his review, he writes as follows:

> The narrative framework of <u>After Many a Summer Dies the Swan</u> has several major supports. There is the interest which Jeremy Pordage brings in, that of an extremely erudite Englishman's amused view of the idiocy of life in California. There is the gross drama of greed and fear represented by Jo Stoyte, who has grown rich enough in the course of his exploitation of the people to build himself a castle, complete with moat and improved by many modern bathrooms, in one of which hangs an El Greco. Mr. Stoyte does not want to lose his mistress and he does not want to die. For Huxley this painful creature of his fancy is the embodiment of a philosophy based on preoccupation with personal desire, and he succeeds in knocking it over as you could a straw man. Enlivening the passages of scandal is the gleeful cynicism of Dr. Obispo, who seduces Jo Stoyte's delectable moron mistress and gets a completely innocent young man shot on suspicion of being the girl's lover. And wandering about as the author's mouthpiece whenever he feels an essay coming on, is the brilliant Mr. Propter, who really outlines Huxley's new religion for him. . . .
>
> Hardly a page of this book fails to contain a provocative, teasing idea, a flash of wit, a bit of sly comedy. And so whether or not you believe in either Huxley's rococo hell on earth, or the sightless, soundless wonder of his new heaven, you will read it, I predict, with a stimulating blend of pique, fascination, rage, sorrow, and unholy joy.[1]

As Gray has said, it is not essential to agree with the religious motive at the base of <u>After Many a Summer</u> in

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[1]James Gray, "Obituary for the Human Race," <u>On Second Thought</u>, p. 171.

order to enjoy it. As a matter of fact, it is not even necessary to know that one exists. But Gray, of course, does know and does not concur and thus feels obligated to qualify his tribute on the side of Huxley's artistry alone. It is possible to do this with Huxley, for although his actions and his characters spring with organic precision from Huxley's root philosophy, most of them are not for practical purposes of art, inextricably locked to that philosophy; they are mainly capable of leading their own independent and entertaining lives on the literary level alone. This is in partial disagreement with critic Chad Walsh, who deplores Huxley's swing to philosophy and states (with probable accuracy) that except for _Brave New World_ and possibly _Point Counterpoint_, the books of Huxley with the greatest lasting power are all non-fiction, that his later novels especially "read as though the author is impatient with the mechanics of plot; that the happenings described are merely a framework to make possible long dialogues and soliloquies on the topic, 'What is the chief end of man?'"[1] This is essentially the criticism of D. S. Savage.[2] Huxley indeed does display an impatience, and it may be that it has prevented him from attaining the full power of his fictional promise, but it is still, at least, considerably better than the mediocre, and, in most instances (_After Many a Summer_, for one) it appears to satisfy the essential demands of plot, imagery,

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[1]Chad Walsh, "False Gods and the Devil to Pay," _The New York Times Book Review_ (October 5, 1952), p. 1.

[2]D. S. Savage, _The Withered Branch_, pp. 138-139.

suspense, motivation and the rest without dependence on the philosophy at all. In any event, the full substance and the central meaning of such fantastically amusing creatures as Stoyte and his household cannot be perceived without an understanding of the basic premise which gave them birth.

It is difficult to attempt even a paraphrase of what Huxley is driving at in this mystical philosophy of his, for that is what it is, an eclectic Hindu mysticism, based on Western Vedanta, and the real dependence will be placed in a moment where it properly belongs: in Huxley's own words, but briefly and in over simplicity. Huxley sees man as a paradoxical mixture of perfection and imperfection existing in a universe of illusions, blind for the most part to the "divine ground of all being," which is an essential part of its own. This divine ground, which exists as an insulated content at the inmost psychical center of every human being, although most are never aware of it, is infinity itself. On occasions, to ordinary mortals under extraordinary circumstances, it is revealed in momentary flashes. Usually, however, it is apprehended only by those who have long and religiously prepared for it by a deliberate dying to self, by a kind of happy suicide wherein doubt, fear, greed, aversion and all the other fleshly illusions that obscure the soul from a merging with the beatific vision, the clear light of the void of perfect Buddahood, are cast away.

This state of perfect Buddahood is the ultimate and inexpressible attainment of Nirvana, when the soul stands directly in the center of eternity, one and identical with the Divine. It is referred to in words, but actually, it is a wordless, timeless, supremely tranquil state of indescribable joy. In the terminology of the Buddhist, it is the "ending of sorrow."

This is the mystical end for which all mankind is destined, Huxley believes, but for most men it is attained only after a perpetual cycle of births and rebirths and deaths and redeaths, broken by the transitional stages between the dying and the being born again in a new form. To some most happy few, however, this Beatific Vision or at least the outer circle of the Vision (for there is some disagreement about how far the mystic can go on this side of death)[1] is attained while its participant is still in the flesh. The mystic who attains this state has achieved a supreme detachment from the will, the appetite, the craving, and the sorrow that have hitherto bound him to mortality. It is, then, at once a recognition and a renunciation. A recognition of the eternal, of which he is now to some degree a part, and a renunciation of the earth, of which he is still a physical inhabitant. And earthly death, when it finally comes to such a man, is nothing more than an unimportant anticlimax. Referring to the death of Father Jean-Joseph Surin, a mystic who had

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[1]Aldous Huxley, Grey Eminence, pp. 66-67.

passed through an agonizing hell on earth before he achieved the great peace that accompanies the state just described, Huxley writes:

> More than thirty years before, at Mareunes, Surin had often watched the calm, irresistible mounting of the Atlantic tides; and now the memory of that everyday marvel was the means by which this consummated soul was able, at last, to 'disgorge herself' in a not inadequate expression of the experienced Fact. <u>Tel qu'en Luimême enfin l' éternité le change</u>, he had come to the place, where without knowing it, he had always been; and when, in the spring of 1665 death overtook him, there was, as Jacob Boehme had said, "no necessity for him to go anywhere": he was already there.[1]

One of the essential concomitants of Huxley's mysticism is a premise which runs as a major or minor theme through practically all of his leading works dating from <u>Eyeless in Gaza</u>, and it is so important a factor in <u>After Many a Summer Dies the Swan</u> that the characterization in that novel seems less an outgrowth of the factor than a plain translation. This is the doctrine of Self-Transcendence.

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[1]Huxley, <u>The Devils</u>, p. 311.

CHAPTER TWO

DEATH AND TRANSCENDENCE

The Counterpoint

Early in his career, years before he turned to his current preoccupation with mysticism, Huxley wrote a novel called Point Counterpoint, whose several characters, like the melodies in musical counterpoint, were all set running at the same time but on different themes, which crossed and crisscrossed but never aligned. The novel was received as a penetrating dramatic narrative and a delightful and revealing experiment in form; it is still considered one of the best he has ever produced.

Huxley has not always since employed the device as a central form, but the counterpoint is still present in practically everything he writes. It cannot help but be, for any delineation of the human race, as Huxley sees it, must of necessity include an unaccountable diversity of personalities engaged in a nightmarish multiplicity of unaccountable antics, and his books are teeming with them. Indeed, the world of man, as it appears in Huxley's pages, is frequently close to a chaos of counterpoint, wherein everyone goes shooting off in a different direction: to science, to sex, to drugs, to suicide, to Nirvana, and to

anything else above, below, or on the level of the earth, in most instances with no apparent reason for doing so.

To one who believes, as Huxley does, that man carries a pure content of infinity within himself, there is, however, a reason. It is the inherent compulsion to escape from one's own "sweating" and imperfect self, impelled by a kind of unverbalized twilight awareness of the eternity everyone carries at the core of his "essential Self." This, believes Huxley, is the urge for Self-Transcendence:

> Introspection, observation and the records of human behavior in the past and at the present time, make it very clear that an urge to self-transcendence is almost as widespread and, at times, quite as powerful as the urge to self-assertion. Men desire to intensify their consciousness of being what they have come to regard as "themselves," but they also desire - and desire, very often, with irresistible violence - the consciousness of being someone else. In a word, they long to get out of themselves, to pass beyond the limits of that tiny island universe, within which every individual finds himself confined.[1]

Self-transcendence, believes Huxley, takes three forms, each determined by its respective compass bearing. These forms, or directions, have already been touched upon, in the preceding chapter, where they were described as the "Ascendant," the "Descendent," and the "Level." They shall hereinafter be referred to under their proper Huxlian titles as the "Upward Self-Transcendent," the "Downward," and the "Horizontal."

Within their directional limits, all three of these escapes take a variety of forms, and all may be either

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[1] Huxley, The Devils, p. 67.

auto or self propelled, but only one, the Upward Self-transcendent, which ends in the Divine Ground of All Being, is the route prescribed by the mystic. Because the others lead to a right-angular or an inverse distance away, they are considered either profitless or downright destructive.

There are several varieties of mysticism and, as a result, several dissimilar sets of instructions for the attainment of the Beatific Vision through upward transcendence, but in the eclectic philosophy of Huxley, it may be described as being achieved through a kind of delicate trilateral state of equilibrium between the temporal and the eternal, whereby the mystic deliberately lives in the world while he just as deliberately dies out of it. This is the "deliberate dying to self," which Huxley believes essential to the attainment of Nirvana. He explains this in the following lines:

> If we experience an urge to self-transcendence, it is because, in some obscure way and in spite of our conscious ignorance, we know who we really are. We know (or, to be more accurate, something within us knows) that the ground of our individual knowing is identical with the ground of all knowing and all being; that Atman (Mind in the act of choosing to take the temporal point of view is the same as Brahman (Mind in its eternal essence). . . . When the phenomenal ego transcends itself, the essential self is free to realize, in terms of a finite consciousness, the fact of its own eternity, together with the correlative fact that every particular in the world of experience takes part of the timeless and the infinite. This is liberation, this is enlightenment, this is the beatific vision, in which all things are perceived as they are "in themselves" and not in relation to a craving and abhorring ego.[1]

According to Huxley's formula, the perfectly coordinated mystic may, with the help of Divine Providence,

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[1] *Ibid.*, p. 69.

expect to attain the divine ground through the fulfillment of three interdependent assignments. It is accomplished through a simultaneous union with the divine ground, the manifestation of the divine ground in a human model, and the spirit which links the known, finite, and temporal to the unknown, infinite, and eternal. An exclusive union with any one of the three, feels Huxley, precludes Nirvana. Adopting for the moment the language of Christianity (in conformance with his belief that all religions may, if properly followed, lead to the same goal), he cautions as follows:

> The primordial Fact and the primordial Duty can be formulated, more or less adequately, in the vocabulary of all the major religions. In the terms employed by Christian theology we may define realization as the soul's union with God as a Trinity, a three in one. It is simultaneously union with the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost - union with the source and Ground of all being, union with the manifestation of that Ground in a human consciousness and union with the spirit which links the Unknowable to the known.[1]

Union with the Son through works and union with the Spirit through docility, he goes on, lead to loving selflessness and thence to a knowledge of the world as it really is - "a multiplicity manifesting the non-dual infinite, a temporal order participating in the eternal."[2] It is here that the soul is made aware of what unconsciously it has enjoyed at every moment - a union with the Father. In cases where the union is exclusively concentrated on the Son, the soul wanders into a hybrid trap of outward

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[1] Ibid., p. 70.

[2] Ibid., p. 71.

works and inward visions and imaginings and self-induced but not properly-inspired emotions, neither leading to the reality, which the insulated or too-exclusively-united self, cannot know. So too with the Spirit. A union here solely restricted leads to the "thought-patterns of occultism, the behavior-patterns of psychics and sensitives," where the embodied mind, with its personalized self crystallized out, merges with a horde of other embodied minds other psychic factors surviving bodily death, other psychic idea patterns, and other nonhuman entities, "beneficient, malicious or merely alien," all floating around in psychic space and all leading short of the goal. For those who confine themselves to this sort of contract there is no more hope than for those who restrict themselves to either of the others:

> For them, there will be no union with the Spirit; there will be a mere merging with spirit, with every Tom, Dick and Harry of a psychic world, most of whose inhabitants are no nearer to enlightenment than we are, while some may actually be more impenetrable to the light than the most opaque of incarnate beings.[1]

There are, then, innumerable chances to go astray even on the route to upward self-transcendence, but the greater number of men, believes Huxley, do not even get on the right route. Most take the wrong turn and head down or along the countless paths leading to downward or horizontal transcendence, all of which in turn lead to dead ends.

Both of these escapes, Huxley makes it clear, may

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[1]*Ibid.*, p. 73.

be made and <u>are</u> made in a variety of ways. The horizontal, as he says, can be directed along any "more or less creditable" path away from but neither above nor below the self, into art, science, politics, a hobby, a job, and even to a religion (when the real point of the religion is missed). They may seem lofty, may to all appearances be inspired, but to Huxley, they are outward, not upward, and their inspiration is purely and blindingly self-induced. They are not to be confused with the finite works of upward self-transcendence, which are essential to union with the Son and are part of a larger inspiration proceeding directly from the Father. Judged against the supreme requirement, those of the horizontal are artificial, inorganic and nonutil. Thus, all the apparently commendable crusades, all the causes, all the vocations, avocations, and dedications to which so many men direct their lives and their talents are adjudged by Huxley to be nothing more than prolonged and eminently lamentable exercises in misdirection.

The forms of downward self-transcendence are just as diverse and even more destructive, and to Huxley, there is, of late, increasing evidence that the already-heavy traffic along this path is swelling and accelerating into what looks like the beginning of a full-scale rout. In his epilogue to the <u>Devils of Loudon</u>, he makes a detailed appraisal of that evidence, and it is one which may be of particular interest because it is his latest pronouncement

on the subject. These downward transcendent escapes, as he describes them here and elsewhere, may be into any of a number of subhuman caverns, among them, alcoholism, drug addiction, elementary sexuality, herd-poison (the intoxication of getting together in a mob), neurasthenia, and insanity. All are a form of living death, all an escape from the self but an absolute refusal to escape into the deliberate dying to self of upward transcendence; and because the supreme and joyous death has not been achieved in either this, the downward, or the horizontal state, the approach of what ought to be the anticlimactic death of the physical state is a barren and hideous thing. Rather than face its oncoming visage, mankind runs faster and farther, either outward or downward until the spectre closes the gap.

Granting that Huxley's thesis is valid, it follows from even a cursory observation of human nature that few people fall exclusively into any single category of transcendence. It is possible to be going partly upward or downward and partly horizontal too, or even partly in all three directions at the same time. Indeed, aside from his fictional arch-types, where the hyperbole (if that is what it is) is justified, the great number of Huxlian characters, taken at any moment short of _Nirvana_ or complete degeneration, are, transcendentally speaking, two-or-three-dimensional rather than one. Therein lies the source of their imperfection and of Huxley's complaint. But it also

follows that most are predominately one of the three types and that is the way they are portrayed.

The importance of transcendence in Huxley's philosophy is self evident in any of his direct utterances on the subject. It is dramatically so when personified, as it is so frequently, either in Huxley's imagination, or conveniently in life itself.

Transcendence in After Many a Summer

This is the way it appears in After Many a Summer, all of whose characters are in one stage or another of transcendence. Jo Stoyte, of course, is a pure example of downward self-transcendence and its final horrible result. Mr. Propter, at the opposite end of the antithesis, is an equally fine illustration of upward transcendence. The idealist, Peter Boone, stands in the middle, directly between Heaven and Hell. Before his sudden, violent end, he shows signs that he can be summoned from his creditable but strictly horizontal level to the heights that Propter has attained. He is not completely sold on Propter's direction because it is all too new and bewildering to him, because it threatens all of his life-long convictions, but it intrigues him; he is giving it thought; he is tempted to explore it further; thus, when Stoyte intrudes as Boone's own private agent of death, the youth dies, still on the horizontal plain, but at least with his face toward the foothills that lead to the summoning peak. He dies, it is

interesting to note (and to shift metaphors), as a kind of innocent traffic victim at a transcendental intersection, wherein Stoyte unexpectedly blunders in on a sun deck love scene between Dr. Obispo and Stoyte's mistress, who displays unmistakable signs of just having been seduced. Undetected by the lovers, Stoyte, in blind and savage rage, descends to his room to get his gun. In the meantime, Peter Boone, who worships Miss Maunciple with a chivalric love that eminently amuses Dr. Obispo and mildly enrages Stoyte, happens along and, with his back to the spot where Stoyte is to reenter, stands talking to Miss Maunciple. Stoyte returns and kills him in the belief that he is killing Obispo. The death, it may be concluded, is the tragic but almost inevitable consequence of a chain of directional circumstances. Stoyte, the downward-transcendent, in a murderous rage over a love affair between his downward-transcendent mistress (for that is what she is) and his horizontal-downward hybrid of a physician, kills the primarily horizontal, but partially upward-transcendent assistant, who is on the scene because he has, in his idealistically horizontal way, fallen in love with a false idol, the lascivious, subhuman Miss Maunciple, whom he believes almost saintly in the purest upward-transcendent way.

This analysis is based on speculation alone and admittedly is a somewhat dizzying one, but in a novel so

organically precise in every other way, it seems hardly possible that such a prominent scene as the apparently accidental death of Peter Boone could be anything less than artistically calculated to fit the central allegory. The death of Peter Boone almost certainly is only one more reassertion of the accompanying indictment, which points to tragedy as the sure result of false direction.

It was said that Miss Maunciple is downward-transcendent and that Obispo is a combination of two types. This seems in both cases obvious. Miss Maunciple, a showgirl when Stoyte meets her, is the perfect example of the empty-headed blonde. She has a religion, but one which is largely meaningless to her, except for the floating sense of guilt she feels during her various excursions into sex, and even that is not wholly due to religious reasons; it is partly the result of her own code of loyalty to Stoyte. There is nothing greatly wrong with being Stoyte's mistress, she believes, but it is probably unfair to be anyone else's. With no apparent saving graces at all, the brainless Miss Maunciple rides downward, even deeper, on her private hobby horse of sex. Obispo, her seducer, is somewhat more complicated. He is intelligent, indeed brilliant, and in a coldly objective way is devoted to his longevity research, but that is the point; he is cold and he is objective. There is nothing altruistic about his quest for longevity. To him, it is simply a highly

interesting challenge of science and beyond the fun of the game itself and the personal or monetary triumph it may bring him, he sees nothing creditable in it at all. His appetites are both human and below-the-human, as Huxley categorizes them. He likes money and makes a great deal of it from Stoyte by deliberately concealing the facts of Boone's murder. He loves a smutty story or a pornographic passage, and takes a cynical delight in his seductions. But even in these, he maintains an amused, scientific detachment; he rides down with Miss Maunciple, but only part of the way. Misanthropic and atheistic, he knows no fear of death, but no assurance of anything pleasing or threatening beyond it. As opposed to the upward-transcendent Propter, who courts death in a religious way, and to the downward-transcendent Stoyte, who is inversely preoccupied with it because of terror, Obispo just doesn't think about it at all. It is probable that, of all the other personages in the story, Obispo would have the best chance to attain the heights of proper transcendence if he would only turn his gifted mind in Propter's direction, but there is no sign that he will. He pays Propter no heed, and regards Stoyte, at the opposite scale, not so much as an object of horror, but as one of amusement, although at times an annoying one. And when, on the way to the subterranean chambers of the anthropoid Fifth Earl, Stoyte pleads hysterically for reassurance that there is no Hell, Obispo

replies, as though to a child, that he'll have to wait and see.[1] And as Stoyte makes his decision in the cavern, with the plaintive remark that the Fifth Earl and his mate look as though they are having fun, it is to the uncontrollable accompaniment of Obispo's derisive laughter.

Jeremy Pordage, the remaining figure in the novel, is, except for some occasional tawdry sexual affairs, almost wholly horizontal. He is amusingly depicted as a scholarly English historian, neither religious nor non-religious, somewhat naive and almost wholly intent on his studies, which are to him vocation, avocation, and hobby all rolled into one. There is nothing complicated about Pordage; the reader sees the rest of the Stoyte retinue largely through his normal eyes, but while the implication is plain that Pordage represents a great portion of humanity it is also plain that his mainly uninspired life is admittedly and disappointingly a hollow one, leading in his resigned course of things to nowhere in particular save an inevitably uninspired death and the hollow, uninviting grave.

This then is the doctrine of Self-Transcendence, as it appears in personified form in After Many a Summer. To where else does it lead in Huxley's depictions?

Transcendence Continued

The answer is that it leads to just about everywhere in Huxley's prose dating from Eyeless in Gaza, which Gray

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[1] Huxley, After Many a Summer, p. 346.

describes as "the first stage of Aldous Huxley's journey away from Earth and all its interests."[1] The Propters, the Stoytes, the Obispos, the Miss Maunciples, and the Jeremy Pordages, drawn from imagination or taken directly from life, appear and reappear in everything he writes or has written from the date of his turn to mysticism. They are reportrayed not because of any impoverishment of the ability to create character on Huxley's part, but because of the great importance which Huxley affords the doctrine by which his characters are both formed and adjudged, which acts, for Huxley, as both the mold and the touchstone. His characterization is fundamentally repetitious, but calculated. It might be described as elastic reassertion. It paints the same underlying image, but expands it into new and vivid portraits. Charles Rolo states that they are all delineated satire, basically personified ideas[2] and to this might be added the entry from Philip Quarle's notebook:

> Novel of ideas. The character of each personage must be implied as far as possible in the ideas of which he is the mouthpiece. In so far as theories are rationalizations of sentiments, instincts, dispositions of 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 about .01 per cent. 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.[3]

To those who find the basic image somewhat tiresome, it still grants the enjoyable variations. For this reason,

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[1] Gray, "Obituary," p. 70.

[2] Charles J. Rolo, "Aldous Huxley," Atlantic Monthly (August, 1947), p. 111.

[3] Aldous Huxley, Point Counterpoint, pp. 294-295.

critics like Gray can complain that Huxley's man exhibits certain annoying consistencies. In Gray's case, he talks too much: "He gossips as he goes, seemingly to suffer from a particularly virulent form of diseased chattiness";[1] but they can add that he nevertheless entertains, as Gray does, for example, in his previously-quoted tribute to After Many a Summer, which, as the reader will recall, he predicts will be read "with a stimulating blend of pique, fascination, rage, sorrow, disapproval and unholy joy."[2] It seems hardly likely that a range of emotions such as this could be stimulated by a set of mere wooden or repetitious personifications, and it is not, for beyond the fundamental theme there is the latitude which the doctrine affords. To Huxley, it is the latitude of life itself, because it is derived from and is capable of covering all instances in humanity. In his fiction, it is applied with live and entertaining fertility; in his biography with spirited and exacting detail, and although diverse, measured as it is against the basic theme of transcendence, it is reliably close to precision. To know a Huxlian man is to know his approximate bearing in mystical space, is to know his relative distance from Heaven or Hell, and his resultant degree of tranquility, terror, or indifference in the face of bodily death. The attitude by now predicts itself.

The overwhelming number of Huxlian figures are depicted as at a long distance from the Beatific Light,

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[1]Gray, "Obituary," p. 166.

[2]Ibid., p. 173.

and their abundance is consistent; they constitute the unmistakable majority in practically any given setting. They are seen gathered around their tea tables in sheltered drawing rooms, or around the executioners' blocks in public squares. They are seen at their hobbies or at their pursuits into business or art or science or politics, and they are just as often found at their more brutish diversions of basic or assertive sex, intrigue, murder, alcoholism, herd-poison, narcotics addiction, neurosis, insanity, sickness, and premature mortal dying. In Huxley's pages, they fill up every assemblage, every city, every nation and every age. When depicted singly, as in _After Many a Summer_ and other works, they are ruthlessly detailed, but the depiction is probably even more damning in the mass because it sweeps with a broad brush across the whole backdrop of civilization itself. This is as it should be to Huxley, because the prominence and the condemnation are derived directly and inescapably from life.

Such a depiction is made, for example, in _Antic Hay_, where one of a group of revelers describes night-time London in counterpoint as follows:

> "Does it occur to you," he went on, "that at this moment, we are walking through the midst of seven million distinct and separate individuals, each with distinct and separate lives and all completely indifferent to our existence? Seven million people, each one of whom thinks himself quite as important as each of us does. Millions of them are now sleeping in an empested atmosphere. Hundreds of thousands of couples are at this moment engaged in mutually caressing

one another in a manner too hideous to be thought of, but in no way differing from the manner in which each of us performs, delightfully, passionately and beautifully, his similar work of love. Thousands of women are now in the throes of parturition, and of both sexes, thousands are dying of the most diverse and appalling diseases, or simply because they have lived too long. Thousands are drunk, thousands have over eaten, thousands have not had enough to eat. And they are all alive, all unique and separate and sensitive, like you and me. It's a horrible thought. Ah, if I could lead them all into that great hole of centipedes."[1]

Coleman is a fictional spokesman, who was created during Huxley's earlier period of post-war disillusionment and cynicism, but the same vitriolic portrayals continue up through the years with greater ugliness and deeper incisiveness.

Death Conditioning and the Retreat to the Tomb

There are the descriptions of the conditioned rabble in Brave New World, where a whole civilization is produced in test tubes and molded to the absolute will of a demagogue, with the result that it is totally inaccessible to the light or to any emotions save those which lead in the opposite direction. There, the means to upward transcendence have been ruthlessly, totally destroyed; those normally considered as the creditably horizontal - chiefly mechanical and scientific proficiency - have been honed down to strict utilitarianism, with no chance at all for possible sublimation; and those of the downward transcendent - such as herd poison, basic sexuality and narcotics - are the instruments to regimentation, recreation,

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[1]Aldous Huxley, Antic Hay, pp. 50-51.

and controlled and temporary escape.

