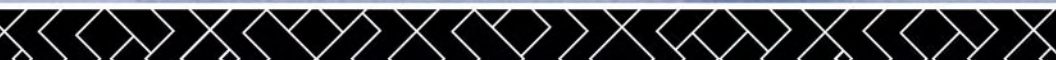


# Aldous Huxley

*Edited by*  
Donald Watt

The Critical Heritage

 **Routledge**  
Taylor & Francis Group



## **ALDOUS HUXLEY: THE CRITICAL HERITAGE**

## **THE CRITICAL HERITAGE SERIES**

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Significant pieces of criticism from later periods are also included in order to demonstrate fluctuations in reputation following the writer's death.

# **ALDOUS HUXLEY**

## **THE CRITICAL HERITAGE**

Edited by

**DONALD WATT**



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## General Editor's Preface

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The reception given to a writer by his contemporaries and near-contemporaries is evidence of considerable value to the student of literature. On one side we learn a great deal about the state of criticism at large and in particular about the development of critical attitudes towards a single writer; at the same time, through private comments in letters, journals or marginalia, we gain an insight upon the tastes and literary thought of individual readers of the period. Evidence of this kind helps us to understand the writer's historical situation, the nature of his immediate reading-public, and his response to these pressures.

The separate volumes in the *Critical Heritage Series* present a record of this early criticism. Clearly, for many of the highly productive and lengthily reviewed nineteenth- and twentieth-century writers, there exists an enormous body of material; and in these cases the volume editors have made a selection of the most important views, significant for their intrinsic critical worth or for their representative quality—perhaps even registering incomprehension!

For earlier writers, notably pre-eighteenth century, the materials are much scarcer and the historical period has been extended, sometimes far beyond the writer's lifetime, in order to show the inception and growth of critical views which were initially slow to appear.

In each volume the documents are headed by an Introduction, discussing the material assembled and relating the early stages of the author's reception to what we have come to identify as the critical tradition. The volumes will make available much material which would otherwise be difficult of access and it is hoped that the modern reader will be thereby helped towards an informed understanding of the ways in which literature has been read and judged.

B.C.S.



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## Preface

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My main objective in making the following selection of documents has been to represent in a comprehensive way the dominant critical responses to Huxley's developing art and thought during his lifetime. Comprehensiveness is a commanding factor in making the selection because of the extent of Huxley's career and the range of his productions. Several lengthy essays, especially those in books still widely available, have been omitted in order to assure the necessary breadth. Within the framework of comprehensive representation I have cherished throughout the principle of quality. Huxley's fiction was clearly the central focus of his reputation, so the reception of his novels occupies the bulk of this volume. Nonetheless, I have tried within the limits of the book to indicate as well the important reactions to his major nonfiction. I have included a substantial but by no means exhaustive list of references in Appendix I to give full bibliographical information on materials mentioned in the Introduction.

Editors of books on authors who have provoked such lively and diversified criticism as Aldous Huxley may be advised to bear in mind his remark when introducing *Proper Studies*: 'The best I can do is to warn the reader against my distortion of the facts, and invite him to correct it by means of his own.'





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## Abbreviations

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<i>B</i>	Sybille Bedford, <i>Aldous Huxley: A Biography</i> , 2 vols (London: Chatto & Windus, Collins, 1973-4). References to the second volume apply to the typescript, since the entire biography had not been published when the present edition was compiled.
<i>DNB</i>	<i>Dictionary of National Biography</i>
<i>ES</i>	Claire John Eschelbach and Joyce Lee Shober, <i>Aldous Huxley: A Bibliography</i> (Berkeley: University of California, 1961)
<i>L</i>	<i>Letters of Aldous Huxley</i> , ed. Grover Smith (London: Chatto & Windus, 1969)
<i>MV</i>	<i>Aldous Huxley 1894-1963: A Memorial Volume</i> , ed. Julian Huxley (New York: Harper & Row, 1965)
<i>NYHTBR</i>	<i>New York Herald Tribune Book Review</i>
<i>NYTBR</i>	<i>New York Times Book Review</i>
<i>PR</i>	Interview of Huxley by George Wickes and Ray Frazer, <i>Writers at Work: The 'Paris Review' Interviews</i> , Second Series (New York: Viking, 1963)
<i>TLS</i>	<i>Times Literary Supplement</i>



## A List of Huxley's Major Works

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References to Huxley's books, unless otherwise noted, are to the Chatto & Windus Collected Edition. In the following list are given for each major title the original year of publication, and then the year of printing for the Collected Edition copy I have used. For the years in which each title first appeared in a collected format, see Appendix III.