In this civilization, the pattern of death, like the pattern of birth, has been chemically controlled and emotionally deconditioned. To prolong their utility as workers, the Utopians are maintained in a glandular state of youthfulness up to the point of diminishing returns and then allowed to pop off into oblivion. "Youth almost unimpaired till sixty, and, then, crack! the end."[1] Their usefulness, however, does not quite end with death. Ninety-eight per cent of each body is reclaimed in the form of phosphorus.[2]

One dies out of this society in a drugged ecstasy induced by soma, which produces a state precisely and mockingly identical to mystical transcendence. One dies unwept as well, for all Utopian children are subjected to an early course of death-conditioning, wherein they are ushered into the death wards, given sweets to eat and encouraged to participate in erotic sex play as the various patients in those wards drift off into oblivion.

Probably one of the most curious (and strangely pathetic) death scenes in all literature is that of Linda in the Park Lane Hospital for Dying. Linda, steeped in soma, slips off into death in the frantic presence of her son, the Savage, and a troop of gawking, death-conditioned brats who are mainly preoccupied with their chocolate eclairs and their game of hunt-the-zipper. The pathos and

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[1]Aldous Huxley, Brave New World, p. 129.

[2]*Ibid.*, pp. 86-87.

the irony in this particular passage derive from the juxtaposition of two worlds - that of the present and that of what the present is promising to be.

From this, the age of the mass-conditioned mind, the universal contraceptive, the world-obliterating soma pill, and the conditioned indifference to death, he goes to the final extreme, in Ape and Essence, to a nightmarish post-atomic sub-civilization of ghouls, who, clothed in the rotting garments they have stripped from decayed or decaying corpses, dwell among the rubble of their ruined cities and the open graves of their now-unadorned dead.

Not flatteringly short of these extremes is the authentic age depicted in his two historical biographies, Grey Eminence and The Devils of Loudun, where man's inhumanity to his own kind reaches nightmarish, but carefully documented proportions of depravity and horror.

There are the rapacious orgies, the sadistic public tortures and blood lettings, the mass murders and disfigurations of early seventeenth-century France and Germany, described in Grey Eminence - in frightful detail in the passage devoted to the etchings of one Jaques Callot, and in Huxley's later account of the final depravity of the war, wherein he speaks of executed malefactors being cut down from the gibbets to serve as butcher's meat; of the efforts of the recently bereaved to guard the cemeteries against the ghoulish

activities of body-snatchers; of the troops of foraging, almost sub-human, camp followers, wandering about like baboons, desperately searching for food; of the peasants living on carrion; of the soldiers amusing themselves by taking pot shots at peasants or setting their dogs on them just "for fun" or by trying, experimentally, to determine how often and how deeply a person could be cut before he died; or by lashing people to trestles and sawing them apart like logs of wood. Atrocities beget a taste for atrocities, Huxley remarks, and the hunger continues till, for some providential reason, men and women discover the hidden springs of compassion in the worst of them, but at that time, the diabolic wartime reaction against common decency was at its height.[1]

The Death Spectacle

What is the reason, one asks, for these extended scenes of death and horror in Huxley? Why this preoccupation, apparently beyond the limits of artistic necessity, with the sights and sounds of death and the precise details of its affliction? With death for the sake of death as it were?

Writing of an age of war, any author is entitled - indeed is usually obligated - to depict some of its horrors, and in artistic consciousness, he must depict them lucidly. But the prolonged and exhaustive attention Huxley devotes

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[1]Huxley, Grey Eminence, pp. 268-269.

to the Callot etchings and to the other public and orgiastic blood-lettings that appear in this particular volume seems clearly disproportionate to any particular utility it may serve as a part of the documentation.

Recapturing the violence and the horror of another age (to which he seems to be attracted because of its very horror), Huxley is justified in describing its roadside massacres, but only up to a point. Beyond that, another reason must be implied. The murder scene is essential in Grey Eminence, but Huxley visits the scene more often than necessary and tarries perhaps too long.

The same question arises in connection with Huxley's latest Baroque volume, The Devils of Loudun, where the amount of attention devoted to the torture and death of Grandier (unlike the death scenes in its predecessor) leads to an overwhelming illustration of the victim's corresponding titanic strength of will and the monumental supremacy of his last-moment victory over death. Even here, however, it is difficult to regard the artistry as wholly objective. One watches the systematic reconstruction of every verified particular of Grandier's excruciating agony up to and including the last juicy moment of his death in the flames and wonders how it could have been accomplished without some measure of grim fascination on the part of the author.

In this same connection, one recalls the peculiarly memorable treatment of the murder scene in Point Counterpoint,

particularly the detailed description of the corpse as it is inexorably transformed into the rigidity of a statue, and the accompanying contrast of hysteria and cynical indifference on the part of the two murderers. It is a scene in which Huxley appears to betray a grimly ironic delight in detailing not only the transformation itself but the prolonged terror of Illidge, who must remain for a tortuous length of time in its horrible presence. The entire scene, including the final comedy of errors in which the two murderers struggle to cram the statue into an automobile, is overlaid with pure mockery. It is arresting satire, but does it not, one may ask, imply a peculiar direction of taste on the part of the satirist?

All this suggests that Huxley himself displays a peculiarly grim personal fascination for the very spectacle of death, for entire epochs of death, for the precise methods of death, and for the accompanying shrieks and gesticulations of its agonized victims, all of which he, like Callot, describes in such thorough and excruciating detail. No artist should be accused on the basis of his very excellence, and Huxley is noted for the brilliance of description and exposition in everything he attempts, but one cannot avoid the conclusion that, coupled with the frequency of his appearance at the orgies of death, the compelling artistry with which he recreates the sights and sounds of death (as of sex and every other orgy) is

accompanied by and proceeds from an intense personal predilection for the scenes at hand. The predilection is undeniable, but the reason for the predilection, is another question.

Huxley's preoccupation with the spectacles and methods of death as well as with its philosophical ramifications is, in fact, voluminously unmistakable. And he _is_ concerned not only with individual death scenes but with entire ages or epochs of death. In _Grey Eminence_, the macabre extends through two nations. In _The Devils_ it is confined to a single village, but the breadth of locale is irrelevant in both instances. The preoccupation with horror in both volumes is alike. Actually, however, an implication that Huxley orients toward particular ages because death and human misery seem to predominate therein would be unjust. Instead, his peculiar emphasis happens to be on the horror in any age or epoch he describes, clearly because of his belief that the horrible persists in _every_ age. This includes the present, to which he refers in _Beyond the Mexique Bay_; _Ends and Means_; _Texts and Pretexts_; _Science, Liberty and Peace_; and numerous single essays. It includes the future too, most notably in _Brave New World_ and _Ape and Essence_.

Later evidence will be shown to the effect that Huxley disclaims any personal obsession with the cult of death advocated by Pascal. But these extended signs of interest in the frightful sights and sounds of death in the volumes

Grey Eminence, _The Devils_, and others should be accounted for. According to the overwhelming testimony of Huxley himself, they occur not because of any direct, personal delight he himself may take in the death spectacle, but in the unconcealed delight displayed by the participants. The best testimony occurs in the death descriptions themselves, where in spite of the great attention to the methods of death depicted therein, the main emphasis lies on the sub-human cruelty of the participants. It is precisely this cruelty which renders these accounts so frightful. One comes away from a Huxlian death scene with an enormous horror for the fate of the victim, but with an unforgettable disgust for those who took part in the scene. And this disgust is not always directed to those who are supposed to take the most intimate part in the spectacle. The two most sympathetic roles in the Loudun death episode, for example, are played by the surgeon who refuses to rip out Grandier's nails, and the executioner himself, whose merciful attempt to end Grandier's agony with a coup de grace is foiled by the victim's sadistic accusers, all to the intense delight of the crowd.

Huxley's descriptions of these scenes is surgically ruthless. Whether he takes any personal sadistic pleasure in the surgery is a question that would be profitless to pursue here. It is mainly inspired, one may be sure, by Huxley's belief in a basic sickness in the human race.

"The commonest, one might call it the natural rhythm of life," he writes, "is routine punctuated by orgies."[1]

Every orgy is a variety of downward-transcendence. The death orgy, one gathers, has always been one of the most popular.

In an essay on Breughel's painting of "The Crucifixion," Huxley refers to that "eager, tremulous, lascivious interest in blood and beastliness" of the gaping crowd with their picnic baskets clustered around the tormented figures on the crosses. It is the same interest, he adds, which modern man is forced to satisfy at only one remove in the pages of his newspapers.[2]

He describes the disappointment of the spectators at a bull fight in Mexico when the "corpse" of a gored torero gets up from the arena and staggers away alive. "Still there had been blood," he chides. "Real blood. One must learn to be thankful for small mercies."[3]

He cites the case of Alypius, who deplored the thought of blood until he was dragged in to witness a gladiatorial battle and thenceforth developed a lust for it. So it would be, believes Huxley, with modern mankind. Civilized people are now trained, as Alypius by St. Augustine, he writes, to regard cruelty and unavoidable suffering as morally wrong and aesthetically disgusting. Moreover, society is so organized that they seldom have the opportunity to gratify their more ferocious passions. But how would

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[1]Aldous Huxley, <u>Beyond the Mexique Bay</u>, p. 77.
[2]Aldous Huxley, <u>Essays New and Old</u>, p. 72.
[3]Huxley, <u>Beyond the Mexique Bay</u>, p. 267.

they behave, if given the chance. Most, he believes, would behave precisely as Alypius does:

> The impulse to cruelty is, in many people, almost as violent as the impulse to sexual love - almost as violent and much more mischievous. Early training can fix principles and inspire a theoretical disgust. But, given free play, a sudden impulse can undo in a minute the work of years.[1]

This lust for the death orgy has been profitable to a number of civilizations, including some in the present. In Spanish Colonial society the public execution was deliberately continued as one means of keeping the populace satiated and controlled.[2] And in every age the lust has been employed on a broader scale for the precipitation of mass hatred and war. This latter kind of orgy, however, has a rather desirable drawback. It frequently results in the death of the participants themselves:

> Bawling in mobs is almost as good as copulation, but the subsequent action leads to extreme pain and death all around . . . , and, in many cases, the transformation of the hater himself into a corpse. This, I repeat, is fortunate; for if the gratification of hatred were always as delicious as it is sometimes, then there would obviously never be any interval of peace.[3]

Recognizing its evils, many civilizations have found it necessary to shift the death orgy to less fatal forms or at least to forms which do not involve the killing of humans. The bull fight is one example. Many of the competitive games of more refined civilizations are others. The headhunters in Papua have been turned from the slaughter of human victims to that of wild boars. One may still

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[1]*Ibid.*, pp. 164-165.

[2]*Ibid.*, p. 81.

[3]*Ibid.*, p. 76.

read about executions in one's newspapers. And in Mexico City on Easter Saturday, the slaughter instinct is satiated by stuffing firecrackers into the belley of a strung-up effigy and blowing the whole figure to smithereens. This is merely a second-best substitute for the more satisfying rituals of primitive times in that locale, when victims were bent backwards over a stone and had their hearts ripped out in sacrifice to the Sun God, or were gutted and eaten alive, or flayed, drowned or decapitated in honor of one deity or another. But it will do in lack of anything better, states Huxley.[1]

The Escape to Space

The relationship of upward ecstasy to the brute phenomenon of bodily death is self-apparent. The ecstatic deliberately seeks to transcend death through an annihilation not only of the illusion of the self but of the illusion of death as well. The orgy at first glance seems merely an unconscious attempt to escape from the self. The fact that it frequently reduces that self to a corpse is no deterrent. There is every reason to believe, however, that it is not only an escape from the self but an escape from death, or rather an escape from the thought of death. Phrased in another way, it is an attempted escape from time. Meditating among the death heads in Copan, which he describes as "one vast monument to the Maya's extraordinary preoccupation with time,"[2] Huxley advances the thesis that at a

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[1] *Ibid.*, p. 81.

[2] Huxley, *Beyond the Mexique Bay*, p. 196.

certain level of consciousness, men become aware of the inexorable current of time and the promise therein of their own inevitable doom:

> At a certain level of consciousness, time inevitably becomes a preoccupation. Men are aware of the flux and of themselves within it. They may see themselves at rest in the current, at rest but doomed to draw the potential into the actual, to go on drawing it until at last they draw the potentiality of death and, with its actualization, can draw no more. The first was the mediaeval conception of time, the second is Galileo's, Newton's and (except in the mathematician's study) ours.[1]

Both are equally depressing, he continues. Indeed any conception of time must be because it promises the intolerable certainty of one's own extinction.

> For any possible conception of time entails the recognition and intimate realization of the flux of perpetual perishing; and to be made aware of the flux - the flux in relation to one's own being; worse, as a treacherous and destructive element of that being - is intolerable. . . . The realization of it is, I repeat, intolerable. Not to be borne.[2]

And in fact, states Huxley, man does refuse to bear it. He takes from time those qualities he finds unbearable and gives it others of a less distressing kind. In the "Undifferentiated flux of perpetual perishing," he cannot feel at home. He does, however, in space - in the comfortable little space of his own planet.

For that reason, he spatializes time by transforming it into circles - a little round day, a large round month, a huge round year. And because man is a long-lived animal with an imagination before which a year sinks, in the long

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[1] *Ibid.*, p. 197.

[2] *Ibid.*, pp. 197-198.

continuity of time, into insignificance, he must invent even larger units to stave off the return of the terrifying flux. The Great Cycles of the Mayas, for example.

Time can be spatialized in other ways, he adds. There are the artistic techniques for bending the irreversible current into the semblance of a circle. Through the rhythms of the dance, the song, and the poem. In addition to these there are the biological and social devices for dulling men's awareness - the artificial circular movements of habit and routine.

Habit and routine are wholly subliminal. The arts, however, are fully conscious. Music, poetry, and the dance transmute time into space on the highest level of awareness, and the effect is in some degree enduring: "A mind impregnated with music will always tend to impose a pattern on the temporal flux."[1]

But of all the devices, religion goes the farthest. It "makes use of every possible device for rendering duration humanly acceptable."[2] It gives to the already circular calendar an emotional and intellectual significance. It exploits the time transmutations of the arts. It disparages time in favor of eternity. But even this disparagement is not enough.

Most of the great philosophical systems of Indian and European antiquity share the common doctrine that time is somehow an illusion and eternity the only reality, he

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[1]*Ibid*., p. 203.

[2]*Ibid*.

continues, but illusion though it may be, time persists in being a distractingly realistic one, and is rarely dispelled:

> But even if true - and personally I should like it to be true - the doctrine is not very efficaceous against the obsessive consciousness of duration. For an illusion which is shared by all human beings, at any rate on our planet, is for all practical purposes indistinguishable from reality.[1]

For this reason, all the major religions add to their disparagements of time, technical education in the art of escaping it for the present experience of eternity. This is the training in ecstasy:

> Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Taoism - all have their systems of mental and physical gymnastics for the production of ecstasy, which is the present experience of eternity.[2]

The chronologist, the musician, the poet, the calendar maker, the common creatures of habit and routine (and these, one may suppose, include the indifferently religious, who observe the chronology of religion but never achieve its ecstasies) have all transformed time, by a variety of means, into the likeness of a circle.

"The mystic," states Huxley, "goes one further and contracts the circle to a point."[3] This is the authentic shape of eternity, he believes. It is an everlasting present; therefore, it is duration spatialized not as a ring but a glowing point. The mystic reduces the whole of existence to here and now. He spatializes time to its

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[1] *Ibid.*, p. 204.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 205.

[3] *Ibid.*

extreme limit. But, until the absolute attainment of the Divine Annihilation, the escape is impermanent, the return desolating. The illusory current still flows - has been flowing all the while - in all its deceptive but frightful reality.

> But, alas, when he emerges from his ecstasy, he finds the current still flowing - realizes that it has been flowing even while he imagined that he had altogether abolished it. The flux may be an illusion, but it is an illusion always and unescapably there.[1]

The circular devices for escaping time - the dance, the song, the metered line, the daily and weekly routine - are, as Huxley has implied, available to anyone who has reached the level whereon temporal preoccupation occurs. As it has in the present, believes Huxley, more than in any other age (this horror of time, age, and death, states Savage, precipitates the central crisis for Anthony Beavis in _Eyeless in Gaza_).[2] So too, one concludes, are the religious disparagements of time or their surrogate forms as exemplified by the Beverly Pantheon, which proclaims eternity as an orgiastic victory over death, with no hangover in the whole delightful scheme.

But from what Huxley has said about the various substitutes for upward transcendence, particularly the downward, one may conclude that even the ultimate means to spatialization: the contraction of time to a glowing point in eternity, may not be restricted to mystical ecstasy alone. It is possible that some of the other ecstasies, artificially induced by chemicals or passions,

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[1] _Ibid._

[2] Savage, p. 144.

which transport men out of themselves and out of time may even result in the contraction of time to a point or something close to a point. At least they are close imitations and achieve momentarily the same approximate degree of annihilation. This possibility seems clearly justified in the light of Huxley's remarks on downward transcendence in the Epilogue to The Devils, where he devotes extensive discussion to the great outward similarity of mystical transcendence and its surrogate forms at the opposite end of the religious scale. It is additionally supported in his most recent discussion of the subject (The Doors of Perception, Harper and Brothers, 1954), where he takes up a study of the use of peyote tea as a possible clue to escape without violence and without hangover. In the excerpts from this essay which appeared in The Saturday Review, he states that man continues every variety of escape from Saturnalia to religion.

> But the need for frequent chemical vocations from intolerable selfhood and repulsive surroundings will undoubtedly remain.[1]

In the opinion of anthropologist James S. Slotkin and W. C. Cutting, M.D., whose critical remarks followed the excerpts, there is no proof now that the safe chemical escape which Huxley envisions is possible. In any event, peyote is not the answer, as Huxley admits himself:

> Along with the happily transfigured majority of mescalin takers there is a minority that finds in the drug only hell or purgatory.[2]

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[1]Aldous Huxley, "Mescalin, an Answer to Cigarettes?" The Saturday Review (February 6, 1954), p. 14.

[2]Ibid.

It is, however, one gathers from Slotkin, a surrogate avenue to ecstasy:

> What it does do remarkably well is to permit a mystically inclined person to have a mystical experience fairly easily and for relatively long periods of time.[1]

The surrogate mystical experience, suggests Huxley, may not always be totally wasted. It may in some instances lead to the real thing. It is conceivable, he states, that once the escape has been made from the insulated self, even though downward, it may reveal a fleeting revelation of the Divine Otherness which is sought by the mystic. And in some instances, through a reintegration of the disintegrated and highly suggestible personality, it may lead to a complete reversal of direction:

> In actual life a downward movement may sometimes be made the beginning of an ascent. When the shell of the ego has been cracked and there begins to be a consciousness of the subliminal and physiological otherness underlying personality, it sometimes happens that we catch a glimpse, fleeting but apocalyptic, of that other Otherness, which is the Ground of all being. . . . Any escape, even by a descending road, out of insulated selfhood makes possible at least a momentary awareness of the not-self on every level, including the highest.[2]

But regardless of an occasional happy result, the downward means is never to be employed, states Huxley in the same Epilogue. Generally, it leads to the destruction of its participant rather than his salvation. But it is employed in increasingly greater numbers, and for that reason Huxley's preoccupation with the orgy becomes understandable. As a mystic, he has every reason to be.

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[1]James S. Slotkin, "Mescalin, an Answer," p. 15.

[2]Huxley, <u>The Devils</u>, pp. 323-324.

Wherever the orgies lead, however, it is self-apparent that they are precipitated by the unverbalized desire for flight - from the insufferable thought of the self and, quite probably, from the intolerable thought of time and its sure warning of bodily extinction. The subhuman ecstasies of drug addiction, alcoholism, elementary sexuality, herd-poison, ritualism, sadism, self-flagellation, righteous indignation, hatred, corybantic revivalism, and possibly even the horizontal orgies of the religious or political crusade - these and all the rest, one may gather, annihilate the self for a time and reduce the circle of time to at least a semblance of the mystical point and thereby constitute an escape - though temporary - from the horrible illusion of death that is always and everywhere a macabre component of time.

The orgy, as a form of transcendental annihilation, is a death in itself but a destructive and imitative one. In an attempt to escape the horrible presence of one's self and the more horrifying reminder of one's extinction in the current of time, the participant usually finds every new return to time and the self increasingly more appalling until he escapes permanently from any chance of proper tutorship into quick extinction or self-induced oblivion and the hastening process of decay. In a blind attempt to simulate the ultimate escape from death, he renders the very means to that escape infinitely less possible, and frequently

reduces himself and/or one or a great number of innocent victims to corpses. The orgy is a death surrogate that ordinarily renders the ultimate victory over death impossible and therefore renders the thought of death, toward whose illusory reality it usually hastens itself, infinitely frightful. This is the Stoytian attitude toward transcendence, and this, save for the diet of Carp gut, is the Stoytian fate. By refusing to face up to the facts of death and of life, the orgy participant insures for himself a living hell and an even more appalling illusory physical death. It is appropriate that Huxley, the mystic, should be attracted to the spectacles of this particular kind of horror and that Huxley, the satirist, should turn the images of the participants, grimly and mockingly, around to themselves.

Death and The Devils

This was the kind of world from which Father Joseph, who had helped create it, was attempting to escape through annihilation:

> Lose life to save it. Die, that life may be hid with Christ in God. Die, die, die. Die on the cross of mortification, die in the continuous and voluntary self-naughting of passive and active annihilation.[1]

And in the midst of his self-immolation, the distracting thoughts of the violent world in which he is rooted come crowding across his vision, like an eclipse between himself and his God. It was a world, as was said, that he had

[1] Aldous Huxley, Grey Eminence, p. 10.

helped to create and sustain. It was not a pretty sight to him or to Callot; nor is it now to Huxley, three hundred years along in time, but neither is the present, and even less inviting is his future of the insane Utopia and the post-atomic age of the ghouls.

More of France of that earlier age is seen in _The Devils of Loudun_, which again mixes religion with things other than religion: with eroticism, superstition, hatred, intrigue, torture, and murder; it is religion again misdirected, again leading to suffering and death of intellect, spirit, will, and the flesh - the last of which, as Huxley unmistakably discloses, is the least important of all.

As in _Grey Eminence_, the action of the narrative is placed in the early half of the seventeenth century, this time chiefly in the provincial village of Loudun but with occasional peripheral interludes in Paris. And again like its predecessor, it is the story of tragically misdirected ecclesiasticism. The main narrative material in this instance, however, is drawn, not from politics, although they have a direct bearing on the course of its action, but from the mediaeval belief in witchcraft and devil seizure and its calculated use to bring about the painful destruction of one man. Moving with almost surgical ruthlessness from the opening scenes to its final tragi-comic denouement, it is an exciting, awesome chronicle that almost certainly surpasses the earlier

biography in dramatic intensity and is fully as entertaining (if "entertaining" is the word to apply to a fascinatingly macabre narrative such as this) as any of his most popular novels. Critic Chad Walsh describes it as follows:

> This peak achievement of Mr. Huxley's career reveals his sharp skill at characterization, his ability to re-create the smell and flavor of vanished eras, his preoccupation with roads to salvation and roads to damnation.[1]

The narrative is focused on three dissimilar characters: Father Urbain Grandier; his schoolmate, Father Jean-Joseph Surin; and the dwarfish, venomous prioress of the Ursuline convent in Loudun, Sister Jeanne des Anges. Both priests are Jesuits, but like so many others of their day, they live at religious opposites. The first, until only a brief time before his horrible death, is exclusively preoccupied with the flesh. The second, like Father Joseph in Grey Eminence, is genuinely devout but is distracted by forces which eclipse the Beatific Light. In this instance, those forces relate directly to Grandier's fate. Grandier is an opportunist and a seducer, with at least one illegitimate child, which he blandly disclaims, and one equally illegitimate wife, whom he weds in a fake marriage ceremony, which he performs himself. His enviable position as an outsider who has been handed the parsonage on a political spoon, his equally enviable but ruthless affairs of love, and his general nastiness of temper (Grandier is the original adrenalin addict) lead to his selection as the target of a

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[1] Walsh, p. 1.

siege of calculated superstitious hysteria, which ends in his torture and, finally, his death at the stake.

Grandier's other enemies hasten it along, but the siege is originally the work of Sister Jeanne, who, in revenge for having been spurned by Urbain, deliberately leads her entire household of sexually-maladjusted sisters on a prolonged orgy of hysterically simulated devil seizure, for which they swear Urbain to be responsible.

Grandier is finally brought to trial, convicted, on ridiculously trumped up evidence, of demonic possession, tortured and burned alive at the stake. Before his death, however, during his imprisonment and during the final excruciating moments of his torture and execution, he transcends to a tranquil reliance on God, and refuses even during his ordeal at the Question, when his legs are systematically being splintered into bloody pulp, to sign a confession that will exonerate his enemies. The executioner has promised to strangle him before the flames reach him, but is foiled by Grandier's enemies, who in final frustrated rage, knot the rope the executioner has planned to use for the coup de grace, and set the fire themselves. Then, to their dismay and at once in ultimate defiance of his persecutors and in ultimate reliance on God, the blackened Grandier speaks out, imploring forgiveness for those who have committed him to the flames. A crude illustration of the death scene by

the mediaeval artist Rene Allain, appears opposite page 220, but the full nightmarish violence of the event is best delineated in Huxley's description, which recreates the sight of the flames, the sound of the steam from the holy water the exorcists sprinkle on the fire, and the spectacle of the huge black fly (Beezlebub himself, the watchers believe) as large as a walnut, which strikes the face of one of Grandier's malefactor's, and with a "preternaturally loud buzzing," flies directly into the fire. Then the flock of pigeons which swoop from the nearby church and wheel around the column of flame, diving through the smoke, singeing their wings in the fire (both parties - Grandier's enemies and his friends - claimed them a miracle, the one from Hell the other from Heaven, but it never seemed to occur to anyone, states Huxley, that "they were just pigeons, obeying the laws of their own, their blessedly other-than-human nature").[1] And all around the scene are the vindictive images of the entranced and triumphant spectators, who later search through the smouldering ashes for souvenirs.[2]

Father Surin arrives in Loudun after the execution to continue the long succession of exorcists sent in to cure Sister Jeanne and the others, who have put themselves on a schedule by now, holding two exorcistic orgies daily except Sunday for the continued edification of their delighted audiences. Years later, he is finally able to

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[1]Huxley, The Devils, p. 221.

[2]Ibid., pp. 220-222.

rid Soeur Jeanne of her devils, but at the loss of his own sanity. Under his tutelage, Soeur Jeanne, who feels that her performance is losing patrons anyway, swings from demoniacism to false mysticism in an attempt to gain profitable sainthood this side of death, and then goes on a tour of exhibition. The forces of skepticism have already replaced the spirit of buffoonery which had prevailed at the orgies. Once Soeur Jeanne is cured, the church cuts off its subsidy to the nuns and its salaries to the exorcists, who are all ordered to their respective parishes. Cut off from financial support, and no longer popular to their audiences, the devils depart:

> Left to themselves such devils as remained soon took their leave. After six years of incessant struggle, the church militant gave up the fight. Its enemies promptly disappeared. The long orgy was at an end. If there had been no exorcists, it would never have begun.[1]

Father Surin, however, has broken under the strain of the affair. In the paralyzing clutches of a neurosis before he even encounters Soeur Jean, he throws all his religious zeal into the cause:

> But Surin was not to be deterred. Day after day, in spite of the blasphemies and the convulsions, he returned to the charge. He had set the Hound of Heaven on her tracks, and he meant to follow his quarry to the death - the death which is eternal Life.[2]

Wanting to suffer on behalf of the Prioress and in her stead, he prays not only to be taken over by her devils but to be regarded as a lunatic - the ultimate humiliation.

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[1] Ibid., p. 258.

[2] Ibid., p. 236.

His prayers are answered. He not only comes to believe himself possessed, but finally, after the cure of Soeur Jeanne, does fall into a crippling mental derangement - a lucid madness, as Huxley calls it -[1] which condemns him to a living hell, wherein he exists half strangled physically, obsessed by guilt, yet clearly aware in his otherwise lucid mind of precisely what horrible straits his nerves have placed him in. This he endures for eighteen years. Then, as if by a miracle, he returns to sanity and attains, before his death, the beatific goal toward which he has aspired all his life but despaired till late of ever attaining. It is a moment of exaltation as Huxley sees it:

> A few months before he died, Surin finished the last of his devotional writings, _Questions sur L'Amour de Dieu_. Reading certain passages of this book, we divine that the last barrier had now gone down and that, for one more soul, the Kingdom had come on earth.[2]

Thus, according to Huxley, the end for Father Surin is a triumph of the seeming minor over the apparent major, the forces of men and of the devil. He passes, at the consummation, from a prolonged ensnarement in a living death:

> Not long after his return from Annecy, Surin came to be convinced (and the conviction endured for many years) that he was already damned. Nothing now remained for him but to wait, in utter despair, for a death which was predestined to be the passage from hell on earth to an infinitely more terrible hell in hell.[3]

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[1] _Ibid._, p. 300.

[2] _Ibid._, p. 310.

[3] _Ibid._, pp. 288-289.

to a supremely triumphant unity with God and an assured entrance into beatific and eternal life. So too, one may conclude, is it with Grandier, whose upward-transcendence at the last moment (from a life-long immersion in the downward) is a tragi-comic reversal, which to his enemies' dismay and to Huxley's joy, finds Grandier clearly the victor over the forces of his own soul, of man, and of the devils they have besett upon him. That Grandier should have been allowed to make this choice is Huxley's chief ameliorative concession to the age. It is one he is not willing to grant to the present. Grandier's enemies, he discloses, did their best to break his body that they might attain from him a false confession of guilt, but there was a limit to how far they would go. They would submit him to unspeakably painful physical torture and finally condemn him to an even more hideous physical death, but beyond the body, they dared not go. When it came to man's inviolate soul, the worst of them feared to transgress, and in spite of their rage against this stubborn object of their cruelty, they conceded to spirituality. They would not allow Grandier to choose his confessor, but before the torture, granted him a quarter of an hour to compose his soul. It is a concession that in many parts of the world would not be made today, Huxley states:

> In the seventeenth century this particular kind of ruthlessness was hardly thinkable, and the relevant skills were therefore never developed. Laubardemont was unable to extract the confession he so urgently

> needed; and though he would not allow the parson to choose his confessor, he conceded in principle that even a convicted sorcerer had a right to spiritual consolation.[1]

Thus, as Huxley sees it, civilization advances - toward greater brutality, toward greater sub-humanity, toward a rejection of the soul, in part already accomplished. It is a far greater indictment than that which he directs against the sadistic age he depicts in Grey Eminence and The Devils, and its supreme penalty, he leaves no doubt, is the final horror of Father Surin's hell on earth and an eternal hell in hell.

The story of the two Jesuits and the dwarfish Prioress and her exorcists - framed in the sordid violence that was the age under Richelieu - constitutes a dramatic appraisal of transcendence in its two extreme forms.

It requires no acceptance of Huxley's philosophy to recognize the sheer drama of the main conflicts. The denouement is another thing, but to those who will grant it a willing suspension of disbelief;, it takes on the satisfying proportions of a Shakespearean tragedy. The death of Grandier is charged with pageantry, and ends as a universal victory over the external forces of evil and his own inner fatal flaw of transcendental blindness. The more tranquil death of Surin is, to Huxley, even a greater triumph over seemingly greater odds. Surin is an almost epic figure as he struggles toward Heaven. His flaw, his own psycho-physical preoccupation - a kind of hell on earth -

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[1] Ibid., p. 208.

is a monstrous thing because he himself is aware of it and because his main efforts are so titanically directed to such an eminently opposite state. And it is supremely ironic that the very energies which break his bonds must be quieted before he can take his final ultimate stride.[1] The fate of Soeur Jean, her devils, her exorcists, and her posthumous mummified head serve merely to make the victory more luminous and more complete. It is not, however, a victory in which Huxley exults. In discussing the improbable possibility of Soeur Jean's repentance, he displays, one implies, a note of something that passes for reluctance or for hope or, in view of his feelings toward transcendence, perhaps for both.

The emphasis on self-transcendence in The Devils is not restricted to the narrative alone. As Walsh remarks,

> The nature of the events narrated in "The Devils of Loudun" gives Mr. Huxley ample opportunity to insert long essays on mystical theology and self-transcendence without any awkwardness. Indeed, these essays are among the most illuminating portions of the book. Altogether, we have Mr. Huxley here dealing with materials perfectly suited to his talents, and at his literary and psychological best.[2]

Between scenes and in the aforementioned Epilogue, there are long discussions devoted to each of the three transcendent types. The main tale illustrates the two extreme forms - the downward and the upward, and in the essays on the horizontal,[3] Huxley states that little

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[1] Ibid., p. 309.

[2] Walsh, p. 34.

[3] Huxley, The Devils, pp. 73-79, 326-327.

need be said of this level, not because it is unimportant - indeed, it is outstandingly so - but because it is too obvious to need analysis and too frequent to be easily classified. It is the level on which most men and women, most of the time, prefer to spend their lives.[1] One passage, however, in which Huxley turns to an analysis of the entire age in the light of transcendence, is of decided novelty.

"The charm of history and its enigmatic lesson," he writes, "consist in the fact, that from age to age, nothing changes and yet everything is completely different."[2] The frames of reference change, he goes on, but at the center remains a fundamental identity.

> Insofar as they are incarnated minds, subject to physical decay and death, capable of pain and pleasure, driven by craving and abhorrence and oscillating between the desire for self-transcendence, human beings are faced, at every time and place, with the same problems, are confronted by the same temptations and are permitted by the Order of Things to make the same choice between unregeneracy and enlightenment. The context changes, but the gist and the meaning are invariable.[3]

Death and The Comic

So it was, he believes, with the seventeenth century, whose culture, particularly in France, was a prolonged attempt to overstep the limits of organic existence. Men were not content to bear a great name or an esteemed office, he reveals; they wanted to <u>become</u> what they were called or

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[1] <u>Ibid</u>., p. 326.

[2] <u>Ibid</u>., p. 259.

[3] <u>Ibid</u>., pp. 259-260.

assigned. Hence the elaboration of the baroque ceremonial, the baroque amenities and protocol. Hence, the insistence on the customs attached to the Divine Right of Kings (he cites as an example the now incongruous vision of nine-year-old Louis XIII with his trousers down but his royal hat on, being birched till the blood runs, by his tutor, who in perfect compliance to kingly divinity, is reverently bare-headed as though before "the Sacrament on the altar").[1]

And the longing to be something more than mere flesh and blood, he continues, reveals itself clearly in the arts of the time. Kings and queens, lords and ladies, liked to see themselves as the "superhumanly energetic, divinely healthy, heroically commanding" allegories of Rubens, or the elegantly refined, infinitely aristocratic portraits of Van Dyck. In the theater, for their "size, for their monolithic and superhuman consistency, for their cult of will," they loved the self-worshiping super heroes and heroines of Corneille, and because they wanted to see life not as it is but life corrected and reduced to order, life as it might be if men and women were something other than what they are, they insisted ever more strictly on the three unities.

The desire for human grandiosity extended to their domestic architecture too, he goes on. And as the houses grew, so, with the aid of artificial contrivances, did the people themselves. Super-high heels came into fashion

[1]*Ibid.*, p. 261.

and with them, the high, thick periwig, so that "Tottering on stilts and crowned with towering piles of horsehair, the Grand Monarch and his courtiers proclaimed themselves larger than life and hairier than Samson at the height of his virility."[1]

All this, of course, appears to the twentieth-century mind as mass lunacy on an ornate and gigantic scale, and as the reader has already gathered, it does not escape the grim ridicule with which Huxley regards all such attempts to escape the given facts of mortality and immortality. He does not bother to categorize this particular display of transcendence, quite obviously because there is no need. One recognizes in the Baroque personality and the Baroque art, the same downward-transcendence of self-deception displayed by Jo Stoyte and his Beverly Pantheon, which in proclaiming themselves larger than life (or death) and twice as handsome, succeed in looking less than human and ten times as idiotic.

"We participate in a tragedy," remarks Huxley in his discussion of Soeur Jeanne; "at a comedy we only look."[2] The pretense to be something one is not is comic. That which consistently pretends, with no relieving interludes of self-honesty, consistently invites the outward approach and is therefore purely comic. So, except perhaps for some secret hidden moments in her own presence, is it with Soeur Jeanne, so with Stoyte, and so with the Baroque. This leads

[1] *Ibid.*, p. 262.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 280.

to an observation of particular relevance here. Huxley's comedy provokes not laughter but dismay, not delight but horror. It is almost invariably connected with the grotesque and unpleasant, usually with the figure of death. The reason seems self-apparent, Huxley's comedy is the instrument of satire and because the satire, in turn, is prompted by what he believes a violation of the supreme assignment of man, it is supremely vitriolic. A common mistake provokes gentle laughter. A universal blunder incites derision and scorn. To Huxley, the pretense to Godliness is high blunder indeed. To him, the really rational man must recognize both the diversity of the universe and its underlying consistency. He must aim toward supreme unity, but at the same time learn to live on all planes of existence - the temporal and the eternal alike. He must recognize the Great Consistency which is a part of himself and every man; but at the same time he must know that he is a creature of flesh and blood, living in a world of multiplicity and change. Thus, to Huxley, every person, every nation, every political institution, and every social hierarchy which deliberately chooses to live at odds, through pretense, with the known facts of mortality and the intuitive facts of immortality, is inescapably and distastefully ludicrous. Because of the very nature of the comedians (as inextricably related to the facts of life, death, and life-after-death, which

they ignore, falsely transcend, or distort), it would follow that Huxley should tend to the macabre. It is possible, of course, that the tendency may be partly traced, as with Swift, to the very temperament of the author, and many of his critics seem inclined to believe that it is, but, that possibility admitted, the tendency is by no means incommensurate with either the philosophy or the strength of the philosophy from which it derives. The wisdom of the philosophy is one thing. Its sincerity is another. If Huxley's sincerity may be assumed (and even his severest critics are not often disposed to challenge that), it will be conceded that he could hardly fail to greet a flagrant attempt to be other-than-human with other-than-gentle humor. In any event, there are no Falstaffs in Huxley; there are no comedians of life. Almost all are comedians of death. And to those who suggest that this is due to Huxley's personal aversion to the first state and preference for the second, the counter suggestion must be made that all his literary evidence, tragic or comic, claims it is due to man, who does not know how to conduct himself in either. Death mingled with the comic is a strange mixture, but, for whatever the reason, that is the way it is in Huxley. Soeur Jeanne, Jo Stoyte, the architects of the Baroque and the Beverly Pantheon, many of the inhabitants of the twentieth century, the death-conditioned automatons of 600 A. F., and the Belial worshippers in the age of the ghouls may be objects of horror, but to Huxley, at

least, the horror is mixed with the comic. By deliberately ignoring the basic facts of their own humanity and spirituality and pretending to direct Godliness, they raise such antics before High Heaven as make the angels weep perhaps, but in one merely human intellect at least, provoke only grim and ironic laughter.

Thus, when Huxley confronts the ridiculous deceptions of the Baroque, it should occur as no surprise that he writes with laughter, that the laughter is derisive and that much of it is phrased in the images of death or decay. Needless to say, he remarks, the Baroque attempts to overstep the limits of nature and to play the game of being superhuman were always unsuccessful. They failed because the age lacked both the know-how and the equipment to make its stagings succeed. "In the _Grand Siecle_ such training and discipline were lacking, and even the material basis of the theatrical sublimity - the _machina_ which introduces, and, indeed creates the _deus_ - was deficient."[1] Versailles itself was a failure, "curiously unimpressive - gigantic but trivial, grandiose but of no effect."[2] And "Seventeenth-century pageantry was sloppy to a degree."[3] Because nothing was adequately rehearsed, Huxley goes on, the most grotesque accidents would mar the most solemn occasions. One of these was most horribly related to death. He cites the case of La Grande Mademoiselle, "that

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[1] _Ibid_., p. 262.

[2] _Ibid_.

[3] _Ibid_.

pathetic figure of fun who was Louis XIV's first cousin."

> After death, according to the curious custom of the time, her body was dissected and buried piecemeal - here the head and there a limb or two, here the heart and there the entrails. These last were so badly embalmed that, even after treatment, they went on fermenting. The gases of putrefaction accumulated and the porphyry urn containing the viscera became a kind of anatomic bomb, which suddenly exploded, in the middle of the funeral service, to the horror and dismay of all present.[1]

Death and Hubris

But such physiological accidents were by no means all posthumous, Huxley adds. History abounds in stories of the gamy aroma of kings and other physical unpleasantnesses of the monarchs and their attendants. "It was precisely because great men tried to seem more than human that the rest of the world welcomed any reminder that, in part at least, they were still merely animal."[2]

Richelieu is particularly amusing to Huxley, who in both _Grey Eminence_[3] and _The Devils_[4], is intrigued by the twist of poetic justice between the Cardinal and his half-witted brother, Alphonse. Both suffered spells of madness; the rumor regarding Alphonse has not been verified, states Huxley[5], but if it was true, the delusions of the two brothers were in exact inverse ratio to the roles each played in life. On the one hand, Alphonse, the half-

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[1] _Ibid_., p. 263.

[2] _Ibid_.

[3] Huxley, _Grey Eminence_, p. 175.

[4] Huxley, _The Devils_, p. 270

[5] Huxley, _Grey Eminence_, p. 175.

wit, was reported to have believed himself the First Person of the Trinity. On the other, the Cardinal, a demigod, imagined himself a horse.

But, as Huxley discloses, the Cardinal, comporting himself simultaneously as a prince, priest, politician, and man of letters, had other, more gruesome reminders of the disparity between what he wanted to be: a quasi-divinity; and what he actually was: a living but rapidly rotting body of death. The false and wretched priest had to play his part in a body which disease rendered so repulsive, states Huxley, that at times people could hardly bear to remain in the same room with him. He suffered from a fissure and tubercular osteitis of the right arm, which compelled him to live in "the fetid atmosphere of his own suppuration." "Musk and civet disguised but could not abolish this carrion odor of decay."[1]

Death and the Molecular

The case of the Cardinal illustrates an important theme in Huxley's death philosophy. He pursues that theme in more detail in an earlier volume of essays, where on the very first page, the dying eighteenth-century metaphysician, Maine de Biran, wretchedly implores, upon awakening, "Who will deliver me from the body of this death?"[2]

Each such awakening to the man is a partial resurrection, a reluctant coming again into a painful

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[1]Huxley, The Devils, p. 263.

[2]Aldous Huxley, Themes and Variations, p. 1.

half-living, half-dying. Each day is for him a weakened and bitter resignation to his own moribundity. A thin reserve of strength on arising; exhaustion by noon, and the rest of the waking day, a vigil to the temporary oblivion of sleep. With pomatum and cream and oil and toilet waters he attempts to make himself look and feel young, but it is useless. Surrounded by beauty and life and the enticing affairs of the court, he helplessly dies daily out of life.

Biran is the opening illustration in this particular volume of one of the forces (premature dying) which take men out of life and out of history, to the private universe of sick and decaying physiology. His final days of existence, here portrayed, appear significantly parallel to that of the Buddhist's conception of the longer life of the unregenerate human - not as one uninterrupted physical span broken irrevocably by a single physical death, but as a continuous series of lives and deaths and lives and deaths until the chain is broken through an attainment of _Nirvana_. It is certain, at the very least, that if Biran's death and the Buddhist's cycle are not parallel, death and life, sleep and waking, to Biran, are not nearly so greatly dissimilar as they are to most ordinary, healthy men. "Every existence is to some extent intermittent and discontinuous," states Huxley; "Biran's differed from most in being extravagantly so."[1] It is interesting to

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[1]_Ibid_., p. 34.

note in passing that before his final decline, Biran was mixed up with death and pseudo-resurrection in a singular way. He was temporarily precipitated out of history by the death of his wife, which resulted when her first husband, long presumed dead, showed up to prove himself very much alive and only a poor correspondent. After her demise, Biran himself retreated from life for a time. And when, his grief assuaged, he finally re-emerged, one of his first public acts as Sub-Prefect of Bergerac, was, ironically, to install in the local hospital a _machine fumigatoire_, designed to restore life to the drowned. Huxley gives no report of what was said when the machine failed to do what its inventor had guaranteed it would, but one may assume that this failure was accepted with little more indignation than any other by a race which stands always in hope of miracles but is rarely willing to believe that they will really occur.

The final privacy of sickness which took Biran out of the world of daily affairs and at last from the world itself is a recurrent theme in Huxley. He sees it not only as a kind of historical death, a falling out of history into the private and alien world of pain,[1] a sinking out of the "social gas" into the private "molecular personality"[2] of the declining viscera, but also as a serious religious distraction, which prevents union with the Divine Ground. Some men, through extraordinary spiritual strength, transcend sickness, as did Father Surin:

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[1]_Ibid_., p. 71.

[2]_Ibid_., p. 66.

> Concentrating his attention upon the idea of a supernatural and metaphysical evil, Surin drove himself to a pitch of madness uncommon among secular demoniacs. But his idea of good was also supernatural and metaphysical, and in the end it saved him.[1]

But most find it an unsurmountable barrier to mystical perfection, which numbers among its prerequisites a state of wholesomness physically as well as spiritually, simply because poor bodily health is in most instances a distraction which frequently results in death obsession and, even in lesser degrees, prevents that happy "dying-to-self," which is essential to Divine Union.

There are other forces, believes Huxley, which take men out of the world of history and society, to the private universe of molecular personality. Among them are sleep, death, and old age.

Sleep, he states, is indispensable to physical and mental health. It is the "most blessed and blessing of all natural graces."[2] Yet like death, "it is completely non-historical, non-social, non-cultural, non-spatial and non-temporal." And in it, for thirty per cent of their lives all men are innocent, sane, and "obscurely at one with the divine ground of all being."[3]

The two-fold experience of sex is just as private:

> As an organic experience, sex is as private and unhistorical a matter as death or sleep, digestion or sickness. As a physiological experience it may be shared to some extent by two people - not indeed completely, for no experience can be shared completely, but as much as any experience of one person can be participated in by another.[4]

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[1] Huxley, The Devils, p. 238.

[2] Huxley, Themes and Variations, p. 65.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid., p. 73.

Death, like sleep and sex, is wholly molecular, wholly outside history, society, culture, space, and time, an act undergone to oneself by oneself:

> One culture gives us the pyramids, another the escorial, a third Forest Lawn. But the act of dying remains always and everywhere identical. Like sleep, death is outside the pale of history - a molecular experience unaffected by the state of the social gas. Every individual has to die alone, to die by himself to himself. The experience cannot be shared. It can only be privately undergone.[1]

Huxley refers to a statement by Shestov regarding the dying and incessantly talking Socrates: "The best death is the death we consider the worst, when one is alone, far from home, when one dies in the hospital like a dog in a ditch."[2] Pascal, Shestov says, talked too. Musset, however, wept like a child. Each, he suggests, would have best been left to die in privacy, and he asks was it not that Socrates and Pascal talked as much as they did, perhaps, because they too were afraid of crying like Musset?[3]

Hardly less unhistorical than death is old age, adds Huxley, who describes it as a "strictly private universe of physical weakness and mental decay."[4] So it was with Biran, living not in the busy, exciting affairs of his age, "but in the intimate experience of dying ever more completely to love, to pleasure, to enthusiasm, to sensibility, even to his intellect,"[5] like Father Surin,

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[1] _Ibid._, p. 67.

[2] _Ibid._

[3] _Ibid._, pp. 67-68.

[4] _Ibid._, p. 68.

[5] _Ibid._

with only enough comprehension to recognize in dismay the inexorable deterioration of his most precious faculties.

So it was with Richelieu, whose private experience of dying was the object of the most public amusement. Brought up as it was on the axiom of the divine right of kings and nobles, reveals Huxley, the popular imagination of the Baroque delighted in pricking the bubble of its rulers' pretensions, and celebrated the Cardinal's last illness, for example, with a book of anonymous ballads, two of which are reproduced in part on page 264 of The Devils. Between the rotting body of the actual man and the glory of the persona he imagined himself to be, he concludes, there was an unbridgeable gulf. Borrowing a phrase from Jules de Gaultier, he states, the "'Bovaric angle'" separating fact from fancy approximated a full half circle of one hundred and eighty degrees. "Hubris invites its Corresponding Nemesis. That dreadful stench, those worms battening on the living corpse, seemed poetically just and appropriate."[1]

And the grim joke prevailed to its peculiarly appropriate end. In the Cardinal's last hours, after the relics of St. Fiacre had failed and the doctors had given him up, an old peasant woman, who had a reputation as a healer, was called in. Muttering spells, she administered her panacea - a concoction of four ounces of horse dung macerated in white wine. Needless to say, this too failed

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[1] Huxley, The Devils, p. 264.

to work, but it served, poetically, as the final sickening reminder of the Cardinal's supreme Hubris. "It was with the taste of excrement in his mouth," writes Huxley, "that the arbiter of Europe's destinies gave up the ghost."[1]

Death and the Baroque

The fantastic pretensions of the Baroque, Huxley discloses, were not confined to life alone. They were equally attendant to death. And in his essay "Variations on a Baroque Tomb," he describes them in ironic detail.

There was some interest in the tomb on Huxley's part years before the publication of Themes and Variations. It appeared in one of his earlier short stories, "Young Archimedes," where an arresting description is given of the Tuscan cemetary in which little Guido, the Young Archimedes of the tale, lies buried. There, Huxley portrays the strange disparity between the austerity of the Tuscan's life and the relative opulence of his death. He speaks of the statues with which the natives adorned their tombs - the busts of men in Homburg hats, the angels bathed in marble tears, extinguishing torches, the little girls, the cherubs, the veiled figures, the allegories, the realisms, all the strange diversity of the idols beckoning and gesticulating. He describes the queer cubistic statue of two dead ladies locked in a geometric embrace, their faces smiling mournfully from their marble frames, the two cones of their black satin meeting point to point

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[1]Ibid.

at the waist with a sphere to the elbow, a polished cylinder below. He describes the photographs, printed indelibly on tin or imbedded in the living rock, looking out under glass from the humbler crosses, headstones, and broken pillars - the hirsute with their white beards or black moustaches; the young, clean-shaven staring or averting their gaze to show a Roman profile; the children in their stiff best, with wide open eyes, smiling obediently, laboriously at the ghostly camera. Then, the spiky, marble Gothic cottages of the richer dead, privately reposed, where through their grilled doors a glimpse may be had of the pale, weeping inconsolables, the geniuses guarding the secret of the tomb. Then the less prosperous sections of the majority sleeping in communities, close-crowded but elegantly housed under smooth continuous marble floors, whose every flagstone is the mouth of a separate tomb. This array of mori emotion was to the younger Huxley just as pretentious then as it is to him now. His narrator states as follows:

> These continental cemeteries, I thought, as Carlo and I made our way among the dead, are more frightful than ours, because these people pay more attention to their dead than we do. That primordial cult of corpses, that tender solicitude for their material well-being, which led the ancients to house their dead in stone, while they themselves lived between wattles and under thatch, still lingers here; persists, I thought, more vigorously than with us. There are a hundred gesticulating statues here for every one in an English graveyard. There are more family vaults, more "luxuriously appointed" (as they say of liners and hotels) than one would find at

> home. And embedded in every tombstone there are photographs to remind the powdered bones within what form they will have to resume on the Day of Judgment; beside each are little hanging lamps to burn optimistically on All Soul's Day. To the men who built the Pyramids they are nearer, I thought, than we.[1]

In Those Barren Leaves, Huxley again contemplates the tomb, when he describes the arch-philosophical conflict between the burial place of the Volumni, along the road to Rome, and that of St. Francis of Assisi, only a few miles away. This is of direct relevance to Huxley's attitude toward the brute fact of ordinary bodily death, which, quite probably, is often misconstrued by his readers. He makes his feelings perfectly clear in this regard in the passage just referred to. Regardless of his particular obsession with annihilation at any time, it is almost certain that he is never obsessed with the Pascalian cult of death, here represented by the mummy of St. Francis. The obese Volumni recline on their marble ashbins, he says, as though on couches around a dinner table, in eternal, pleasurable anticipation of the next succulent meal. These enjoyed life tremendously and regarded death without horror, he goes on. They thought of death as the seasoning which made their five and twenty thousand dinners upon this earth yet more appetizing.

Not so with the mummified she-saint in its illuminated glass case at Assisi. Her macabre, scolding presence is a mute command to ponder not on life and its sweetness but on its grisly opposites: death and decay. And if one broods

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[1] Aldous Huxley, Little Mexican, pp. 331-332.

long enough, states Huxley, the savour of living indeed is taken away:

> A few miles further on, the mummy of a she-saint lies in a glass case, brilliantly illumined by concealed electric lights. Think of death, says the she-saint; ponder incessantly on the decay of all things, the transience of this sublunary life. Think, think; and in the end life itself will lose all its savour; death will corrupt it; the flesh will seem a shame and a disgustfulness. Think of death hard enough and you will come to deny the beauty and holiness of life; and in point of fact, the mummy was once a nun.[1]

And as Huxley leaves the scene (or as his characters do), he takes one parting shot at the death obsession of Assisi, from his unmistakable rallying point on the side of the forces of Life:

> They got into the cars once more; waving the red bandana, Miss Elver said good-bye to the saints who thought so much of death that they were forced to mortify their lives. In their cool summer-house the obese Volumni smiled contemptuously. We thought not of death, we begat children, multiplied our flock, added acre to acre, glorified life. . . . Lord Hovington accelerated; the two wisdoms, the new and the ancient law, receded into the distance.[2]

In 1934, he wanders among the Mayan death's heads in the ruins of Copan, intrigued by the mathematical preoccupation with the macabre which marked that vanished civilization - and its total absence of preoccupation with the sensual, which marked the art of the Maya's counterparts in India: "There is no sex in the art of the Mayas; but by way of compensation, what a lot of death!"[3]

"Why should one find in death a congenial and stimulating theme," he asks, "while the other is best

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[1]Aldous Huxley, Those Barren Leaves, p. 286.

[2]Ibid., p. 287.

[3]Huxley, Beyond the Mexique Bay, p. 47.

inspired by, indeed can hardly escape from, thoughts of sexual pleasure?"[1]

He describes the macabre numerals in the Mayan vigisomal system, which, from ten onwards, are all variations on the death's head. "Nine faces, each with its distinguishing jaw."[2] And because their inscriptions were mostly dates, these arithmetical emblems of death are almost as numerous among their ruins as numerals on the stones of a modern cemetery. "But death among the ruins," he adds, "was by no means a by-product of Mayan arithmetic."[3] Copan is full of monumental skull symbols more gruesome than any realistic imitation. With these, the Mayans expressed their idea of death with "a penetrating force surpassed in all history by only the Aztecs."[4]

What was the reason for the Mayan death preoccupation? "Quien Sabe?" replies Huxley.[5] But it was probably not the same reason of the late Middle Ages or the baroque or the modern. "These colossal skulls, for example, have nothing to do with the macabre of our later Middle Ages, or the florid horrors of baroque sepulchral art."[6] There is no trace in these, he states, of the European lament for transience or the modern personal terror of extinction and decay.

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid., p. 193.

[6] Ibid., p. 192.

The Mayan preoccupation with time, he suggests, may possibly have been precipitated by the appearance among the priesthood of one man or a succession of them, haunted by the perpetual perishing of things and congenitally equipped to deal with the subject in mathematical terms.[1] For a similar reason perhaps (the dominance of one or more individuals with anti-phallic dispositions) there was no artistic sexual theme. And so it may have been with the Mayan and the later Aztec obsession with the more gruesome reminders of death. The skulls, like the arithmetical death's heads and the absence of sex, may have been due to an intellectual fashion set by a few individuals with a peculiar turn of mind.

Such fashions have occurred before, he states. There were several periods when death was all the rage in Europe. In the fifteenth century, for example, corpses, skulls and skeletons were extravagantly popular, and the painted, sculptured, written celebrations of the Danse Macabre were everywhere. "To the fifteenth-century artist a good death appeal was as sure a key to popularity as a good sex-appeal is at the present time." The fashion was revived, he states, in the forties of the eighteenth century. "Blair and especially Young were instrumental in making the grave as popular, during a number of years, as the bed. The Night Thoughts had an international success comparable to that of the Green Hat."[2]

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[1] Ibid., p. 53.

[2] Ibid., p. 55.

"Similarly," believes Huxley, "the unspeakable Aztec sacrifices were a logical outcome of the cosmological speculations of a few philosophers."[1]

The sun was alive and very large and required nourishment. If it were not nourished, it might die or become angry. For the good of humanity at large, therefore, "human victims had to be bent backwards over a stone and have their hearts ripped out with an obsidian knife."[2]

In 1950, the tomb reappears and with it some old themes.

The skeleton, states Huxley, along with its similar grave adornments, the skulls and bones and grisly reapers of later mori art, remained invisible from the early "happy" days of paganism through the Middle Ages and the Renaissance up to the middle of the sixteenth century, when the carved effigy arose from its prolonged and tranquil sleep amid its quasi-celestial dreams, and sat up - eyes open and ideally noble or soberly a portrait. Frequently, from 1550 on, a little round skull appeared at the base of the stone as a reminder to the onlooker of the fate that had already overtaken the entombed.

Why the death's head should have become fashionable at this particular moment in history, is anybody's guess, says Huxley. To the religiously minded, it may have had some connection with the counter revolution, or it may have symbolized the noseless victims of syphilis as a reminder

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[1]*Ibid.*

[2]*Ibid.*

of man's latter end; or perhaps, it resulted merely from the whim of some mortuary artist who had a happy knack with bones. In any event, there undeniably it was, and as the years passed, these reminders of mortality grew from their first diminutive proportions to "full-blown, death-sized replicas of the thing behind the face." As the statues burgeoned, they became increasingly animate until finally they sprouted wings and took to the air above the tombs. The Renaissance had given way to the Baroque; the symmetrical had become the disbalanced, the static the dynamic, and the formalized the disquieting realistic. Statues were caught in the act of changing position; pictorial compositions tried to break from their frames. Formalized understatement had given way to strident emphasis; the old measure and humility to the enormous, the astounding, the demigod and the epileptic sub-man, all in violent and terrifying animation.

The statues continued to grow, Huxley continues, until they reached an overpowering truth to death. To heighten their verisimilitude, they were turned from their traditional site on the central axis, where casually or in profile or three-quarters face, they stare up to heaven or down into the grave. And, inevitably, by 1630, the skulls on the monuments were no longer enough as a symbol of death. The full skeletons, the grandiose reminders, had arrived - complete with wildly-beating wings like those of vultures in a hurricane.

Of these, the most arresting, states Huxley, are the mighty skeletons by Bernini which dominate the tombs of Urban VIII and Alexander VII in St. Peter's. Each sits aloft in the act of blessing the populace. Below are arrayed the special Papal Virtues with the gigantic emblem of death square in their middle. On Urban's tomb, the spectre holds, at a slightly cock-eyed angle in the dynamic fashion of the Baroque, a black marble scroll inscribed with the departed Pontiff's name and title. On Alexander's tomb, the monster has been "stopped," in the language of photography, in the act of shooting up from the vault entrance like a rocket at an angle of sixty or seventy degrees, effortlessly dragging with it six or seven tons of red marble drapery.

The emphasis in both these extraordinary productions is not, states Huxley, on the spiritual destinations of heaven, hell, and purgatory but simply on physical dissolution and the grave. It is not on the second death of the *Dies Irae*, the death inflicted by an angry judge upon the sinner's soul, but the first death, "the abrupt passage from animation to insensibility and from wordly glory to supper with the convocation of politic worms."[1]

The Roman churches too are full of such cautionary skeletons, he states. He describes as an example, the small monument of a juriconsult by the name of Vizzini, in Santa Maria sopra Minerva. Vizzini's intensely life-like, serenely

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[1]Huxley, *Themes and Variations*, p. 170.

complacent face looks out from a round frame that is held almost amorously by a great skeleton in high relief whizzing the lawyer and all his complacency into oblivion.

Even more astounding is Mazzouli's fantastic sculptured dance of death in San Francesco a Ripa. There, states Huxley, Baroque mortuary art probably reaches its greatest fruition. Above the usual sentry line of guardian Virtues which are arrayed at the base of each of the vast pyramidal structures, hovers a ten-foot skeleton with huge bronzed beating wings. It displays two oval frames containing busts of the Pallavacini entombed below. On one side of the family chapel, Death, with studied carelessness, holds the framed likenesses of the two princely ecclasiastics, tilted in opposite directions so that the grave, ascetic faces look out as though from the ports of a rolling ship. Opposite these, an even more frightful emblem of death holds two other members of the family, an elderly princess and her fat,complacent husband, with his whole squat person swollen almost to the bursting point by high blood pressure, his pig snout of a nose under a majestic wig pointed chronically skyward. "And it is Death," writes Huxley, "who now holds him aloft; it is Corruption who, with triumphant derision, exhibits him, forever pilloried in marble, a grotesque and pitiable example of human bumptiousness."[1]

All this sculptured acquiescence to death, Huxley points out, is actually deceptive. It asserts on a grand

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[1] *Ibid.*, p. 172.

scale that wealth is unimportant because death is inevitable; but for the living, wealth was still the major goal. Like the monument to the fat Vizzini in the clutches of the skeleton at San Francesco, the mori theme of the time, despite the fact that it commemorated the earthly glories of the departed, was emphatically the transience of earthly greatness and the vanity of human wishes. But those who ordered and paid for the tombs, merely redoubled their efforts to gain the power and money and position they craved. This in Huxley is a reassertion of a familiar theme: that man refuses to accept either the inevitability of death or the possibility of its survival. This, one should note, is by no means the same attitude of the Volumni, who recognized death for what it was, and savoured their life the more for it; or of the Assisi, whose emphasis was wholly and sincerely on the side of corruption. The Baroque glorified decay in its sculpture but actually ignored it in life. It spent enormous sums to celebrate it in stone but received in turn neither savour, fright, nor hope. The difference, adds Huxley, between that world and this, is primarily one of reticence:

> A belief in hell and the knowledge that every ambition is doomed to frustration at the hands of a skeleton have never prevented the majority of human beings from behaving as though death were no more than an unfounded rumor and survival, a thing beyond the bounds of possibility. The men of the Baroque differed from those of other epochs not in what they actually did, not even in what they thought about those doings, but in what they were ready to express of their thoughts. They liked an art that harps on death and corruption and were neither better nor worse than we who are reticent about such things.[1]

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[1] *Ibid.*, pp. 172-173.

The death dance at San Francesco, says Huxley, was one of the last of its kind. The macabre but hypocritical tendency of which it was so dramatic a representative continued along for a while in another form, in literature, he adds, but after the early part of the eighteenth century with only erratic enthusiasm. Thirty years after the death dance at Ripa, writes Huxley, Robert Blair won mild popularity with lines like the following:

> Methinks I see thee with thy head low laid,
> While surfeited upon thy damask cheek
> The high-fed worm, in lazy volumes rolled,
> Riots unscared.[1]

But the sculptors had long since turned from images such as these. Death was no longer an object of unadorned terror but now one of bereavement. No longer did it satirize the worldly pretensions of its inevitable claimants. Instead, it eulogized in broken columns, extinguished torches, weeping angels, and muses, the sad departure of its reluctantly-accepted victims. There were occasional flare-ups, occasional stylistic revivals but to the horror of corruption, the grisly mortuary art of the Baroque, there was never a full or permanent return. From the Rimini death dance to this day, "no monument to any important European has been adorned with death's heads or skeletons."[2]

At this point, a familiar theme returns. Men live, states Huxley, on at least three levels: that of the strictly individual, that of intellectual abstraction, and that of historical necessity and social convention. On

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[1] *Ibid.*, p. 173.

[2] *Ibid.*

the first of these, life is completely private; on the others it is, at least partially, a shared and public one. It is this disparity which forms one of the major preoccupations of the Baroque cemetery:

> Baroque mortuary sculpture has as its basic subject matter the conflict, on one important front, between the public and the private, between the social and the individual, between the historical and the existential. The prince in his curly wig, the Pope in his vestments, the lawyer with his Latin eulogy and his smirk of self-satisfaction - all these are pillars of society, representatives of great historical forces and even makers of history. But under smirk and wig and tiara is the body with its unsharable physiological, processes, is the psyche with its insights and sudden graces, its original imbecilities and its unavowed desires. Every public figure - and to some extent we are all public figures - is also an island universe of private experiences; and the most private of all these experiences is that of falling out of history, of being separated from society - in a word, the experience of death.[1]

And Huxley himself is no exception. Writing about death, he states, he is on the level of intellectual abstraction. Participating in the life of a generation which must regard Baroque mortuary art as alien and odd, he is on the level of history. But when he comes to die, he shall be on the first and exclusively private, non-historical level - the level of death.

Here, he adds an incidental discussion on the two-headed moral code which regards the shared and public, for some odd reason, to be more respectable than the strictly private. This leads, he says, to an indifference to or a toleration of the most obvious excesses of physiology or the most enormous orgies of horror. Emperors have their

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[1]*Ibid*., pp. 174-175.

Historiographers; kings their Astronomers Royal; but there are no Royal Gastronomers, no Papal or Imperial Pornographers. The social, historical crimes are condoned as the last infirmities of noble minds. The private as despised by all save Jesus. There is no God of brothel, but the God of battles is still going strong.[1]

In the avowed knowledge that he is making a historical generalization (which at best, he admits, can never be more than partially true), and at the calculated risks of distorting facts to fit a theory, Huxley suggests there is a geometric relationship between man's Death concern and his reliance on Utopia. At any given period, he believes, preoccupation with death is in inverse ratio to the prevalence of a belief in man's perfectibility through and in a perfectly organized society. Thus, he says elsewhere, when the state and quintessential science become substitutes for God and fact, death and the individual become unimportant. Man becomes a mere body, an animal, even a machine, and his extinction - on an increasingly grand scale, by the way - becomes justifiably unimportant or even irrelevant. The entire volume of <u>Science, Liberty and Peace</u> is devoted to this theme, as is <u>Ends and Means</u>. The State rises, science is distorted, and the relevance of death declines; yet as the relevance declines, in this queer context of twisted logic, the incidence of death and of human misery ascend - to horribly great proportions.

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[1] <u>Ibid</u>., p. 174.

There is, for example, today, an enormous revival of slavery in its worst form; an increasing indiscriminateness of slaughter, torture, human vivisection; a systematic starvation of entire populations; a forced migration at bayonet point of millions, most of whom will die of hunger, exposure, and disease.[1] And science, which furnishes part of the excuse for the individual Moloch of the Greek separate states, which strangled themselves to death, furnishes the more efficient means for annihilation on a grander scale. Contrasted to the Greek chariot and javelin, modern technology has given the world bombers that can fly non-stop for eight thousand miles, incendiaries that nobody can put out, and atomic missles "that are guaranteed to do to whole cities what a quart of water does to an ant's nest."[2] The solution is in some respect suggested to Science, but its main responsibility lies with the Mystic:

> And beyond these primary physiological needs food, clothing, shelter lies man's spiritual need - the need, in theological language, to achieve his Final End, which is the unitive knowledge of ultimate Reality, the realization that Atman and Brahman are one, that the body is a temple of the Holy Ghost, that Tao or the Logos is at once transcendent and immanent.[3]

It is merely a reassertion (in a most prophetic booklet) that the Final End of man is not in the unknowable Utopian future, but in the timeless eternity of the "Inner Light," which every human being is capable of attaining here and now if he wishes. When that is attained, states Huxley,

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[1]Aldous Huxley, Science, Liberty And Peace, pp. 37-38.

[2]Ibid., p. 45.

[3]Ibid., pp. 26-27.

the myth of progress will lose its harmfulness as a justifier of present tyranny and wrongdoing.[1]

But returning - to conclude - to the Baroque, the preoccupation with death is in inverse ratio to the belief in the State.

In the art and literature of the age of Condorcet, of Herbert Spencer and Karl Marx, of the age of Lenin and the Webbs, there are few skeletons, states Huxley. Why?

Because during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries men came to believe in progress, in the march of history towards an even bigger and better future, in salvation, not for the individual but for society. Predestination has been ruled out. The emphasis is on history and environment. But the fact remains, he insists, that every man inherits, in this unregenerate world, a physique and a temperament, like it or not. Moreover, the career of every individual man or woman is essentially non-progressive. People reach maturity only to decline into decrepitude and the body's death. "Could anything be more obvious?" And yet how rarely in the past two hundred and fifty years has death been made the theme of any considerable work of art! Among the great painters only Goya has chosen to treat of death, he states; and then only death by violence, death in war. The mortuary sculptors harp only on the sentiments surrounding death. These range from the noble to the tender to even the voluptuous. "The most delicious

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[1] _Ibid._, p. 39.

buttocks in the whole repertory of art," he adds parenthetically, "are to be found on Canova's monument to the last of the Stuarts."[1]

Painting and sculpture are only minor claimants to the subject of death, he admits. It has been treated more extensively in the other arts, but only once to his knowledge with complete adequacy - in Tolstoy's The Death of Ivan Ilyitch, which he describes as "one of the artistically most perfect and at the same time most terrible books ever written."[2]

> It is the story of an utterly common place man who is compelled to discover, step by agonizing step, that the public personage with whom all his life, he has identified himself is hardly more than a figment of the collective imagination, and that his essential self is the solitary, insulated being who falls sick and suffers, rejects and is rejected by the world and finally (for the story has a happy ending) gives in to his destiny and in the act of surrender, at the very moment of death, finds himself naked and alone in the presence of the Light.[3]

The death of Ilyitch, the reader will note, is strikingly similar to that of Grandier in The Devils of Loudun, who achieves the same discovery amid agony and at approximately the same final moment.

The Baroque sculptors delved in the same theme as that of Tolstoy, he states. Tolstoy, however, is never so demonstrative. He speaks simply of the difficult, and matter-of-factly of the horrible, adds Huxley. Hence, his impact on modern-day complacency. Tolstoy's death narrative shocks his readers in much the same way pornography shocks them - and for the same reason. As Huxley

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[1]Huxley, Themes and Variations, p. 176.

[2]Ibid.

[3]Ibid.

has said before, sex and death are almost equally and completely private, and nothing shocks the public personages most people think themselves to be more than a powerful expression about either. Nobody, he concludes, can have the consolations of religion or philosophy without first having their desolations. Therein lies the utility not only of Ivan Ilyitch but of such books as Henry Miller's Tropic of Cancer.[1]

Most of the pornography of the age which saw the rise of social progress was merely pretty, Huxley points out. It was "Boucher carried to his logical conclusion."[2] He speaks of the most celebrated pornographer of the time, Marquis de Sade, as a mixture of escapist mania and philosophy, dwelling in a world of alternate insane phantasy and post-Voltairean ratiocination, wherein impossible orgies are interrupted for shallow talk about the humanities. In all, it was an insolent attempt to rationalize "the essentially unrationalizable facts of private existence."[3]

The remedy is obvious to Huxley. Floundering between time and eternity, in which willy-nilly, he has to live and die, amphibious man must learn the Other, or be bogged down in unmitigated, desolate self-knowledge and thence in despair or complacent cynicism. What is needed now, he states, is precisely the truthful and painful expression in art of the unrationalizable facts of death - as in Ivan Ilyitch; of sex - as in The Tropic of Cancer;

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[1]Ibid., p. 177.

[2]Ibid., p. 178.

[3]Ibid.

of pain and cruelty - as in Goya's Disastres; of fear, disgust, and fatigue - as in "that most horrifyingly truthful of war books, The Naked and the Dead."[1]

Death was not the only private experience with which Baroque art was concerned, Huxley discloses. A few yards from the Pallavicinos' tombs reclines Bernini's statue of Blessed Ludovica Albertoni in religious ecstasy, whose sculptured privacy like that of his celebrated St. Teresa, is shocking at first glance as an unexpected intrusion on one of the more secret experiences of sex. Entering those rich chapels in San Francesco and Santa Maria della Vittoria, states Huxley, is like opening a bedroom door at the most inopportune of moments, or The Tropic of Cancer at one of its most lurid pages. The posture of the ecstatics, he believes; their expressions, and in Albertoni's case, the cataract of peritoneal drapery, emphasizes that saints may be important historical figures, but that their physiology is as disquietingly private as anyone else's.

Works such as these, Huxley explains, are attributable to the inner logic of the Baroque tradition, which committed its artists to a deliberate exploitation of the inordinate. Hence the deceptive symbols of mystical experience such as the swoons, the gesticulations, the epileptic poses of the statues. All this in spite of the great efflorescence of mystical religion, which thought

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[1] Ibid.

that the end of the spiritual life is the immediate and intuitive knowledge of God, beyond discursive reasoning, imagination, or emotion. It was the age of Bernini, writes Huxley, but was also the age which produced St. John of the Cross and Benet of Canfield, of Mme. Acarie, Father Lallemant, Charles de Condreu, Augustine Baker, Surin and Olier. These had all insisted that visions, raptures, and the like were mere by-products which could eventually impede spiritual understanding. They were used simply because they were more astounding and picturesque.

Because of the very nature of Baroque Art, he goes on, the Mystic is represented as either a psychic with supernormal powers or an ecstatic who passes out of history not to be alone with Eternity but with his or her physiology in a state hardly distinguishable from sexual enjoyment. But oddly enough, even during the less epileptic vogue, he adds, Christendom never did achieve the contemplative life in the plastic arts. The peace that passes all understanding was sung or spoken but rarely painted or carved. St. Bernard, Albertus Magnus, Eckhart, Tauler, and Ruysbroeck expressed clearly the nature and significance of mystical contemplation, the anticipation of the Beatific Vision, but the painters and sculptors did not. There is no Western equivalent of the Far Eastern Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, who incarnate in stone and paint the experience

of ultimate reality. Christian saints in art exist in a world from which the supernatural beauty and transcendent significance of non-human nature has been excluded. The Western Artist painted jagged but uninspiring mountains; the Chinese and Japanese went to live in their mountains until, in quiet and passive alertness, they could understand and paint the workings "of the Immanent and transcendent Tao."[1] In full contrast to the woodenish backdrops of the Medieval Westerner, they were "the formally perfect rendering of man's experience of being related to the Order of Things."[2] "It is the equivalent of mystical poetry."[3]

Like sex, pain and death, concludes Huxley, the mystical experience is perfectly private, non-historical and unsocial. And for these reasons, it is considered suspect and indecent by church and state. Maddeningly, unbearably, he writes, an occasional artist rubs men's noses in his rendering of these facts. People shrink before the pornographies of suffering, of sensuality, of dissolution in the _Disasters of War_, _The Naked and the Dead_, _The Tropic of Cancer_, _The Death of Ivan Ilyitch_, and even the Baroque tombs (in spite of their ludicrous sublimity). But in another way, hardly less appalling are the pornographies, as rationalists regard them, of mysticism. Even the consolations of religion and philosophy

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[1] _Ibid._, p. 181.

[2] _Ibid._

[3] _Ibid._

are pretty desolating for the average sensual man, "who clings to his ignorance as the sole guarantee of happiness," and is tortured by the terrible image of life just as he is by the equally terrible spectre of death.[1]

The Mystical Vantage Point

Thus, in the Baroque as in every other age, the urge to escape is an inherent tendency of man. Huxley supports this opinion even in his earliest, pre-mystical, volumes, among them Antic Hay, whose most striking examples occur in the final scenes, wherein one wretched character lies poised on the edge of suicide, while another peddles away from the unhappy milieu on a stationary bicycle.[2] And when that tendency is misdirected it results in a thwarted or wasted life and, inevitably, an uninviting death - both to some extent ludicrous, but grimly, mockingly so.

The proper escape is really not an escape at all, believes Huxley, it is the tranquil recognition of one's own place in the mystical scheme of things. And it is attained through constant active annihilation, "the experience of living simultaneously in time and eternity; among men and in God; the peace and bliss, here in this earthly life, of the Beatific Vision."[3] Aware of the multitude of forces which prevent man from attaining this state, Huxley agrees that it is "probably the most difficult

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[1]Ibid., pp. 181-182

[2]Huxley, Antic Hay, pp. 230, 248.

[3]Huxley, Grey Eminence, p. 91.

and exacting of all human tasks",[1] but to those who fulfill it comes the reward that came to all the great mystics, the reward regarded by the Christian mystics, the Hindus, the Buddhists, the Taoists, the Sufis as "the highest, the most perfect condition to which the human consciousness - purified, one-pointed, radically transformed - can attain."[2]

It is not to be expected that an ordinary mortal can attain this state simply by turning on a switch of will, so to speak. Certain conditions must be met before the Divine Reality may be apprehended (loving detachment, charity and humility), but if one is not himself a sage or a saint, the least, and best, one can do is to study the works of those who were:

> The self-validating certainty of direct awareness cannot in the very nature of things be achieved except by those equipped with the moral "astrolabe of God's mysteries." If one is not oneself a sage or saint, the best thing one can do, in the field of metaphysics, is to study the works of those who were, and who, because they had modified their merely human mode of being were capable of a more than merely human kind and amount of knowledge.[3]

The above passage, selected from the introduction to Huxley's Perennial Philosophy, is self-explanatory. The route to upward transcendence is open, and in that volume and in an earlier work, entitled Ends and Means, Huxley attempts to show the way. The first volume, Ends and Means, is in effect an amplification of the mystical essays with which Huxley intersperses his other publications. As Walsh describes it, it is a "sober exposition of

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[1]Ibid.

[2]Ibid.

[3]Aldous Huxley, The Perennial Philosophy, p. xi.

mysticism and its practical implications for society."[1] The later volume, The Perennial Philosophy, again in Walsh's words, is an "anthology of excerpts from the great mystics, designed to reveal that mysticism is the common denominator of the world's major religions."[2] This volume deliberately refrains, for the most part, from the utterances of professional philosophers in order that the almost exclusive emphasis may be placed on those who, in Huxley's opinion, have found the way to Divine Reality by fulfilling the conditions already referred to. The selections, states Huxley, were chosen mainly for their "intrinsic beauty and memorableness."[3] But, beauty aside, the basis of Huxley's anger is there for all to see. This work, like the earlier volume, is threaded with the doctrines which elsewhere are translated into dramatic and scathing full-scale warnings. In these volumes, as in the others, the way to proper transcendence is delineated, but so too is the warning against the failure to *take* the way. In both volumes, as in *Science, Liberty and Peace*, may be found unmistakable hints that *Hubris* against Nature still invites the *Nemesis* that ends in the horrible penalties imposed on Jo Stoyte, Soeur Jeanne, Richelieu, the Baroque, the Brave New World, and the Age of the Ghouls.[4]

Huxley's mysticism and its accompanying doctrine of Transcendence pervades and underlies everything to which

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[1] Walsh, p. 1.

[2] *Ibid*.

[3] Huxley, *The Perennial Philosophy*, p. vii.

[4] Aldous Huxley, *Ends and Means*, pp. 17-27, *The Perennial Philosophy*, pp. 80-81, *Science, Liberty and Peace*, p. 49.

he has lately set his pen, and it is seen in latent form in his very earliest volumes. There are embryonic suggestions of it in Crome Yellow and Antic Hay. It burgeons in Those Barren Leaves. And although it is renounced in Point Counterpoint, it restlessly displays itself throughout the volume - through the action itself, through the long conversations between Quarles, Rampion, Spandrell and the others, and frequently through its imagery, whose references like the following, are unmistakably mystic.

> The sordid suburbs of Bombay slid past them - factories and little huts and huge tenements, ghostly and bone-white under the moon. Brown, thin-legged pedestrians appeared for a moment in the glare of the headlights, like truths apprehended intuitively and with immediate certainty, only to disappear again almost instantly into the void of outer darkness. Here and there, the light of a fire mysteriously hinted at dark limbs and faces. The inhabitants of a world of thought starrily remote from theirs peered at them, as the car flashed past, from creaking bullocks.[1]

And it has pervaded every major work from Eyeless in Gaza on. Indeed, the best illustration of Huxley's full turn to mysticism is the revelation in his introduction to the 1946 edition of Brave New World that if that novel had been rewritten, the mysticism would have been its central theme, or at least one of its major alternatives. In addition to the insanity of the Utopia of 600 A. F. and the lunacy of the Indian reservation there would have been the summoning rationality of the Beatific Void.[2]

It goes on in his main works and in occasional articles for the popular magazines; in Life, for example,

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[1]Aldous Huxley, Point Counterpoint, p. 74.

[2]Huxley, Brave New World, pp. x-xi.

where he recently took up his by-now-old case for spiritual communication between disembodied intelligences and - of most importance here - the possibility of the survival of human personality after death.[1]

In all of his late major works, Huxley discloses mankind obsessed with death, disease, premature dying, alcoholism, narcotics and herd-addiction and the hundreds of distracting escape enticements of horizontality, and some few who are on the jubilantly right way aloft. But these are regrettably few.

In all events, the mysticism, beyond doubt, now has a direct and extensive bearing on Huxley's attitude toward death because it has the same bearing on his attitude toward life, and life both before and after death. Mysticism _is_ a study of death because it seeks to overstep it, to transcend, through active annihilation, the brute fact of inevitable bodily death for the eternal life-in-death of the Beatific Union. Annihilation itself, the supreme achievement of the mystic, is a deliberate death of the self, to which, depending on the mystic, bodily death is either an anticlimax or a final barrier to the final union with Divine Reality.

Active toward a self-validating annihilation which makes of bodily death at best only an anticlimax or at worst an annoyance which must be patiently waited out, any successful mystic must obviously regard the attitudes most people

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[1] Aldous Huxley, "The Case for ESP, PK and PSI," _Life_ (January 11, 1954) pp. 96-108.

display toward merely temporal annihilation as either pathetic or downright idiotic. Poised as he is on his own mystical way aloft, Huxley regards them as a combination of pathos, grim humor <u>and</u> idiocy, but his main emphasis is unmistakably on the idiocy. This is predominantly the basis of complaint on the part of his critics.

<u>The Alternative</u>

The prophecy Huxley has drawn up for humanity is decidedly a frightful one. What precisely, one asks, is its alternative if one is not a mystic?

Huxley's own precise bearing in this regard is probably impossible to determine at any given moment. He has reversed positions twice in his career, and although there seems little doubt that he will forsake his present stand on the side of the mystics, with Huxley one can never be certain. The point is, however, that Huxley's particular religious convictions may not have as much to do with his basic attitude toward general mankind as his critics would lead one to believe.

Many of these find him brilliant but oppressive - James Gray, for one, who states that "a curious intellectual fatality" has hung over the talents of both Huxley and Maugham, obscuring the undeniable brilliance of their gifts. Neither, he believes, is able to offer any hope for the future of mankind.

> Both have spent the past two decades writing, bit by bit, obituaries for the human race, naming over with a kind of ghoulish satisfaction that betrays them often

> into lurid venom, the faults that have pushed us all toward an unlovely death.[1]

Huxley, Gray continues, fails to offer any reasonable escape. Instead of offering a faith to which one could wholeheartedly subscribe, "he has bravely failed at what is probably impossible."[2]

This opinion is shared by Edwin Burgum, based on Huxley's writings up through Eyeless in Gaza. Huxley's cynicism along with his mysticism, believes Burgum, have resulted from his substitution of an aggressive bitterness for his first plaintive demand for sympathy in a world which he cannot accept on its own terms. His detachment from the workaday world, his indifference to human suffering, his annihilation of desire and aim for Nirvana are means only to forestall the collapse of his own defences, are the rationalist's substitute for suicide. "The Swan," believes Burgum, "is dead."[3]

This is approximately the tone of Edmund Wilson's pronouncement. Wilson does not quarrel with the sincerity of Huxley's states of exaltation. But he believes that the states themselves imply an incomplete experience of human life:

> Huxley's satire has always been founded not only upon a distaste for humanity but also upon a real incapacity for understanding most of the things that seemed to other people important and exciting.[4]

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[1] Gray, p. 165.

[2] Ibid., p. 170.

[3] Edwin Berry Burgum, The Novel and the World's Dilemma, p.

[4] Wilson, p. 211.

The most serious indictment, however, is probably made by critic Anthony West in his review of The Devils.

West is not disposed to regard the enlightened deaths of Grandier and Surin as the clear victories which Huxley claims they were. The enlightenment both received in their final positions was really a premature acceptance of death, he states. While alive they both knew indifference to the future as well as to the moment that death brings to all sentient beings.

Though accepting without fear the knowledge that one must soon die is an essential first step toward being happily alive, he adds, it is hard to believe that there is virtue in achieving mental death ahead of the physical breakdown. This is not the aim of Western mysticism, in whose moment of enlightenment the value of life is enormously increased. The Devils, he states, makes by implication even more reference to the negative Oriental systems than was made in Perennial Philosophy. It is tempting to take the easy way out, he goes on, and "suggest that this is the current that is bearing Huxley off and out of the Western frame of reference." But at the source of Zen Buddhism, to which he believes particular reference was made in The Devils, he finds that the goal of its enlightenment is an enrichment of life summed up in the words "'the dead trees come into full bloom.'" The enlightened sage is found in the market, with the wine drinkers and

butchers, very much alive and in life. Huxley's extraordinary negative revelation, he believes, is a Western aberration that Grandier himself would have rejected.

> When, his legs pulped and splintered and nothing but the fires ahead of him, he was asked to confess that he had trafficked with devils, he replied, "I have been a man, I have loved women," and one may suspect that had he been given another life to live, he would not have rejected it as unimportant but would have lived and chosen a career to which the same epitaph would have been an honorable one and not a confession of disgrace.[1]

One is forced to agree there is something profoundly missing in Huxley's philosophy. One concludes any given Huxlian work with a feeling of guilt for being a member of the human race, but with the accompanying impression that some saving quality has been overlooked on the part of the author. Critics have quarreled rather consistently with his attitude toward the important basic appeals in life - the relationship between the sexes, for example. Huxley has written several disclaimers in this regard - in The Devils, for one,[2] but he has rarely failed to describe it as anything but ugly and erotic, as coldly, objectively carnal. One is most disturbed, however, by his late emphasis on mystical annihilation, which seems to imply the almost total pointlessness of every human activity except the attainment of Nirvana - an attainment, one may add, which Huxley himself has never claimed and which is for all practical purposes impossible for most ordinary men and women. It is this emphasis and its

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[1]Anthony West, "End As a Man," The New Yorker (October 25, 1952), p. 136.

[2]Huxley, The Devils, pp. 313-316.

accompanying lack of an alternative which leaves one most dismayed with Huxley.

One must return to a volume written more than twenty-three years ago, to obtain the most lucid solution to the dilemma in which the current Huxley has seemingly placed his readers. In that volume, Do What You Will, Huxley discusses the death obsession of Pascal, who he states, was so wholly preoccupied with the contemplation of death, was so hemmed in by the darkness of death, that he was astonished that others contrived to think of anything else. This disregard of death and infinity seemed to him so strange that he regarded it as supernatural. God lays his hand on those who forget Death, thought Pascal. And he was right, adds Huxley, but it is a merciful hand:

> God does lay His hand on those who can forget the darkness and death and infinity - but lays it upon them not in anger, not as a punishment, as Pascal imagined, but encouragingly, helpfully. For the God who forbids men to think incessantly of the infinite darkness is a God of Life, not of Death, a God of Diversity, not of frozen unity.[1]

And in accordance with this merciful Providence, men still refuse to spend their lives contemplating death, that dark infinite which reduces to nothingness all their objects of finite desires. They prefer to "'think of dancing, of playing the flute, of singing, of making verses.'"

> Even when their only son has died, they hunt the boar or play fives, or try to make themselves king. Why? Because life is diverse, because they are not always the same. They think of death when death is near, and of the boar when the boar is near.[2]

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[1]Aldous Huxley, Do What You Will, p. 293.

[2]Ibid., p. 294.

This was written, as the reader is aware, during Huxley's life-worship stage. The aim of that particular worship, as Huxley states, is first, life on this planet as valuable in itself and then, ultimately, more life.[1]

It is decidedly not mysticism, but it has as its ultimate goal the decided transcendence of brute physical death, so that in either case with Huxley, the physical phenomenon of bodily death does not seem to pose a serious threat to himself. If he has swung so far to a negative mysticism as to deny the value of life for himself, he does not wholly nullify his basic indictment of man. That indictment, one may conclude today, as one could in 1930, is based on the charge that twentieth-century man, like most of his predecessors, fails to properly orient himself not to death alone, but to life as well. The missing quality in man, therefore, the saving grace that Huxley finds wanting, may be the ability to live richly, diversely, according to what Huxley believes to be man's universal heritage:.

> If people remembered to live they would abstain from occupations which are mere substitutes for life. However, most of them don't want to live, just as they don't want to die; they are as much afraid of living as of dying.[1]

Most of the distractions which make men forget they must die are equally hateful to the life worshipper, he continues, because they prevent him from fully living.

> It was from pain and gradually approaching dissolution that Ivan Ilyitch learned to understand the futility of his respectable bourgeois career. If he had ever

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[1] *Ibid.*, pp. 310-311.

> met a genuinely living man, if he had ever read a book, or looked at a picture, or heard a piece of music by a living artist, he would have learned the same lesson.[1]

All this, it is suggested, may be directly submitted in evidence today for the basic validity of Huxley's main quarrel with mankind. It is further suggested that until man does learn to live with a complete degree of intelligence here on his own planet, that validity will still remain in force. Man will still be terrified of life and equally terrified of death. It is inconceivable that a writer of Huxley's discernment could really believe for even an instant that the thin upper stratosphere of his esoteric mysticism is accessible to - or even appealing to - the average inhabitant of this earth. And he has made himself clear on this point in his arch-treatise on mysticism, The Perennial Philosophy.

In reply to critic West, it may be said that the triumph of Urbain Grandier was derived not from his recognition of the unimportance of life, but from the recognition of his own indestructability in the eternal scheme of things. Because his was a last-moment realization of this indestructability - precipitated by the brute presence of death - there was only enough time for it to render that death irrelevant. Properly, however, the realization should have come earlier, and it should have come through living itself. If it had been so attained, all the remaining interval between the moment of realization and

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[1] Ibid., p. 310.

the irrelevant moment of death would have become immeasurably sweeter than before - as it did for Father Surin.

This still, one concludes, remains the primary message from Huxley to mankind. The invitation - from whatever religious vantage point it may happen to proceed at any given time - is to eternity, of course, but first of all, of very necessity, to Life.

It is true that Huxley has not been all unremitting anger. His essays are not all ungentle. His spokesmen are not always vitriolic. One novel, Time Must Have a Stop, is a quieter attempt to develop the mystical theme,[1] and The Devils exhibits some tolerance for mankind,[2] but it is clearly not Huxley's main inclination to meet Hubris and/or idiocy with compassion. The essays are placed between scenes of violence, where they occur, by context, as the more satiric. The gentle spokesmen are placed next to passionate opposites, and in Time Must Have a Stop, Edmund Wilson points out, the mystic material is treated in the same dry, droll way as the rest of the narrative matter, which results in an effect which "must be new in fiction".[3] This treatment makes the religion, like its denouement, a hybrid mixture of sweetness and irony, underlaid with anger only partly held in check.

The anger intensifies in inverse ratio to the descending direction of the escape, and so, in both quantity

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[1]Walsh, p. 1.

[2]Ibid., p. 34.

[3]Wilson, p. 211.

and horror, does the Huxlian image of death. This is a natural phenomenon in Huxley, because it proceeds directly from his interpretation of all means of transcendent escapes as nothing more than deaths in themselves of a kind. They are, he believes, death substitutes or, as he describes them, "death-surrogates". As the surrogates descend in their Huxlian scale of values, they take on increasing proportions of resemblance to the brute forms of bodily death and suggestions of hell. As they rise in that scale, so does their similarity to life, first in its higher bodily form, the "Magical", thence beyond to the ultimate form of death which is the eternal Life of the spirit. Speaking of the difference between two disparate states of ecstasy, the downward and the upward, Huxley describes the first as a descent into catalepsy and coma, the second a rise into the Magical, thence beyond the Magical, and finally, into the Spiritual. The first, he says, is an anticipation of death; the second of Glory and Resurrection. Between death ecstasy and magnetic ecstasy there is a difference of only degree, not kind, he adds. Both, he concludes, are mainly ignored by man because "they bewilder and appall him as physical death bewilders and appalls him."[1]

Those who inhabit the middle ground of horizontality exhibit some characteristics, imagistically, of both death and life; they are not only capable of departing in either

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[1]Huxley, Themes and Variations, pp. 136-137.

direction from their flatland between the two extremes, but *look* as though they are. Thus, depending on their extremes, such phenomena as pain, starvation, sleeplessness, physical austerities of almost every kind may look like, and actually lead to, upward transcendence, downward transcendence and even premature physical death (as they did with Father Lallemant) or to that "queer" psychic middle ground which lies between the "Ground and the upper," of plain horizontality, which leads to nowhere in particular, or to the "royal road of the occult", as Huxley calls it.[1] Thus, as the greater majority of mankind busies itself with hundreds of horizontal distractions, it appears poised on a kind of plateau between two worlds, whose characteristics are in some respects similar to its own. The artist, the scientist, the industrialist, the dilettante, even the mystic, saddled to his own private hobby horse of escape, is riding into a deliberate suicide, which may take him above the plateau, merely along it, or below it, depending on the direction in which he spurs his mount. And although each may exhibit no pronounced obsession with life, to some extent, he is part of both, but not creditably a great abundance of either. And middle ground though it is, the horizontal in Huxley's depictions does not always remain a neutral place. The forces of the other two levels are too active to leave it in peace. Dr. Obispo, for example, can help Stoyte along toward gorillahood by

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[1]Huxley, *The Devils*, p. 79.

granting him the horizontal scientific wherewithal. Pordage may try to remain neutral, but in the proper course of his uninspired research may give Obispo the clue, as he does. Peter Boone can guide his horizontal steed directly into the path of a transcendental shot from below. Father Joseph and Father Surin may, with good horizontal intentions, intervene in the sub-temporal affairs of an age or a village and get themselves pulled from the ledge. And so it goes.

But to those who are clearly ensnared in the lower circle of life, come the lineaments of death, fully illuminated in the glare of Huxley's mystical light. The grotesque idiocies or chalk-white obliviousness of the alcoholic and the drug addict, the frenzies of the crowd hysteric, the epileptic violence of the basic sensualist, the sick or panicked impassiveness of the advanced neurotic, the glazed and enfeebled helplessness of the ill or prematurely dying, the bizarre gestures or the corpse-like rigidities of the insane, and the ominous, other-than-human detachment of the prospective suicide, all these are a part of the picture of death and the hell-in-life and threat of hell-in-hell which death for such as these evokes. Obsessed as they are with their own deaths which they impose in advance of the fact, it is inevitable, to Huxley, that they should be obsessed with constantly increasing fear of death, and the process is self-generating. Afraid of physical life (and therefore of physical death)

to begin with, they feed on their death-surrogates, whose visions invoke only greater hysteria. Continuing to take bigger doses of surrogate, they plunge deeper into visions of the grave until in final desperate horror, they run headlong into its oblivion. In the mind of the critical witness, there can be little doubt that these have seen the fires of hell well in advance of the final surrender. It is, to Huxley at least, an incredible enigma that they should run in exactly the wrong direction. The pigeons that circled the flames of Grandier's funeral pyre are to be excused. They were obeying the secret laws of their own other-than-human nature. But the same excuse applied to humanity is by no means acceptable in Huxley's eyes. In an attempt to divert their flight, he points to the light of the Beatific Void. That failing, he turns in anger to a more frightening device: the direct threat of death, phrased in the images of death, addressed to those obsessed with death. It is an urgent message because it has to be delivered before the final hypnotic effect of the grave and the flames sets in.

Most men and women are at present on the plain of horizontality, believes Huxley, but there are ominous signs to him that a mass descent may be underway at a rate faster than he anticipated in Brave New World. In 1949, he stated as follows:

> Sixteen years ago, when I wrote Brave New World, I fancied that the third revolution was still five or six centuries away. Today that estimate seems

> to me excessive. Mr. Orwell's forecast in <u>Nineteen Eighty-Four</u> was made from a vantage point considerably further down the descending spiral of modern history than mine, and is probably more nearly correct. It may be indeed that he is completely right and that, only thirty-five years from now, the third revolution, whose crude beginnings are already visible, will be an accomplished fact - the most important and the most terrible fact in human history.[1]

But there is a way out. Ultimately, it is through high religion, but the first measures consist of a full participation in life, in and on all planes of the universe; this is the taking of a death-surrogate too, but it is the highly workable prescription leading to the ultimate cure.

> <u>Fuir, la-bas fuir</u> - it is what all of us aspire to do at certain moments, what some of us are trying to do all the time. The world in which our bodies are condemned to live is really too squalid, too vulgar, too malignant to be borne. There is no remedy save in flight. But whither?
>
> There are various possible retreats. The safest of them, as Plato insists, is death.
>
> Fear no more the heat o' the sun,
> Nor the furious winter's rages.
>
> For most people, however, death seems to be too finally sovereign a remedy for the evils of living. They know that, sooner or later, it will duly be administered; but they are not prepared to make the ultimate escape before death is forced upon them. What they want is a death-surrogate in their lives - a state of being that combines the advantages of being alive with those of having removed to another world.
>
> There are escapes into drink, into sensuality, into play, into day-dreaming. None of these, however, provides the perfect refuge. Lust exhausts itself; there are nights of self-questioning insomnia after the day-dreams, mornings of sick repentance after the alcohol; as for play, only an imbecile could bear to play away his existence. No; of all the death-surrogates incomparably the best is what is called - rightly, after all - the higher life. Religious

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[1] Huxley, <u>Themes and Variations</u>, p. 133.

> meditation, scientific experiment, the acquisition of knowledge, metaphysical thinking and artistic creation - all these activities enhance the subjective sense of life, but at the same time deliver their practitioners from the sordid preoccupations of common living. They live, abundantly; and they are, in the language of religion, "dead to the world." What could be more satisfactory?[1]

This was written during Huxley's "Life Philosophy" stage. But it still applies in every important respect, one concludes, to the great majority of mankind. A note of warning however. Many of the flights men take under the guise of simplicity or benevolence or spirituality or world sympathy are false and deceptive ventures. There are escapes to the blessed other world of the animals, for example, but these are too often a cheap exploitation of the ego. Many more men and women retreat from the world to the kennel instead of the cloister, states Huxley, and with good cause, for in the kennel, even the feeblest and dullest human being can feel "himself the master, the genius, positively the god." And what a delightful, intoxicating change this is from the unsympathetic world of men who deride the weak and exploit the stupid.

> Disappointed humans discover among the fleas and the dog-dung, a kind of paradise of wish-fulfillment. They are grateful to their pets - hysterically so at times, almost insanely.[2]

There are spiritual excesses too, which can easily be made an excuse for the most shocking sins of both omission and commission. Artists, for example, higher livers - dead to the world while they labor - are frequently

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[1]Aldous Huxley, Texts and Pretexts, pp. 296-297.

[2]Ibid., p. 298.

enticed by a sense of social guilt, away from the heights into the destructive melee of human affairs.[1] So it was with Keats and with Huxley's maternal great-uncle, Matthew Arnold, who deserted their roles as artists to take part in the medley of lower life, excusing themselves on the basis of their greater capacity for suffering world pain and its horrors, which, illogically, they felt obliged to endure. Milton began above the medley and "cultivated his leisure in a next world of intellectual detachment." Then what seemed a higher duty beckoned from the lower life, and he descended to the fray. "Milton went down unhesitatingly into the arena, and there, in the battle, unhesitatingly sacrificed his eyes."[2]

Blind and in his old age, Milton returned again to the other, higher world of creative thought and imagination, states Huxley, but not so with another poet, Rimbaud, who deliberately refined and intensified his own passions, his own vigour of body and mind for the imaginative paradise of _Le Bâteau Ivre._[3] It was a paradise, states Huxley, to which he should never have gone. The surrogate with him was too deliciously sweet.[4]

But with these cautions accounted for, the invitation is to life on a high and rewarding plane. And to those who surpass the normal limitations of the earth by living

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[1]_Ibid._, p. 302.

[2]_Ibid._, p. 303.

[3]_Ibid._, p. 289.

[4]_Ibid._, pp. 303-304.

"without ever ceasing to learn of life", comes the triumph of the minor over the seemingly major forces of death; and with it, simultaneously, comes a recognition of the macabre human comedy below.

The Later Works

Those who have read Point Counterpoint will recall the weird scene near the novel's end - just before Spandrell's violent death - where he and Rampion turn on a Beethoven recording and, to the eerie, supernatural accompaniment of the post-human counterpoint, stand arguing the merits of remaining mortal or of transcending mortality - as they both agree Beethoven does.[1] Spandrell, the reader will recall, is all for the composer's choice, and goes out to his death, a few moments later, tranquilly convinced that eternity is undoubtedly the ultimately proper direction. Not so with Rampion, however. His decision is wholly on the side of life. To go as far as Beethoven went, he protests, one would have to die. Why couldn't the composer have remained a man? The reply was given at the time by Spandrell, but, deliberately perhaps, it did not dissuade the man to whom it was addressed. Since then - although not at first - Huxley, in direct essay and through numerous spokesmen, has replied again and again, and with great vehemence, for the hesitancy which marked the earlier argument has now wholly disappeared. Needless

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[1]Huxley, Point Counterpoint, pp. 237-240.

to say, there was a reason for the uncertainty in Point Counterpoint, because, although Huxley had almost converted completely to mysticism after Those Barren Leaves,[1] he turned, like the posthumous voluptuary in Time Must Have a Stop, away from the summoning impersonality at the last moment, and wrote Point Counterpoint as a renunciation of mysticism in favor of the life worship of the Greeks, Blake, and D. H. Lawrence, the latter of whom is the pattern for Rampion.[2] The full return was not made until eight years later, when it was marked by the publication of Eyeless in Gaza. The supernatural quality in Beethoven was never in dispute, however - least of all in the Rampion-Spandrell debate.

In Themes and Variations, Beethoven, along with Verdi, is included in what Huxley describes as his "Anthology of Later Works." This is a collection of masterpieces, he states, which have an unearthly, post-death quality about them because they were written by artists who had surpassed the limits of the earth by living and continuing to mature "without ever ceasing to learn of life."[3] The merriment in Beethoven's-B-Flat-Major Quartet is supernatural, he believes; and so too is the contrapuntal paroxysm of detached and already posthumous laughter in the last act of Verdi's Falstaff. Something of this same non-human, posthumous quality he finds in the Later Works of Yeats

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[1]Rolo, p. 114.

[2]Ibid., p. 113.

[3]Huxley, Themes and Variations, p. 221.

and Piero della Francesca. It is present too (except in their earthly, anti-climactic endings) in Faust and The Tempest. In the plastic arts, it is found in the last El Grecos - in the "unimaginable" Immaculate Conception at Toledo, for example, with its fantastic harmony of brilliant ice-cold colors, its ecstatic gesticulations in a heaven with a third dimension no greater than a mine shaft, its deliquescence of flesh, flowers, and drapery into a "set of ectoplasmic abstractions."[1] The final twenty-five or thirty years of Goya are numbered among the anthology. Goya found nothing but death in his posthumous other-world. But the others found something more.

To Huxley, it may be implied, the superhuman laughter which comes pealing down from the heights which two of these artists attained rings with exultation, but with mockery too. So it is with Beethoven, where in the last movement of his B-Flat-Major Quartet, states Huxley, the old composer turns from a contemplation of eternity to that of the human world, and sends the sounds of his quite inhuman merriment, the "peals of violent and yet somehow abstract laughter echoing down from somewhere beyond the limits of the world."[2] So it is with Verdi, where the even more disquieting mirth which reverberates through the final act of Falstaff, culminates in one "huge contrapuntal paroxysm of detached and already posthumous laughter."[3] To Huxley, one may be sure, the laughter of both is derisive, and it is aimed not at death but at man's refusal to escape into Life.

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[1]Ibid., p. 221.

[2]Huxley, Themes and Variations, p. 222.

[3]Ibid.

CHAPTER THREE

SOURCES

Early in the present research, Huxley was asked by letter if he would name the principal works which acted as influences or sources in his death exploration.

He has admitted to some annoyance regarding Huxlian thesis writers, based in part on their tendency to place him in the implied past tense, wherein so many live and writing authors are mummified by the unthinking graduate student.

> I like very naturally to think that I am being read; but the idea that I am being studied fills me, after the first outburst of laughter, with a deepening gloom. There is something extremely disagreeable about being treated as though one were dead when one supposes - perhaps (and this is the really disquieting thought) mistakenly - that one is still very much alive. Nor is the anticipation of posthumous Fame any compensating satisfaction.[1]

No one who has followed Huxley's prolific authorship up through the years to his freshest contribution, The Devils of Loudun, can by any stretch of imagination regard him as less than overwhelmingly alive - metaphorically or otherwise. His annoyance was understood, and his reply, which was mailed from Paris, as a brief but courteous interruption to another composition then underway, was decidedly appreciated.

The reply listed three sources: Frederic W. H. Myers' Human Personality and Its Survival of Bodily Death;

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[1]Aldous Huxley, The Olive Tree, p. 112.

Leo Tolstoi's The Death of Ivan Ilyitch; and W. Y. Evans-Wentz's edition of the Bardo Thodol: The Tibetan Book of The Dead.

There is no necessity to discuss these volumes in any great detail. It is sufficient to state that they all display a strong underlying consistency in their attitude toward death and that they are all found as pervasive and accredited influences throughout a great part of Huxley's authorship. Because this relationship becomes automatically apparent once their purpose has been disclosed, little more is required here than a brief reference to the major thesis of each.

Human Personality relates clearly to Huxley's continuing exploration into the occult (the various manifestations of PSI, PK and ESP) because it is devoted to a collection of psychic evidence which suggests the possible validity of human survival after bodily death.

This is a subject which has long intrigued Huxley. He discusses it briefly in Themes and Variations, where he refers to the parapsychology of a Dr. Broad, based on the possibility of a psychic medium, wherein the interconnected human personalities bathe and for a time survive the death of the body.[1] He discusses it in some detail in the Devils of Loudun. He takes satirical delight in the subject in his short story "Chawdron," where a woman pretends occult and mystical powers to attract a male, and in his play

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[1]Huxley, Themes and Variations, p. 137.

The World of Light, where two false spiritualists, the one deluded, the other a deliberate charlatan, are plunged into dismay when their ghostly correspondent, believed killed in an airplane crash, returns from "the other world" disconcertingly in the flesh and blood.[1] The satire is mixed with sincere exasperation in Time Must Have a Stop, where a spiritualist unintentionally but repeatedly garbles the posthumous messages of the voluptuary who has died of a stroke and is doing his best to communicate with his nephew from the outer-psychic space between earth and the fringes of the Beatific Void. But the study itself Huxley regards in all sobriety. He agrees with Myers that probably less than a hundred professional men since Mesmer have seriously studied hypnotism and its allied sciences of healing and extrasensory perception, yet contends that if the philosophers had examined the masses of carefully-sifted evidence accumulated by such scientific organizations as the Society for Psychical Research, they would have found themselves confronted with strange data very hard to explain in terms of the current Western philosophical systems.[2] He attributes their restraint to a natural reluctance to give up deeply-rooted intellectual habits coupled with the disreputableness of a field that has attracted more Charlatans than disinterested investigators,[3] but doubts that they will be able much longer to

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[1]Aldous Huxley, The World of Light, Act ii: Scene iii.

[2]Huxley, Themes and Variations, p. 130.

[3]Ibid.

preserve what he terms "the virginity of their voluntary ignorance."[1]

The floating psychic intelligences that are the objects of these studies frequently serve as distractions, Huxley believes; some may be beneficent; others malicious; some may possess knowledge eminently higher than human, but others infinitely less. To the mystic in search of the Divine Spirit, these present a real danger. As it has been pointed out before in this paper (page 30), Huxley believes a too-exclusive union with the Spirit results in the thought-patterns of occultism, the behavior-patterns of psychics and sensitives; for them there will be no merging with the Spirit, but only a merging with spirit, with every Tom, Dick and Harry of a psychic world, most of whose inhabitants are no nearer to the Light than incarnate beings, and may actually be much farther away. The study continues, however, and in his recent utterance on the subject, Huxley states it may, if pursued, possibly invalidate the claims of the behaviorists by establishing the validity of other-than-physical phenomena:

> Another problem for the psi [paranormal] perception researchers of the future will be that of human survival after death. If all mental events depend completely on physical events, survival is out of the question. But if there are some mental events that do not depend completely on physical events, survival certainly becomes a possibility.[2]

This survival is the object of study in <u>Human Personality</u>.

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[1]<u>Ibid</u>., p. 131.

[2]Huxley, "A Case for ESP, PK and PSI," p. 108.

Based on original research and a sprawling variety of sources, chief among them the 16 volumes of the sixteen Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research, Human Personality makes a first-rate collection of ghost stories, if nothing else. It divides into two volumes, the first devoted to an examination of psychic phenomena occurring exclusively among the living, the second to those taking place between the living and the discarnate (the latter from this world and possibly others).

As its title implies, the book's principal thesis is the survival of human personality after the shock of bodily death: "that the ego can and does survive - not only the minor disintegrations which affect it during earth-life - but the crowning disintegration of bodily death."[1]

It bases this assertion on what the autnor describes as a "scientific" examination of the normal phenomena which occur among the living and the supernormal which occur first exclusively among the living and finally between the living and the dead. These include the phenomena and manifestations of personality disintegrations, genius, telepathy, sleep, hypnotism, sensory automatism, phantasms of the dead, motor automatism, trance, possession and ecstasy. Of fundamental importance in the book is the phenomenon of telepathy, which Myers considers a law in itself of the spiritual or metetherial world (the spiritual or transcendental world of the soul).[2]

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[1] Frederic W. H. Myers, Human Personality And Its Survival of Bodily Death, I, 11.

[2] Ibid., p. 8.

Myers and his collaborators, Henry Sidgwick and Edmund Gurney, were fully conscious of the low value their fellow scientists would accord their work. They were aware that it would evoke not only a variety of legitimate criticism but also much of the resentment which "novelty and heterodoxy naturally excite."[1] And their regret was acknowledged in Myers' Introduction:

> A recluse, perhaps, or an eccentric, - or a man living mainly with his intellectual inferiors, may find it easy to work steadily and confidently at a task which he knows that the bulk of educated men will ignore or despise. But this is more difficult for a man who feels manifold links with his kind, a man whose desire it is to live among minds equal or superior to his own. It is hard, I say, for such a man to disregard altogether the expressed or implied disapproval of those groups of weighty personages to whom in other matters he is accustomed to look up.[2]

Yet the book was essential, believed Myers, because in the long course of man's endeavours to understand his own environment and govern his own fates, there is one great singular and paradoxical omission: his failure to apply to those problems which most profoundly concern him the penetrating methods of inquiry in which he has attacked all others. The question for man, he goes on, is whether or not he has an immortal soul. Or - to avoid the word _immortal_, which belongs in the realm of infinities - whether or not his personality involves any element which can survive bodily death. It is in this direction, he states, that there have always lain "the gravest fears, the farthest reaching hopes, which could either oppress or

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[1] _Ibid_., p. viii.

[2] _Ibid_.

stimulate mortal minds."[1]

If a proof of man's survival could be obtained in a manner which would satisfy the scientific mind, he states early in volume II, the discovery would be the profoundest in all science and philosophy, and would constitute an inlet into infinity itself:

> It would carry us deeper both by achievement and by promise. The discovery that there was a life in man independent of blood and brain, would be a cardinal, a dominating fact in all science and philosophy. And the prospect thus opened to human knowledge, in this or other worlds, would be limitless indeed.[2]

This proof the author believes he has gathered. As a spirit, man's existence becomes cosmic instead of merely planetary.[3] Moreover, there is a strong implication in the evidence that his existence is not only cosmic, it is evolutionary, possibly to ultimate union with Divine Law:

> I have thus indicated one point of primary importance on which the undesignedly coincident testimony of hundreds of first-hand narratives supports a conclusion not yet popularly accepted, but in harmony with the evolutionary conceptions which rule our modern thought. Nor does this point stand alone. I can find, indeed, no guarantee of absolute and idle bliss; no triumph in any exclusive salvation. But the student of these narratives will, I think, discover throughout them uncontradicted indications of the persistence of Love, the growth of Joy, the willing submission to Law.[4]

The increase of man's knowledge of the spiritual world, states Myers in his Epilogue, is rendering possible a religious synthesis less incomplete than any which has been hitherto attained. The response made in the past by

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[1] *Ibid.*, p. 1.

[2] *Ibid.*, II, 79.

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 275.

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 79.

human spirits of a high type, he goes on, has been on the whole concordant in the belief that a spiritual world underlies the material. The two leading World's religions have developed different sides of this consensus. Eastern contemplation has dwelt on the vastness of the Spirit's ascent up infinite degrees of Being to the merger at last in an impersonal all. Western worship is based on the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and His revelation that the world is spiritual and ruled by love. This dim and imperfect agreement, he believes, is now supplemented by the discovery of telepathy, which reveals a direct communication between incarnate spirits, and between discarnate spirits and incarnate. The messages from the discarnate confirm what philosophy had suspected all along - the existence and influence of a spiritual world.

This new knowledge, he continues, confirming ancient streams of thought, corroborates analogically for Christianity the record of Christ's appearances after death, and hints at the possibility of the beneficient incarnation of souls previously higher than man's, and confirms for Buddhism the conception of an endless spiritual evolution, which the whole cosmos subserves. And meantime, he adds, the nascent communion with enfranchised spirits offers both immediate sustenance and endless development. The development must be an increase in holiness, an intensified interpenetration of worlds and souls, "an evolution of

Energy into Life, and of Life into the three-fold conception of Wisdom, Love, and Joy." This is in itself continuous and cosmic. "All Life," he concludes, "is developing itself from the primal Energy, and divinising itself into the ultimate Joy."

The religious tone of the volumes and their methods of inquiry are both familiar in Huxley. The work is accredited in The Devils, in connection with automatic writing, along with another more recent volume on the same subject, G.N.M. Tyrell's The Personality of Man.[1] Myers' opinion of the devil seizures of Soeur Jeanne, based on the reports of two physicians who examined her diabolical manuscripts,[2] is identical to Huxley's almost half a century later.[3] Both regard them as pure and well defined instances of hysteroepilepsy.

Of additional relevance to Huxley is Myers' discussion of reincarnation (in Myers' opinion, it is a possible phenomenon but not yet a proven one)[4] and his remarks on the problems of communication between the discarnate and the living.[5] Both subjects are given prolonged attention in Time Must Have a Stop.

But of greatest significance perhaps are Myers' philosophical statements regarding the proper attitudes not only to death but to life. One finds in these an exact

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[1]Huxley, The Devils, p. 172.

[2]Myers, ii, 198-199, 422-23.

[3]Huxley, The Devils, p. 176.

[4]Myers, ii, 134-135.

[5]Ibid., pp. 55, 276.

parallel to Huxley's own.

The prime need of man, states Myers, is to know more fully, in order that he may better obey, the laws of the unseen world. He can attain this end only by the development from within of his transcendental faculty - by the recognition of himself as a cosmic being rather than as a planetary one, as not a body but a soul. When these conditions have been met, the special preminition which is sometimes spoken of as a thing of terror - the warning or the promise of earthly death - "should to the wise man, sound as a friendly summons and as a welcome home." Let him remember the Vision which confronted Socrates in the prison-house, continues Myers. Then and only then, in the similitude of an Angel, the Providence which till that hour had been but an impersonal and invisible voice was revealed. And though friends offered escape from death, "the fair and white-robed woman" had spoken of better hope than this, and had given to the words of Achilles a more sacred meaning: "On the third day hence thou comest to Pithia's fertile shore."[1]

Spiritual evolution is man's destiny in this and the other world, he affirms. It is evolution gradual with many gradations rising to no assignable close. And the passion for Life, he states, is no selfish weakness. It is a factor in the universal energy.

> It should keep its strength unbroken even when our weariness longs to fold the hands in endless slumber;

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[1]*Ibid.*, p. 274.

> it should outlast and annihilate the "pangs that conquer trust." If to the Greeks it seemed . . . . a desertion of one's post in battle - to quit by suicide the life of earth, how much more craven were the desire to desert the Cosmos, - the despair, not of this planet only, but of the sum of things.[1]

The statement ends, as does the volume, on a note of triumph:

> Nay, in the infinite Universe man may now feel, for the first time, at home. The worst fear is over; the true security is won. The worst fear was the fear of spiritual extinction or spiritual solitude; the true security is in the telepathic law.[2]

In Huxley's opinion, however, it is a note of triumph that is by no means shared by the great majority of the human race. Most of that race, he believes, still considers the promise of bodily death with unspeakable terror.

The Death of Ivan Ilyitch, as the reader knows, was described in Huxley's own words in Chapter Two of this study. It is, as Huxley says, the story of a man who falls sick and discovers "step by agonizing step" the complete disparity between the public personage he has always regarded himself and the private individual he really is, and at the very last moment achieves a triumphant victory over death. Ivan's ultimate terror of death is portrayed as hideous and overwhelming, but he is brought to this state through gradations not only of terror but of painful self-renunciation, which the terror precipitates. It is this step-by-step annihilation which renders the following victorious denouement both credible and memorable:

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[1] Ibid., p. 281.

[2] Ibid.

He looked for his old accustomed terror of death, and did not find it. "Where is it? What death?" There was no terror because death was not either.

In the place of death there was light.

"So this is it!" he suddenly exclaimed aloud. "What joy!"

To him all this passed in a single instant, and the meaning of that instant suffered no change after. There was a rattle in his throat, a twitching in his wasted body. Then the rattle and the gasping came at longer and longer intervals.

"It is over!" someone said over him.

He caught those words and repeated them in his soul.

"Death is over," he said to himself. "It's no more."

He drew in a breath, stopped midway in the breath, stretched and died.[1]

The relevance of this story to Huxley is self-apparent. Ivan's death-transcendence, one notes, is almost identical to that of Grandier. The terror which preceded it is only slightly less frightful perhaps than that which obsesses Jo Stoyte, whose choice, as the reader knows, is a diet of Carp gut and a sunless basement in place of the Light.

The Tibetan Book of the Dead, or Bardo Thodol (Liberation by Hearing on the After-Death Plane), in the words of its editor, is an "epitomized exposition of the cardinal doctrines of the Mahayana School of Buddhism."[2] It is one of a class in which he includes The Egyptian Book of the Dead; De Arte Moriendi; The Descent into Hades; the Pretakhanda of the Hindu Garuda Purana; Swedenborg's De Coelo et De Infierno; Rusca's De Inferno; and several other eschatological works. A treatise based essentially

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[1]Leo Tolstoy, The Death of Ivan Ilyitch.

[2]W. Y. Evans-Wentz, The Tibetan Book of the Dead, p. 2.

on the occult sciences of the Yoga philosophy which were fundamental in the curriculum of the Buddhist Oxford of ancient India, the University of Natanda, it was preserved and passed down by a long succession of saints and seers of the ranges of Tibet.

In his introduction to the volume, Sir John Woodroffe states that it has three characteristics. First, it is a work on the art of dying. Second, it is a manual of religious therapeutics for the last moments as well as a psychurgy of exorcising, instructing, consoling, and fortifying by the rites of dying. Third, it is a traveller's guide to the other world because it describes the experience of the deceased during the intermediate period, and instructs him in his conduct there.[1]

This volume has extensive importance in relation to Huxley's death concern for the interrelated reasons that it is included as one of the sources in his arch-treatise on mysticism, _The Perennial Philosophy_, and almost certainly constitutes a source for the after-death experience in the novel _Time Must Have a Stop_.

There is no need to discuss its relationship to _Perennial Philosophy_, which is fully explained by Huxley himself. It is sufficient to state that all the volumes that were used as sources for _Perennial Philosophy_ were employed because Huxley believes they display a greater mystical insight than any others obtainable. But the almost

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[1]Sir John Woodroffe, "The Science of Death," _The Tibetan Book of The Dead_, pp. xxvi-xxvii.

unmistakable relevance of the Book of the Dead to the posthumous wanderings of Eustace Barnack in Time Must Have a Stop invites a brief description of the principal points of similarity between the two works.

Fundamental in the teachings on which the Book of the Dead is based is the belief that all is either Sangsara or Nirvana - Ignorance in the fleshly life of brute or man or one of the other lokas (worlds), or Knowledge which leads to and is the perfect state of Buddhahood in the formless, timeless, inexpressible void of supremely clear light.[1]

All possible conditions, states, or realms of sangsaric existence, including birth and death, according to this doctrine, are transitory and illusionary phenomena that are non-existent save to the sangsaric mind perceiving them. All phenomena may be traced to a cause, and this is the yearning or thirsting after sensation, after the unstable sangsaric existence. Until this cause is overcome by Enlightenment, believes the mystic, death follows birth and birth death in an unceasing cycle (it is interesting to note that the corpses of departed Tibetans, like those of the mummies or skeletons in ancient tombs, are bound up in a sitting position in the embryonic posture symbolical of being born out of this life into the life beyond death).[2] The after-death experience is but a continuation, under

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[1] Ibid., p. xxxviii.

[2] Evans-Wentz, p. 19.

changed conditions, of the phenomena-born existence of the human world, and the nature of the existence intervening between death and rebirth (the Bardo state) in this or any other world like that in the human, is determined by antecedent actions (karma). Psychologically speaking, the Bardo is a prolonged dream-like state in what may be called the fourth dimension of space, filled with hallucinatory visions directly based on the mental content of the percipient, happy and heavenly if the karma are good, miserable and hellish if they are bad.

Unless Enlightenment is won, rebirth in the human world or from any other world or paradise or hell to which karma has led, is inevitable. It is this doctrine of reincarnation which forms one of the great differences between the Eastern religions and Western Christianity. Christianity agrees that one's after-death experience depends upon antecedent actions in the human world, but believes that man is given only one mortal life that is broken irrevocably by a single mortal death. Not so with the Eastern religions, which regards the enforced cycle of death and rebirth - the wheel of life - the fate of every man until he breaks from the wheel by achieving Enlightenment through the realization of the unreality of the sangsara of existence.

The Buddhist believes that such realization is possible in the human world, or at the important moment of death therein, or during the whole of the after-death state,

or in certain of the non-human realms. He further asserts that training Yoga, which can best be had under a human guru (teacher) is essential to right knowledge. According to the Book of the Dead, the greatest of Gurus known to mankind in this cycle of time is Gautama the Buddha. It holds that his doctrine is the same that has been proclaimed for Salvation, for the deliverance from the Cycle of Rebirth and Death, for the crossing of the ocean of Sangsara to the realization of Nirvana since time immemorial by a long and illustrious dynasty of Buddhas who were Gautama's predecessors. It holds too that lesser Bodhisattvas and gurus in this or other worlds, though still not freed from the Net of Illusion themselves, can nevertheless bestow divine grace and power upon the shiska (that is, the chela or disciple) who is less advanced upon the Path of Spiritual Enlightenment than they (it is interesting to note at this point that Huxley has been under the tutelage of a guru for many years).

The ultimate and only possible goal is Emancipation from Sangsara. It comes from the realization of Nirvana, which is non-sangsaric, beyond all paradises, heavens, hells, and worlds. It is the ending of Sorrow. It is the only Reality. According to the Buddha Gautama's own explanation to his disciples it is the ending of death as it is of birth. Rather, it is the realization that such phenomena never existed at all!

> There is, disciples, a realm devoid of earth and water, fire and air. It is not endless space, nor infinite thought, nor nothingness, neither ideas nor non-ideas. Not this world nor that is it. I call it neither a coming nor a departing, nor a standing still, nor death, nor birth; it is without a basis, progress, or a stay; it is the ending of sorrow.[1]

This liberation or emancipation, states the editor of the volume, will come as a normal process of human evolution, but the aim of Indian and Tibetan *Yoga* is to outstrip this tedious process and win Freedom even now.[2] It is this freedom toward which Bruno Rontini leads young Sebastian Barnack in *Time Must Have a Stop*. Rontini, another, more acceptable, spokesman for mysticism, is the counterpart of Mr. Propter in *After Many a Summer*. Eustace is Rontini's disciple, just as young Peter is Propter's. Both the elder men, therefore, correspond to *gurus*.

Sebastian's living search for values, ultimately in the company of Rontini, runs as a curious and arresting parallel to the *sangsaric* wanderings of his posthumous uncle, who dies of a heart attack, traverses the intermediate state between death and rebirth and is finally returned to earth in the body of a child. It is this wandering in the intermediate state between death and rebirth which displays such striking similarity to the after-death states described in the *Book of the Dead*.

In the *Bardo* or After-Death State (literally meaning "between (Bar) two (do)", that is, "between two states," the intermediate or transitional or uncertain or

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[1] *Ibid*., p. 68.

[2] *Ibid*., p. 9.

twilight state between death and rebirth),[1] from the moment of death and for three and a half or sometimes four days afterwards, the consciousness of the ordinary deceased, unskilled in Yogic science, is in a sleep or trance-state, unaware that it has been separated from its human body. As in Swedenborg's account and in the play Outward Bound, states Woodroffe, the deceased at first does not know that he is dead. His first, post-death dream state is to him, a continuation of the one in the world he has left.[2] He describes the sacred Hindu rite performed at the sacred town of Gaya in India, which like the Catholic Requiem Mass, is intended to allay the unhappy ghosts or pretas, thus terminating their haunting. These pretas illustrate the Buddhist similarity and continuity of experience before and immediately after death, he states. "The Hindu soul longs for the sacred rite which will give it a new body for that destroyed on the funeral pyre." It does not lose its belief that it has a body; nor does it lose the habits and the sensory appeals of that body. In the after-death state, he continues, according to Hindu belief it is quite conceivable that a man who drank or smoked in life imagines that he continues to do so in death. Thus, one has dream-whiskey and dream-cigars along with dream bodies, the latter analogous in Woodroffe's description to the imagined limbs of the amputee. The ghost "feels" a body "though he has been severed therefrom by the high surgery of death."[3]

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[1] Ibid., p. 28.

[2] Woodroffe, xxxv.

[3] Ibid., xxxvi.

He alludes to a case cited by Evans-Wentz, in which the grave of a European planter who had died in the jungles of the Malabar interior of South-West India was fenced in and covered with empty whiskey and beer bottles to allay the thirst of the ghostly sahib, who had incidentally become a ghost because of his earthly addiction to the contents of both kinds of bottles.

In this first post-death state, believes the Buddhist, the deceased is presented with the clear light of the void, which dawns in primordial purity. The ordinary percipient, however, is unable to recognize it because of his _sangsaric_ mind. Then the secondary clear light is presented, but this too is usually _karmically_ obscured. After this, the transitional moment of death, the first _Bardo_ ends; the knower begins to realize that death has occurred and commences upon the transitional state of glimpsing reality. This merges with the third _Bardo_, the transitional state of rebirth or the seeking of rebirth and ends when the principle of consciousness is reborn in the human or other worlds, or in one of the paradise realms (the normal procedure, save for those who directly attain _Nirvana_, is to return to the human world even after an existence - and a death - in one of the others).

Passing from one process to another as in birth, the Knower of the deceased wakes from one swoon or trance state and then another until the _Bardo_ is ended (in the

Mahayana school, this requires Forty-nine days). On awakening in second Bardo, there dawns upon him in symbolic visions, one by one, the hallucinations created by the karmic reflexes of actions done by him in his earthly body. From day to day, these Bardo visions change, concomitant with the eruption of the thought forms of the percipient until they are exhausted. In other words, states the editor, these thought forms, being mental records like those on a cinema film, run to the end of the reel; the after-death state ends; and the dreamer, emerging from the womb, begins to experience anew the phenomena of the human world.[1]

In the first state - by way of summary - the dying or deceased is confronted with the clear light of the void and, that failing, with the clear secondary light. Throughout, he is unaware that he is even dead.

In the second state, there is a recovery of death consciousness, a reawakening from death as from a swoon, in which the soul emerges from its experience with the void into a dream state which it continues until it attains a new body and really awakes to earth life again. In the third, the deceased, if not previously liberated, seeks rebirth. The past life has become dim and the future is now indicated by certain premonitory signs which represent the first movements of desire toward fulfillment. The soul-complex takes on the color of the loka in which it is

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[1] Evans-Wentz, p. 34.

destined to be born. It may go to Hell or to Paradise but to neither for good because neither punishment nor reward is eternal. Returning from either of the two opposite worlds, it now returns to earth. If the percipient, however, goes immediately to rebirth on earth, he sees premonitory visions of mating men and women. In this final stage of awakening to earth-life, he now realizes that he has no gross body and he develops a craving for one in order that he may again enjoy the sensory pleasures of life. From this stage, he passes out of the _Bardo_ dream into a womb of flesh and blood and from there to the waking state of earthly existence.

These states and their accompanying phenomena are strikingly recreated in _Time Must Have a Stop_, where the entire transition of the dead Eustace Barnack from the first agonizing presence of the light of the void to his ultimate reincarnation is dramatically and persuasively unfolded in a documentary tone.

Barnack's spirit, at first unaware that death has occurred, is confronted with the excruciatingly radiant light of the void, where, incapable of complete annihilation, yet drawn to the enticement of eternity, it is arrested for an immense duration in an agony of indecision:

> As though balanced, as though on a knife-edge between intensity of beauty and an impossible intensity of pain and shame, between a hunger for opacity and separateness and absence and a hunger for a yet more total participation in the brightness.[1]

And then abruptly commences its retreat:

> And all at once there was no longer any participation. There was a self-knowledge of the clot and the disintegrated dust; and the light that knew these

[1]Aldous Huxley, _Time Must Have a Stop_, p. 142.

things was another knowledge. There was still the agonizing invasion from within and without, but no shame any more, only a resistance to attack, a defense of rights.[1]

Once the retreat has begun, the light diminishes and the hallucinatory visions begin:

By degrees the brightness began to lose some of its intensity, to recede, as it were, to grow less urgent. And suddenly there was a kind of eclipse. Between the insufferable light and the suffering awareness of the light as a presence alien to this clotted and disintegrated privation, something abruptly intervened. Something in the nature of an image, something partaking of a memory.[2]

One of the first images to return, it is interesting to note, is that of Barnack's cigar:

Then abruptly it was Eustace Barnack who was aware. Yes, this opacity was Eustace Barnack, this dance of agitated dust was Eustace Barnack. And the clot outside himself, this other opacity of which he had the image, was his cigar.[3]

The documentation continues to its end. The reel of Barnack's past is run through. He is occasionally brought into inarticulate communication with his friends, through a medium who repeatedly garbles his messages. He develops a craving for a body of his own, and at last sees the tactile visions of a mating couple, the Weyls, who offer him the momentous chance to escape from the Light:

And these Weyls, he now perceived, this Venus with her swarthy Vulcan, could become the instruments of his permanent deliverance from that atrocious knowledge. There was a living uterine darkness awaiting him there, a vegetative heaven. Providence was ready for him, a providence of living flesh, hungry to engulf him into itself, yearning to hold and cradle

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[1]*Ibid.*

[2]*Ibid.*

[3]*Ibid.*, p. 143.

> him, to nourish with the very substance of its own delicious carnal and sanguine being.[1]

These are followed instantly by premonitions of future events, including the violent death of Mrs. Weyl, and the weeping image of his own reincarnated self near her corpse. He resists one last-moment invitation of eternity, and deliberately effects his escape into flesh:

> He remembered the warm delicious sense of being full of food and drink, and the feel of flesh, the aromatic smell of cigar smoke. . . . But here was the light again, the shining of the silence. None of that, none of that. Firmly and with decision, he averted his attention.[2]

These clearly-defined parallels between the spiritual voyage of Eustace Barnack and the Bardo states of the Mahayanas imply an almost unmistakable relationship between the two works in which they were described. It is almost certain that the Book of the Dead was not employed as the exclusive source for Barnack's transition. Huxley's mysticism is an eclectic one and his reading in eschatological works is undoubtedly broad. But at the same time there is every evidence to believe that The Book of the Dead constituted at least one of the sources - and probably a major one.

The important, indeed the essential point to remember, in connection with all three of the sources which are the subjects of this chapter is that they are all an entreaty to avoid the fate of Barnack (and the near fate of Ilyitch) by the proper preparation for death. This is the primary message of Time Must Have a Stop. Eustace, it

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[1] Ibid., p. 264.

[2] Ibid., p. 267.

must be remembered, has to return to life and a probable succession of lives and deaths because he has done nothing toward attaining a permanent escape from both. It is a message personified by his nephew, Young Sebastian, who at the novel's end has achieved a complete reversal of his cynical indifference toward death. Shortly after Eustace dies, Sebastian renders an account of the death to Bruno Rontini and is ironically amused at Rontini's response:

> An expression of distress appeared on Bruno's face. "So suddenly!" he said, when Sebastian had finished. "So utterly without preparation!"
> The words caused Sebastian to feel delightfully superior. Inwardly he smiled an ironic smile. It was almost incredible, but the old idiot seemed actually to believe in hell-fire and Holy Dying. With a studiously straight face, but still chuckling to himself, he looked up, to find the blue eyes fixed upon his face.
> "You think it sounds pretty funny?" Bruno said, after the usual second of deliberate silence.
> Startled, Sebastian blushed and stammered. "But I never....I mean, really...."
> "You mean what everybody else means nowadays," the other interposed in his quiet voice. "Ignore death up to the last moment; then, when it can't be ignored any longer, have yourself squirted full of morphia and shuffle off in a coma. Thoroughly sensible, humane, and scientific, eh?"[1]

Sebastian shrinks from further argument but replies half truculently that he doesn't see anything wrong with this attitude. At the novel's end, however, his confirmation has been completely affected. The following are Rontini's words, but Sebastian is devoutly in accord.

> But Hotspur's summary has a final clause: time must have a stop. And not only must, as an ethical imperative and an eschatological hope,

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[1] Ibid., pp. 237-238.

> but also does have a stop, in the indicative tense, as a matter of brute experience. . . . The divine Ground is a timeless reality. Seek it first, and all the rest - everything from an adequate interpretation of life to a release from compulsory self-destruction - will be added."[1]

This is the destination prescribed by each of the three sources just discussed. This is the destination toward which each attempts to point the way.

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[1] *Ibid.*, p. 298.

CHAPTER FOUR

IMAGERY: DEATH AND SEX

Coupled with Huxley's multiple direct utterances on the subject are the Huxlian images of death. These not only render the evidence of his death preoccupation overwhelming but suggest that it has been present - in latent form at least - from the very beginning of his authorship.

The death image appears in several forms in his first volume of short stories. The pathetic figure of Mr. Glottenham in "The Farcical History of Richard Greenow," is compared to a "Memento Mori," the "sub-human filthy death's-head" of Canteloupe College.[1] In "Happily Ever After," the embittered soldier, home on leave, launches into a tirade about blood and death and putrefaction.[2] In "Happy Families," frost and death outdoors is employed as an arresting contrast to the passion within, where Topsy recoils from a greedy visage of a lust-maddened negro, while Henrika lies looking on "pale as death and with wide-open terrified eyes."[3] Through the window of "The Bookshop," the human traffic is compared to Phantasms of horror."[4] In "The Death of Lully," the aged philosopher dies on the bier that has been prepared for his own corpse, while the spectators recount the scene wherein Lully, fifty years

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[1]Aldous Huxley, _Limbo_, pp. 40-41.

[2]_Ibid._, p. 157.

[3]_Ibid._, p. 238.

[4]_Ibid._, p. 265.

before, unlaces his lover's gorgeret to discover that her left breast has been half eaten away by cancer.[1]

The image appears in narrative after narrative to follow. In "The Tillotson Banquet," the brittle laughter of the "resurrected" artist reminds his young companion of a ghostly bell in a deserted house where phantom footmen respond to the thin flawed note.[2] Later, when Mr. Tillotson breaks down momentarily during his speech of honor

> It was as though a breath of the wind of death had blown suddenly through the room, lifting the vapours of wine and tobacco-smoke, quenching the laughter and the candle flames.[3]

In "The Gioconda Smile," Mr. Hutton looks at the cadaverous face of his sleeping wife and compares it to that of a dead Christ by Morales,[4] and, later, there is the image of her corpse lying at the bottom of a seven-foot grave, while old General Greco complains that the funeral has prevented his attending the Eton and Harrow match.[5] That evening, Hutton, brooding on death, writes Teddy Bear of his fear.[6] Miss Spence, the murderess, is sickened by the thought of the posthumous child of the man she herself has sent to his doom.[7] And over the entire story broods the macabre image of the ominous Gioconda Smile.

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[1] *Ibid.*, p. 282.

[2] Aldous Huxley, *Mortal Coils*, pp. 139-140.

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 153.

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 25.

[5] *Ibid.*, p. 35.

[6] *Ibid.*, p. 37.

[7] *Ibid.*, p. 65.

In "Nuns at Luncheon", Miss Penny describes the horrible spectacle of a disgraced nun, who is compelled to witness her own funeral.

> "Don't forget about the funeral service," she added, as she put on her coat. "The tapers, the black coffin in the middle of the aisle, the nuns in their white-winged coifs, the gloomy chanting, and the poor cowering creatures without any teeth, her face all caved in like an old woman's wondering whether she wasn't really and in fact dead - wondering whether she wasn't already in hell.[1]

As the reader has seen, the image of the nun is intermingled with that of death elsewhere in Huxley - in the reference to the illuminated mummy of St. Francis in Those Barren Leaves, for example; in the description of the imported monastery in After Many a Summer; and in the macabre exorcisims of the Loudun convent in The Devils (where there also appears an account of Soeur Jeanne's mummified head on display in a silver gilt-box in the Ursulines' chapel).[2]

Miss Penny, the narrator of "Nuns at Luncheon," appears as a figure of death herself, when her companion compares her long earrings to "corpses hanging in chains,"[3] Barbara in "Green Tunnels" lies naked under the transparent gauze of her mosquito netting and pictures herself entombed alive in a glass case in a museum.[4] Later, brooding on the imagined spectacle of the pale, bloodied corpse of the man she loves, she is angered when she is startled out of her reverie, as though out of one's intimate sorrow and

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[1]Ibid., p. 223.

[2]Huxley, The Devils, p. 279.

[3]Ibid., p. 195.

[4]Ibid., pp. 171-172.

self-abandonment at a death bed.[1] Mr. Topes, in the same story, thinks of himself as an old tree "built up of dead wood, with only a few fibers of life to keep him from rotting away."[2] And it is he who summons up the ghosts of dead sculptors in the clouds over Carrara.[3]

In "Half Holiday," the emergence of London into springtime is described as the "thaumaturgical change from life to death."[4] The process is reversed in Beyond the Mexique Bay, where the dry season in Mexico is depicted as "at its last gasp."[5] In "Chawdron," Tilney describes the poetic fate of the woman who pretended to occult and mystical powers, and faded out of life about a year after she was revealed as a fraud:

> "She retired to her mystic death-bed once too often. . . . She really did die."[6]

The image pervades Huxley's two volumes of poetry. In "Gothic," four gargoyles on the roof of St. Paul's Cathedral sit playing dice for the crooked French crown of a dead knight who lies entombed below.[7]

In "Last Things," the condemned souls of the dead are depicted acting out every beastly moment of their lives before the eyes of the saints and angels, shining impassively

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[1] Ibid., p. 184.

[2] Ibid., p. 187.

[3] Ibid., pp. 185-186.

[4] Huxley, Two or Three Graces, p. 219.

[5] Huxley, Beyond the Mexique Bay, p. 279.

[6] Aldous Huxley, Brief Candles, p. 56.

[7] Aldous Huxley, Leda, p. 43.

down like a "million of little blazing loopholes slotted in the walls of hell."[1]

There is a mock resurrection in "Theatre of Varieties," where "death draws and petrifies the watching faces" as a little Indian boy climbs into a basket and the magician plunges home the blade.[2] The little Indian reappears, and the shouts of the "petrified gargoyles," the drums and saxophones of the orchestra affirm victory over death. And Picardy blooms only with roses. "And never a rotting corpse in all its earth."[3]

In "Arabia Infelix":

Death starts at every rattling gust
That in the withered torrent's bed
Whirls up a phantom of grey dust
And, dying, lets the ghost fall dead.[4]

In "The Moor," Desdemona lies a carrion, "That fixed grimace of lidless eyes and starting tongue," deriding Othello's foolishness.[5] In "Nero and Sporus," Nero decries the transience of life:

. . . The Christians smoulder red;
Their brave blue-hearted flames are dead;
And you, sweet Sporus, you and I
We too must die, we too must die.[6]

In "Storm at Night" appear the intermittent images of the womb and the tomb.[7] In "Sheep" the flock is compared to headstones browsing on a plot of green.

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[1]<u>Ibid</u>., p. 42.

[2]Aldous Huxley, <u>The Cicadas</u>, pp. 2-3.

[3]<u>Ibid</u>., pp. 4-5.

[4]<u>Ibid</u>., p. 24.

[5]<u>Ibid</u>., p. 29.

[6]<u>Ibid</u>., p. 15.

[7]<u>Ibid</u>., p. 44.

> For man to dust, dust turns to grass
> Grows wool and feeds on grass. The butcher's knife
> Works magic, and the ephemeral sheep forms pass
> Through swift tombs and through silent tombs, until
> Once more God's acre feeds across the hill.[1]

In "Carpe Noctem," a lover describes himself as one who, "doomed to die, at morning will be dead."[2] In "Lines," machines

> Carve out another cavernous world, a narrow
> Sepulchre, and seal it from the sky.[3]

And in the title poem, the dead skeleton of a fig tree breaks into life with emerald fire.[4]

The image appears with both humor and pathos in Huxley's first novel. In Crome Yellow, three pale girls pretend an obsession with death but are totally preoccupied with life.[5] Denis, trapped by his hasty decision to leave the manor, despairs, "The funeral was underway. He abandoned himself to his destiny. It was time to lay himself in the coffin."[6] In the same mood of finality, he steps into the waiting automobile:

> "'It sinks and I am ready to depart,'" he said, quoting Landor with an exquisite aptness. He looked quickly round from face to face. Nobody had noticed. He climbed into the hearse.[7]

And in the same volume, little Sir Hercules dies the Roman death of Seneca, his blood floating through the water in pink dissolving wreaths and spirals as he sinks drowsily into oblivion.[8]

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[1] Ibid., p. 54.

[2] Ibid., p. 56.

[3] Ibid., p. 58.

[4] Ibid., p. 63.

[5] Aldous Huxley, Crome Yellow, p. 201.

[6] Ibid., pp. 306-307.

[7] Ibid., p. 307.

[8] Ibid., p. 142.

In <u>Antic Hay</u>, Mrs. Viveash, brooding over her dead husband, walks slowly, through the length of the volume, along the private knife-edge between her personal abyss.[1] And she remains an image of death at the novel's end:

> "To-morrow," Mrs. Viveash interrupted him, "will be as awful as today." She breathed it like the truth from beyond the grave prematurely revealed, expiringly from her death-bed within."[2]

Lypiatt, in despair over Myra's indifference, and in a prolonged, masochistic reverie on death, poises on the edge of suicide and compares the annihilating crash of the anticipated revolver shot to the sound of a stone striking the bottom of the well of death.

> After that, he would lie bleeding. The flies would drink his blood as though it were red honey. In the end the people would come and fetch him away and the coroner's jury would look at him in the mortuary and pronounce him temporarily insane. Then he would be buried in a black hole, would be buried and decay.[3]

The image is abundant in <u>Those Barren Leaves</u>. Francis Chelifer, floating like an outstretched cross, on the sunlit Tyrrhenian sea, sees an approaching boat bearing Irene and Mrs. Aldwinkle. In the cylinder of the greenish shadow of her parasol, the pink and flame-colored Mrs. Aldwinkle is compared at first to a chinese lantern lighted in a conservatory. Then, rather unexpectedly (and in a mixed simile), an accidental tilt of the umbrella recalls the miracle of Lazarus. The green and corpse-like hue leaves the features, and the colors of health come

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[1]Aldous Huxley, <u>Antic Hay</u>, p. 151.

[2]<u>Ibid</u>., p. 248.

[3]<u>Ibid</u>., p. 226.

rushing back. The miracle is reversed. The penumbra of the greenhouse envelops the glowing lamp and the living face once more becomes ghostly, as though it belongs to someone who has lain for three days in the tomb.[1]

The image appears in a variety of other forms throughout the volume. The smell of a crushed laurel leaf brings back the memory of Miss Thriplow's dead cousin,[2] to whom she composes somewhat maudlin letters from time to time.[3] Mrs. Aldwinkle deplores the words "good-night" because they mean the pronouncement of the sentence of death on yet another precious day - and temporarily on herself.[4] In a drawing room scene, Cardan jokingly composes his own epitaph.[5] Mounting the steps of his old home, Francis Chelifer feels like an excavator on the threshold of a tomb, wherein reposes the mummy of his boyhood self. He is revived after a near-drowning, and his return to consciousness and the joy of being alive is compared to a resurrection.[6] To Mrs. Aldwinkle, his seductress, it is one with most romantic and personal implications:

> And at her feet, like Shelley, like Leander washed up on the sands of Abydos, lay the young poet, pale, naked and dead.[7]

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[1]Aldous Huxley, Those Barren Leaves, p. 88.

[2]*Ibid.*, p. 47.

[3]*Ibid.*, pp. 80-81.

[4]*Ibid.*, p. 63.

[5]*Ibid.*, p. 70.

[6]*Ibid.*, pp. 161-162.

[7]*Ibid.*, p. 180.

In the novel's final pages, the cynical Cardan appropriately chooses to taunt the newly-converted mystic with the brute symbols of death and putrefaction.[1]

The images appear in Huxley's essays as well. In one, he describes the great cities of Pisa, Bruges and "the newly murdered Venice" as dead or in decay, and in the thousand rooms of Reggia at Mantua, "the walls enclose an emptiness that is the mournful ghost of departed plenitude."[2] In "Rimini and Alberti," he ironically describes the thaumaturgical arm of St. Francis Xavier " - a skeleton arm with a huge amethyst ring still glittering on one of the fingers of its bony hand -"[3] which rakes in great quantities of reverential coin on its Italian tour, and is treated "as though it were a combination of Jackie Coogan and the Host."[4]

In another, he describes the intense and greenish yellow of a Hollywood movie studio as giving to living men and women the appearance of jaundiced corpses.[5] And it is peculiarly appropriate that he should choose as his symbol of Western Philistinism the garish advertisement of Kalbsfleisch the Mortician in the yellow pages of the Chicago telephone directory.[6]

In Beyond the Mexique Bay, there are the corpses of the monuments to murder, the little crosses festooned with

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[1] Ibid., p. 366.

[2] Aldous Huxley, Along The Road, p. 123.

[3] Ibid., p. 160.

[4] Ibid., p. 163.

[5] Aldous Huxley, Jesting Pilate, p. 293.

[6] Ibid., p. 305.

paper roses or wilted flowers along the road to Miahuatlan;[1] the half-dead pre-natal ghost of the village of Pochutla;[2] the coffin-like whale boat at Puerto Angel;[3] the whole population of Copan clustered around the airplane like a crowd at Breughel's "Crucifixion";[4] the beans and crystals of dead sorcerers in rotting bags at Momostenango;[5] the gruesomely realistic cadaver in a glass coffin in the church at San Felipe, with the hundreds of people queued up to kiss the projecting hand. All save one woman who, repelled by the visions of the millions of germs implanted there by other lips, recoils at the last moment and merely wafts a kiss. "Touch wood! - but by wireless."[6] And the sign on the shop at Speightstown which offers a free lottery ticket (first prize four thousand dollars) in return for the privilege of making the funeral arrangements for one's dearly departed. Tickets are subject to one condition. All fees must be paid before the drawing.[7]

These are only a few examples of the death image in Huxley's earlier volumes. The image continues on a grander scale throughout every major volume to the present day. Point Counterpoint is loaded with the images of death.

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[1]Huxley, Beyond the Mexique Bay, p. 213.

[2]Ibid., p. 213.

[3]Ibid., p. 211.

[4]Ibid., p. 193.

[5]Ibid., p. 175.

[6]Ibid., p. 125.

[7]Ibid., p. 11.

The nocturnal foragings of the intellectuals are framed against the death of the night. There are long allusions to death in the conversations between Spandrell and Rampion. There is the grim comedy in the portrait of Webley's murder and the transformation of the corpse. And there is the counterpoint of death between John Bidlake and the child.

The image pervades Eyeless in Gaza as well. It appears on the very first page, where Anthony Beavis, the central figure of the narrative, brooding over old snapshots, compares his dead mother to a "ghost at cock-crow," a "brown phantom" with tresses like an ornamental deformity on the skull. He thinks of his dying first mistress, Mary Amberley, as a phantom too, under a great plumed hat of 1911, which was simply a "French funeral of the first class."[2]

His current mistress interrupts him, and Anthony turns his attention to the speculation that Helen, with her tortured eyes in her flame-colored beach pyjamas, is as though in hell. In reply to her question, Anthony tells her he is looking at his old corpses, and hands her a snapshot of himself, which is compared to a "ghost of the dead Etonean."[2]

An extended image appears in one of the flashback chapters in this volume. The boyish Anthony, travelling by rail across the English countryside to his mother's funeral, wretchedly endures the metronomic chant of the locomotive wheels: "'Dead-a-dead-a-dead.'" Across the

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[1]Aldous Huxley, Eyeless in Gaza, p. 1.

[2]Ibid., p. 4.

aisle, his father, with closed eyes, broods on the image of his dead wife and despairs of any possible life beyond death. Later, as Anthony and his father approach the church, two huge women dressed in mourning, like the cowled spectres of Baroque mori art, rise in "great inky cones of drapery from the flagstones," and accompanied by two enormous men, further magnified by their funeral hats, advance to meet the bereaved and begin the walk to the funeral. Their blackness obscures the sky, eclipsing the amber towers and the trees, hemming in the nearly hysterical boy, who walks as though at the bottom of a moving well, dank with the concentrated horror of death. And at the service, as the clergyman drones on about God and death and the beasts at Ephesus, a counterpoint of mental responses takes place. The boy, whom his mother has obsessed with a germ phobia, gags in the attempt to hold back his spittle, all the time wretchedly awake to the memories of her when she lived. His uncle, an atheist and misogynist, thinks of the dead woman as a silly, frivolous little thing with the soft, horrible bulges of her effeminate body. Anyhow, he consoles himself, John, her husband, had been firm about the cremation. "The Christians had been scored off there. Resurrection of the body indeed! In A. D. 1902!"[1] John watches the ashes confined to the grave and remembers a night in Rome a year after their marriage, "and the fireflies, under the trees,

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[1] _Ibid._, p. 29.

in the Doria Gardens, like stars gone crazy."[1] Above them, the jackdaws, like evil omened messengers, cry aloud in the church tower, and little Anthony remembers his mother, swerving toward him on ice skates, like a sea gull, he thinks - all white and beautiful. "And now she was dead, and up there in the tower the jackdaws were throwing stones on last winter's ice."[2]

In the same volume, Helen Ledwidge, in compulsion, steals a wet, flabby kidney from a butcher's. Later, her mother in malicious amusement, describes the repulsive prize to her guests, adding with mock seriousness that she will have the object embalmed and put under glass. "Like life," interjects the homosexual, Beppo Bowles, who is imaginarily projected into his own appropriate hell, an underground lavatory (where Beppo makes his assignations) with rows of urinals stretching to infinity in all directions and a boy at each. "Beppo walking up and down the rows, forever - his sweating self, but worse."[3] The kidney image again comes into play when Helen compares it to her dead kitten and later the aborted foetus of her own child.[4] There are other death's heads in the novel - the recurrent image of Brian's corpse lying broken on the rocks at the bottom of a cliff; the late portrait of the morphine addict, Mary Amberly, as a hardly human creature festering to death alone in a dirty burrow; the macabre

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[1]*Ibid.*

[2]*Ibid.*, pp. 28-29.

[3]*Ibid.*, p. 173.

[4]*Ibid.*, p. 368.

depiction of the last moments of Anthony's Uncle James; and the curious portrayal of Mark Staithes as an artificial cadaver instilled agonizingly with life.[1]

The image is copiously in evidence in Brave New World. The three red ghosts in the Embryo Store;[2] the death-pale roses with the posthumous whiteness of marble in the Infant Nurseries;[3] the toothless death's head of an old Indian on the reservation;[4] the dead dog on a rubbish heap nereby;[5] the floodlighted Slough Crematorium, where the corpses are converted into phosphorus;[6] the concluding images of the Savage like a figure on a cross;[7] or like a gravedigger brooding on death;[8] then the swarm of reporters to invade his sanctuary, "like turkey buzzards settling on a corpse";[9] and the final spectacle of his corpse revolving aimlessly at the end of a rope:

> Slowly, very slowly, like two unhurried compass needles, the feet turned towards the right; north, north-east, east, south-east, south, south-south-west; then paused, and, after a few seconds, turned as unhurriedly back towards the left. South-south-west, south, south-east, east. . . .[10]

The image is present in increasing abundance in After Many a Summer; Time Must Have a Stop; Grey Eminence; The

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[1]Ibid., p. 175.

[2]Huxley, Brave New World, p. 11.

[3]Ibid., p. 21.

[4]Ibid., p. 129.

[5]Ibid., p. 131.

[6]Ibid., pp. 86-87.

[7]Ibid., p. 292.

[8]Ibid., pp. 304-305.

[9]Ibid., p. 298.

[10]Ibid., p. 311.

Devils; Ends and Means; Texts and Pretexts; Science, Liberty and Peace, and Ape and Essence (which is actually one prolonged image of death from beginning to end) - all because these volumes deal directly and extensively with death in formal expository terms. No attempt was made to include selections from these in the examples quoted in the earlier pages of this chapter because more than a representative number of them have appeared in the three chapters which precede it. The main purpose of the examples that have been given was to suggest that even in his earlier volumes, where death was not the subject at hand, Huxley imagistically displays a floating preoccupation with the macabre, which has now reached or is reaching its unconcealed fruition. Knock on any door in Huxley, and the image of death appears. Of late it has been appearing with alarming rapidity. It has always been a popular one, of course, but few writers, in recent years at least, have employed it on such a broad and diverse scale as has Huxley, in whose more than thirty years of authorship and more than thirty separate volumes it has burgeoned like the skeletons above the Pallavacino tombs, reaching its present hideous proportions in Ape and Essence.

As the reader is already aware from the foregoing chapters, Huxley's imagery has merely repeated in pictorial terms his personal belief that man responds to death by taking larger and larger doses of death-surrogate in one or

more of its orgiastic forms, many of which display a marked outward similarity, not only to mystical ecstasy, but to one another as well. As a result, the Huxlian death image is frequently interfused with both the religious and the orgiastic - most arrestingly with sex. This is by no means an exclusive discovery of Huxley. Philosopher Irwin Edman, for example, calls attention to the unmistakable phallic overtone in St. Teresa's description of the mystical ecstasy.[1] This interfusion is the dominant image in "Nuns at Luncheon." It is seen in After Many a Summer, not only in the oppressive sensualism of the Beverly Pantheon and Jo Stoyte, but particularly in the relationship between Miss Maunciple and Dr. Obispo. The morning after her first seduction, in which Obispo (in the familiar sexual role of the murderer) has scientifically engineered her into an excruciatingly intense erotic epilepsy, she is compared to a beautiful young convalescent newly emerged from the valley of the shadow of death.[2]

This same interfusion of death, sex and religion (the religious overtone is nearly always implied) appears in Point Counterpoint, where Lucy Tantamount and Spandrell are both compared to murderers during the sex act.[3] It appears as well in the soma-drugged sexual orgies in Brave New World, where in "their blood-coloured and foetal darkness," the participants dance themselves into a frenzy that culminates in mass copulation followed by a superhuman

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[1]Irwin Edman, Four Ways of Philosophy, p. 199.

[2]Huxley, After Many a Summer, p. 224.

[3]Huxley, Point Counterpoint, p. 151.

mystical tranquility.[1] It is present throughout the hysterical orgies of exorcism in The Devils, which are a mass descent into downward annihilation[2] in an atmosphere of oppressive sexuality "thick enough to be cut with a knife."[3] The human sacrifices in Ape and Essence are precisely identical to the sexual orgies, and all are performed in the very presence of the dead.

Death and sex are intermingled elsewhere in Huxley - in several curious combinations. The seduction scene in Antic Hay is carried out in a pink bedroom (with a strawberry carpet) under a portrait of Domenchino's "The Last Communion of St. Jerome." Under the ironic direction of Huxley, the reader's attention is first centered on the portrait:

> And utterly remote, absorbed in their grave solemn ecstasy, the robed and mitred priest held out, the dying saint yearningly received the body of the Son of God.[4]

and then on the event which is occurring beneath it, where Rosy is lifted into the arms of her suitor, carried across the strawberry carpet, and deposited on "the rosy catafalque of the bed. Lying there with her eyes shut she did her best to pretend she was dead."[5] In the same volume, Gumbril, beginning the first stage of his step-by-step conquest of his half-frigid lover, asks her to stay the night.

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[1]Huxley, Brave New World, pp. 99-100.

[2]Huxley, The Devils, p. 192.

[3]Ibid., p. 119.

[4]Huxley, Antic Hay, p. 102.

[5]Ibid., p. 103.

in an agony of suspense during the interval before she gives qualified consent, he compares himself to a man on the night before his execution.[1]

This juxtaposition of sex and death appears too in the account of Maine de biran, the living body of death, who watches himself die out of life in impotent inability to savour the delicious enticements of the court. He knows himself impotent. He knows himself dying:

> But, oh, the musk and the patchouli! And, under the chandeliers, those arms and throats, those high-busked bosoms offered as though on platters - on silver salvers, like the strawberry ices at the reception given last month by the Keeper of the Seals.[2]

The images are fused again in the short story "Two or Three Graces," when Grace Peddley's lover, momentarily frustrated in his attempt to seduce her, breaks into tears of self-pitying despair:

> All the animation went out of his face; it became like the face of a dead man, frozen into a mask of quiet misery. Pale, ruddy-bearded, delicately featured, it was like the face of a dead or dying Christ in some agonising Flemish picture.[3]

It is this mask of dead or dying grief that succeeds for the lover where cynical aggressiveness had failed a moment before. Grace, in her efforts to console him, is precipitated into a wave of passion which culminates in her total surrender. This phenomenon is nothing new in the history of emotions, states Huxley:

> Anger and grief may both dispose to sensual desire. Violent disputes often end in love-making; and there are sometimes strange orgies over new-made graves, orgies, to the eye of the indifferent

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[1]*Ibid*., p. 149.

[2]Huxley, *Themes and Variations*, p. 3.

[3]Huxley, *Two or Three Graces*, p. 157.

> spectator, most unseemly, but which, as often as not, should be attributed less to a cynical lack of feeling than to its abundant presence.[1]

The image occurs in "Happily Ever After," when the embittered soldier's fiance is nearly seduced almost immediately after the announcement that he has been killed in battle.[2] The callow youth in "Uncle Spencer," who has just been forced to view a corpse, affecting a pompous philosophical tone, intermingles the images in a letter to a friend whose sister has just been married:

> How rapidly, my dear Henry, the saffron robe and Hymen's torches give place to the naenia, the funeral urn and the cypress! While your days have been passed among the jocularities of a marriage feast, mine have been darkened by the circumambient horrors of death. Such, indeed, is life.[3]

Peter in "Half Holiday" gratefully accepts the overtures of a prostitute. "You look as though you'd been to a funeral," she observes as she leads him to her cheap pink and dimly lighted room. "You got money?" she adds anxiously.[4]

The image - to conclude - is present in two most diverse and memorable forms in <u>Eyeless in Gaza</u>. It appears in the singularly arresting description of the erotic ritualism of John Beavis in his attempts to restore the sensuous presence of his dead wife. John defiantly refuses to believe that she is dead, and keeps sacred - and tries to make his son keep sacred - the second day of each

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[1]<u>Ibid</u>., p. 159.

[2]Huxley, <u>Limbo</u>, p. 162.

[3]Huxley, <u>Little Mexican</u>, p. 78.

Huxley, <u>Two or Three Graces</u>, p. 244.

month, the anniversary date of her death. At nights, he mounts the stairs, encloses himself in the solitary silence of their room (like the solitary silence of the grave, he shudders), and begins the sensuous ritual of calling up the ghost, which is described as a communal sacrament. Opening the wardroom door, he fondles her dresses; then, with closed eyes, stands breathing her perfume, "the sweet essence of her body from across the widening abyss of time." He caresses her laces and linens, imagining her rounded swelling breasts beneath the intricate-patterned threads. He winds her belt around his forehead or his wrists. He strokes her gloves. In an ecstasy of self-torture, he forces himself to call back to mind, in the sharpest, most painful detail, every intimate moment of his trip with her to Rome; then, in more agonizing detail, the awful burial scene at Lollingdon - the hollow vale, the earth, the terrible dark silence. To consummate the agony of the rite, he sits down and carefully re-reads each of the letters she had written to him during their engagement. Then he goes to bed with "another sword in his heart" deliberately implanted there by himself.

As time passes, however, John finds the sword growing duller. And this very bluntness is an agony of a kind. The pain of his bereavement up to this point has been all that has made his life worth living. Now this begins to slip away:

> Desire and tenderness had suddenly been deprived of their object. It was an amputation - agonizing. And now this pain - and it was all of her that was left him - this precious anguish was slipping away from him, was dying, even as Maisie herself had died.[1]

Desperately, he tries to recapture the pain, to recreate the ghost in full, heady, torturous sensuality. He buries his face in the scented folds of her dresses; spreads out the laces and lawns she had worn next to her skin; blows his breath gently into one of her gloves and watches "the gradual deflation of the image of her hand - dying, dying, till the skin hangs limp again and empty of even the presence of life."[2]

His magic rite unfulfilled, he goes to bed restless and somewhat humiliated, where he lies unable to sleep, "dry, like a mummy in the dusty emptiness of his own sepulchre."[3] Falling asleep at last, he dreams of her for the first time since her death, not as dying but as alive in his arms, her rounded flesh swelling and subsiding beneath the lace, her lips parted and consenting. Once the convalescence has begun, the ghost fades, and with it the pain and the ecstasy of the ritual. John eventually remarries.

From this rather sadistic flashback account (which displays much of the macabre fascination of the murder scene in Point Counterpoint), one returns to the opening image of the adult Anthony and Helen Ledwidge, naked and in the midst of copulation on a flat rooftop overlooking the sun-drenched Mediterranean. Anthony, like many of his

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[1]Huxley, Eyeless in Gaza, p. 146.

[2]Ibid.

[3]Ibid.

Huxlian prototypes, "still lucid in his self-estrangement,"[1] detachedly studies the violent gestures of his impassioned mistress and compares them, significantly, to the symptoms of a death bed, in which he is both assassin and fellow victim. Then intrudes the final element in the Huxlian trinity - the religious. Distorted, her face is a mask of extremest grief. And bending down to her tormented lips, he suddenly perceives it is the face of "one of Van der Weyden's holy women at the foot of the cross."[2]

> And then, from one moment to the next, there was a stillness. The victim no longer rolled her tortured head on the pillow. The imploring hands fell limp. The agonized expression of pain gave place to a superhuman and rapturous serenity. The mouth became grave like that of a saint. Behind the closed eyelids what beatific vision had presented itself?[3]

But the image does not end even here. As Anthony bends to kiss Helen's sun-warmed skin, her musky odor, redolent of salt and smoke, evoke the memories of his dying seductress and the broken corpse of his friend, Brian Fox, at the bottom of a cliff. The lovers continue to lie in the sun. A few moments later, they are awakened from their torpor by the clattering roar of an airplane overhead - like a disapproving but irresistibly comic heavenly visitant.[4] As Anthony begins a joke regarding the intrusion, a strange yelping punctuates the roar of the engine. Anthony looks up to see a dark shape plummeting toward them. He cries out, makes a quick, involuntary movement to shield his face:

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[1] *Ibid.*, p. 15.

[2] *Ibid.*

[3] *Ibid.*

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 113.

> With a violent but dull and muddy impact, the thing struck the flat roof a yard or two from where they were lying. The drops of a sharply spurted liquid were warm for an instant on their skin, and then, as the breeze swelled up out of the west, startlingly cold. There was a long second of silence. "Christ!" Anthony whispered at last. From head to foot both of them were splashed with blood. In a red pool at their feet lay the almost shapeless carcase of a fox terrier.[1]

The fact that this particular death image is purely symbolistic is self-evident. And it is a perfectly appropriate one in Huxley, who has frequently employed the beast as a vitriolic contrast to the sub-humanity of man. It is employed in Texts and Pretexts, one recalls, where the death-surrogate of the kennel is mockingly discussed. It is utilized in After Many a Summer, where Virginia Maunciple watches the apes in copulation and fails to recognize their clear indictment of her own relationship with Jo Stoyte:

> "Aren't they cute," she cried, clapping her hands in pleasure, "Aren't they human!"[2]

It appears in Beyond the Mexique Bay, where the six "beauties" watching the bull fight at the Plaza de Torres are compared to oxen.[3] The whorish-visaged female performers at Puebla, however, are less ox-like, slightly more human. And in his concise addendum to this observation, Huxley supplies the unmistakable key to the image:

> But this, precisely, was their undoing. Spirituality is not demanded of an ox; but in a human being you expect to find some trace of a soul.

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[1]Ibid.

[2]Huxley, After Many a Summer, p. 93.

[3]Huxley, Beyond the Mexique Bay, p. 265.

> The animality of a bestial man or woman seems more intense than that of a beast, and is always incomparably more dreadful.[1]

The peculiar spectacle of the falling fox terrier seems clearly an imagistic way of saying the same thing, and probably corresponds to the equally curious sight of the pigeons at the Grandier death orgy. Up to this point, Anthony has refused to instill into their relationship anything beyond brute sensualism (Anthony's first, tentative love for Helen, writes Savage, has merged with his horror of time and death, as symbolized by Helen's mother, Mary Amberley. This incident, states Savage, is the central crisis of the novel, and the time-horror has precipitated it).[2] The falling dog is Huxley's symbol of protest. Revolted by the sight of the crushed carcass and the words of Anthony's first joking response, Helen decides to break the relationship, and leaves that afternoon. That evening, in final irony, the memory of the dead dog re-invokes for Anthony the ghosts of the earlier images of death:

> He woke up shuddering. Once awake, he was unable to go to sleep again. A huge accumulation of neglected memories broke through, as it were, into his awareness. Those snapshots. His mother and Mary Amberley. Brian in the chalk-pit, evoked by that salty smell of sun-warmed flesh, and again at the cliff's foot, among the flies - like that dog. . .[3]

It should be added that this rather grisly dead-dog image seems to be a popular one with Huxley. It appears in _Time Must Have a Stop_, where the death of Foxy is directly

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[1] _Ibid._, p. 271.

[2] Savage, pp. 144-146.

[3] Huxley, _Eyeless in Gaza_, p. 125.

attributable to the then unregenerate Sebastian Barnack.[1] For refusing to fulfill his destiny as a complete human being, Sebastian (like the sexual assassin, Anthony Beavis) is confronted with the image of a dead dog. Both, it may be added, are in part brought to their senses thereby. The image appears too in "The Gioconda Smile" and Point Counterpoint, both in sexual contexts but neither resulting in a conversion. The image occurs to Mr. Hutton (who is involved in a sex quadrangle that inevitably sends him to his doom) at the very moment his wife is taking poison:

> Once, when he was walking along Piccadilly, a dog had jumped out of the third-storey window of the Ritz. He had seen it fall. He had heard it strike the pavement. Should he go back? He was damned if he would. He hated her.[2]

It occurs in Point Counterpoint when a male dog in pursuit of a female across a dark road in India is crushed under the wheels of an auto bearing Philip and Elinor Quarles. The incident, to Elinor's horror, sets Philip going on a train of ideas all bearing on sexual patterns among humans:

> Elinor listened with interest and at the same time a kind of horror. Even the squashing of a wretched animal was enough to set that quick, untiring intelligence to work. A poor starved pariah dog had its back broken under the wheels and the incident evoked from Philip a selection from the vital statistics of Sicily, a speculation about the relativity of morals, a brilliant psychological generalization. It was amazing, it was unexpected, it was wonderfully interesting; but oh! she almost wanted to scream.[3]

Two conclusions may here be drawn regarding Huxley's image of death: It has always been in evidence in his

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[1] Huxley, Time Must Have a Stop, p. 273.

[2] Huxley, Mortal Coils, p. 63.

[3] Huxley, Point Counterpoint, p. 80.

authorship - from its first peripheral presence among the company of post-war intellectuals walking the knife edge of a crumbling civilization - to its present direct frontal position between mankind and eternity. It has always displayed an attitude of supreme irony (probably the nearest approach Huxley ever makes to pathos in the macabre is the death of little Phillip in Point Counterpoint and that of Linda in Brave New World, but in both instances, one recalls, the pathos is an instrument of vitriolic satire).

The high utility of the death image in Huxley's satirical scheme derives from its brute persistence. It is the one inexorable counterweight to man's impassioned idiocy. It is the single phenomenon man has not yet succeeded in knocking over, and to an artist such as Huxley, who has watched the systematic destruction of every human value, this brute inviolability of death must offer a rather vindictive source of consolation.

Huxley suggests this utility in "Orion," one of his early poems, where death is given a god-like astrological form:

> Death in the Scorpion hunts him up the sky
> And round the vault of time, round the slow-curving year,
> Follows unescapably
> And to the end, aye, and beyond the end
> Will follow, follow; for of all the gods
> Death only cannot die.[1]

It is not dead, he continues; it is not even very effectively buried:

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[1]Huxley, The Cicadas, p. 33.

> The rest are mortal. And how many lie
> Already with their creatures' ancient dust!
> Dead even in us who live - or hardly live,
> Since of our hearts impiety has made,
> Not tombs indeed (for they are holy; tombs
> Secretly live with everlasting Death's
> Dark and mysterious life),
> But curious shops and lumber rooms
> Of bone and stone and every mummified thing,
> Where Death himself his sacred sting
> Forgets (how studiously forgotten
> Amid the irrelevant to and fro of feet!),
> Where by the peeping and the chattering,
> The loud forgetfulness seemingly slain,
> He lies with all the rest - and yet we know,
> In secret yet we know,
> Death is not dead, not dead but only sleeping,
> And soon will rise again.[1]

He is a persistent god, continues Huxley, and a most treacherous one. Only Death

> Still claims our prayers, and still to those who pray
> Returns his own dark blood and quickening breath,
> Returns the ominous mystery of fear.[2]

Mark Staithes phrases the same idea, somewhat less romantically, in his conversation with Anthony Beavis:

> "Death," said Mark Staithes. "It's the only thing we haven't succeeded in completely vulgarizing. Not from any lack of desire to do so, of course. We're like dogs on an acropolis. Trotting around with inexhaustible bladders and only too anxious to lift a leg against every statue. And mostly we succeed. Art, religion, heroism, love - we've left our visiting card on all of them. But death - death remains out of reach. . . . One day, no doubt, some genius of the kennel will manage to climb up and deposit a well-aimed tribute smack in the middle of the statue's face. But luckily progress hasn't yet got so far. Death still remains.[3]

It remains, Anthony replies, but it is behind a pretty thick smoke screen. The smoke screen is bigger and better, agrees Mark, but the enemy behind it has grown more formidable too:

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[1] Ibid., pp. 33-34.

[2] Ibid., p. 34.

[3] Huxley, Eyeless in Gaza, p. 311.

> "Death's grown, I should say, now that the consolations and hopes have been taken away. Grown to be almost as large as it was when people seriously believed in hell. Because if you're a busy film-going, newspaper-reading, football-watching, chocolate-eating modern, then death _is_ hell. Every time the smoke screen thins out a bit, people catch a glimpse and are terrified. I find that a very consoling thought.[1]

And so, one gathers, does Huxley, in whose voluminous authorship the smoke screen clears repeatedly to reveal the burgeoning figure of death. Lately, the screen has been dispelled for frightfully long intervals and the figure has towered closely at hand. From the documented spectacles of horror in the early seventeenth century to the prophetic return to the tomb in 2200 A.D., somewhere in the foreground or middle distance of Huxley's authorship has intruded the ominous and insistent spectre of death. It stalks in black funeral cowls before the terrified eyes of a boy on the way to his mother's burial in an English churchyard. It hovers above the tombstones in a Baroque cemetery. It lies among the ruins of the vanished civilization of Copan. It dangles from the earlobes of a sadistic dilettante telling a grisly tale in an Italian cafe. It plummets from an airplane to a lover's tryst on a flat rooftop overlooking the Mediterranean. It towers before the eyes of a California millionaire searching hysterically for a formula to escape it forever. It earliest appeared as though of its own haunting accord, but is lately brought to fore with full premeditation. It displays none of the pathos

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[1] _Ibid._

of its predecessors, none of the idealism of the traditional literature of the graveyard. It is an accusation, not an elegy. It contemplates the tomb and the death's head with little sympathy for the dead and no quarrel at all with the act of death. It will point to the sculptured evidence of a wasted life, but will rarely speculate over what a life might have been had death not intervened. Mankind, to Huxley, is capable of supreme attainments, but continues to fall short of its promise, not because of premature mortal death but because of the multiple living death of intellect and spirit it has imposed upon itself. He is preoccupied with death simply because most men refuse to think of it at all or regard it as an object of inescapable horror.

"We ignore the outer darkness," he states in an essay on D. H. Lawrence; "or if we cannot ignore it, if it presses too insistently upon us, we disapprove, being afraid."[1]

And ranging, like Lawrence, into the outer darkness, Huxley sees only greater reason to disapprove of indifference or of fear. He indeed has written an advanced obituary for the human race,[2] but has not entirely suspended hope. Like Lawrence, who "looked at things with the eyes, so it seemed, of a man who had been at the brink of death," he expresses his disappointment not in plaintive and self-pitying resignation but in savage and accusatory anger; yet hopes - still hopes - for the profound miracle, against

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[1]Huxley, The Olive Tree, p. 211.

[2]Gray, pp. 165-174.

the almost certain knowledge that it can never happen.[1]

In his conclusion to "Orion," the younger Huxley attempts to rally the forces of life under his own spirited leadership. In spite of the seeming invulnerability of death, men may still escape. They are free.

> . . . free to turn
> Lifewards, within, without, to what transcends
> The squalor of our personal ends and aims,
> Or not to turn; yes, free to die or live;[2]

And on a note of victory, he urges the way:

> Up from the emblems of the wind
> Into its heart of power,
> The Huntsman climbs, and all his living stars
> Are bright, and all are mine.[3]

To the present Huxley, however, the Scorpion of Death is still pursuing his victorious course, and the appeal to the forces of life is almost wholly in anger, almost exclusively in despair. The way out is possible, but there is no conviction that man will take the way. Two men escaped from the devils. But these were events that occurred in the past. What of the future? The answer is probably best indicated in the concluding scene of _Ape and Essence_.

Two other people - a man and a woman - have broken away from the civilization of the ghouls. Still three days from safety, and with the mounted forces of their former captors searching for their trail, the two exhausted fugitives pause by an ancient burial mound (from the twentieth century), unpack their knapsack, and prepare to eat lunch. This is

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[1]Huxley, _The Olive Tree_, pp. 236-241.

[2]Huxley, _The Cicadas_, p. 38.

[3]_Ibid._, p. 39.

the way Huxley leaves them - halfway between the forces of death and of life - with no assurance of which way they will inevitably go. The final image, it may be added, is a peculiarly appropriate one.

> There is a silence. Then Loola hands him a hard boiled egg. He cracks it on the headstone and, as he peels it, scatters the white fragments of the shell over the grave.[1]

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[1]Aldous Huxley, Ape and Essence, p. 205.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

A review of the foregoing study suggests the following major points regarding Huxley's death concern.

He has disclosed a clear preoccupation with death in every major work from Those Barren Leaves through The Devils of Loudun, and at least a floating, imagistic preoccupation from his earliest volume.

This preoccupation has led to the delineation of four clearly-defined patterns of death-response in Huxley's authorship. These are the blithe indifference to death of the early Greeks and the Volumni; the cult-like obsession with death of Pascal and St. Francis of Assisi; the death-hysteria of the Baroque and the modern; and the supreme transcendence of death of the mystic.

Huxley's search for a valid manifestation of eternity has led him through diverse sources of eschatology and the life worship of the early Greeks to a present preoccupation with eclectic mysticism. He has always deplored the worship of death (the second of the attitudes just summarized), but his main anger has been directed toward the hysterical denial of death on the part of twentieth-century man.

This anger was expressed at satirical length in Brave New World and Eyeless in Gaza and reached its first-full-volume proportions in After Many a Summer.

It is carried to its present fruition in _Ape and Essence_. Throughout these volumes, the basic prediction remains the same. Man plunges along the knife-edge of existence toward sub-gorillahood, mindless automatism, or total annihilation, feeding on increasing portions of death-surrogate as he goes. The indeterminate ending of _Ape and Essence_ neither nullifies nor ameliorates this prediction. Man has been reduced to a ghoul, then placed a tantalizing distance from freedom, but with the forces of Belial angrily riding to track him down. If this is a suggestion of hope, it is decidedly not a very inspiring one.

These, briefly, are the major aspects of Huxley's death concern. What is their significance?

Huxley continues as a ruthless delineator and a macabre prophet. His portrayals are primarily vitriolic, his predictions almost invariably in the direction of doom. There is much of Swift in Huxley. One cannot avoid the feeling that there is too much at times. One suspects that his emphasis is too exclusively on the brute members of the human race and that it fails to take into account the great many who are attempting to work out their destinies on both sides of death, just as Huxley is. These, except for the rare mystics, are not included in Huxley's appraisal, which finds man in this early second half of the twentieth century almost exclusively below the level of the brute, headed at an accelerating pace toward total and unenlightened oblivion in one of a number of forms -

in drugs, in passion, or in the annihilating explosion of the atom. It is a frightening prediction because it could, one agrees, be fulfilled and conceivably at any moment.

But Huxley does offer a way out. The bitterness with which he has pervaded his authorship is overlaid and intermingled with a determined appeal to life - both in time and in eternity and on an immensely richer scale than most men imagine it.

The invitation is based on one supreme condition, however: an epoch reversal of values. Death is irrelevant, believes Huxley, because life is eternal. At present, he implies, man has it the other way around. Life is irrelevant because death is so inescapably there for all to see.

It is there, states Huxley, but not inescapably. It is an illusion - a frightful one to be sure - but one that can be dispelled. It is dispelled through life. Man is totally unprepared to die because he is equally unprepared to live.

This is the message to which Huxley has directed the accumulated brilliance of his long and fruitful career. It has been written in increasing anger of late because the message has grown more urgent and has continued to be overlooked. Intent toward the self-validating experience of eternity, yet living richly and vigorously in life, he has paused to turn mankind face to hysterical face with

itself and has shown it the image of death.

It is an advance image, to be sure. It does not have to come about. The answer lies not with Huxley, one concludes, but with the object of the image itself.

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