- Adonis and the Alphabet* (American title, *Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow*) 1956\*  
*After Many a Summer* (American title, *After Many a Summer Dies the Swan*) 1939, 1968  
*Along the Road* 1925, 1948  
*Antic Hay* 1923, 1949  
*Ape and Essence* 1948, 1971  
*The Art of Seeing* 1942, 1971  
*Beyond the Mexique Bay* 1934, 1950  
*Brave New World* 1932, 1967  
*Brave New World Revisited* 1958, 1972  
*Brief Candles* 1930, 1970  
*Collected Essays* 1959†  
*Collected Short Stories* 1957, 1969  
*Crome Yellow* 1921, 1963  
*The Devils of Loudun* 1952, 1971  
*Do What You Will* 1929, 1970  
*The Doors of Perception* 1954, 1968  
*Ends and Means* 1937, 1969  
*Eyeless in Gaza* 1936, 1969  
*The Genius and the Goddess* 1955\*  
*Grey Eminence* 1941, 1956  
*Heaven and Hell* 1956, 1968  
*Island* 1962, 1972  
*Jesting Pilate* 1926, 1957  
*Limbo* 1920, 1962  
*Literature and Science* 1963, 1970  
*Little Mexican* (American title, *Young Archimedes*) 1924, 1968



A LIST OF HUXLEY'S MAJOR WORKS

*Mortal Coils* 1922, 1958  
*Music at Night* 1931, 1960  
*The Olive Tree* 1936, 1960  
*On the Margin* 1923, 1956  
*The Perennial Philosophy* 1945, 1969  
*Point Counter Point* 1928, 1963  
*Proper Studies* 1927, 1957  
*Science, Liberty, and Peace* 1946, 1970  
*Texts and Pretexts* 1932, 1959  
*Themes and Variations* 1950, 1954  
*Those Barren Leaves* 1925, 1969  
*Time Must Have a Stop* 1944, 1966  
*Two or Three Graces* 1926, 1963  
*Verses and A Comedy* 1946\*

\* Has not yet appeared in the collected editions: all references are to the British first edition.

† No collected edition, published only in America.

## Introduction

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For Aldous Huxley (1894–1963) life and music shared a common quality: they could each be described as a simultaneity of co-existing incompatibles. The same description may be applied to the critical reception of Huxley's work. He was hailed as an emancipator of the modern mind and condemned as an irresponsible free-thinker; celebrated as a leading intelligence of his age and denounced as an erudite show-off; admired as the wittiest man of his generation and dismissed as a clever misanthrope. A few pages of his writing or half a career served equally to evoke the incompatible opinions. Opening the cover of *Point Counter Point*, Wyndham Lewis objected to a 'tone of vulgar complicity with the dreariest of suburban library-readers' (No. 76), while André Maurois discovered in the same opening pages scenes 'worthy of the great Russians' (No. 58). In 1933 C. P. Snow claimed that Huxley 'ought to seem the most significant English novelist of his day' (No. 73a), while G. K. Chesterton quipped: '[He] is ideally witty; but he is at his wit's end' (No. 74).

Huxley's writing, both the fiction and the nonfiction, provoked controversy at almost every stage. Those very features of his work which drew most praise—the scientific contexts, the detached irony, the panoply of startling ideas—provided as often as not evidence which his critics felt could be used against him. The Huxley critical heritage is a history of vigorous contention spurred by not always equal shares of insight and misunderstanding.

At the center of that history was Huxley's own peculiar approach to fiction, what George Catlin (No. 100) called 'that strange mutt of literature,' the 'novel of ideas.' The term provided at most a sketchy description of Huxley's books, but his critics were at a loss to suggest anything better. His attitude toward fiction seemed too casual and iconoclastic. 'There aren't any divinely laid down canons of the novel,' he asserted. 'All you need is to be interesting' (Parmenter, p. 11).<sup>1</sup> Huxley's novels flaunted those conventions of logical realism followed faithfully by older writers, such as John Galsworthy and Arnold Bennett. Accordingly, his younger audience in the 1920s found him refreshing: 'By comparison, most other contemporary writers seemed stuffy, unen-

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lightened, and old-fashioned' (Brooke, p. 6). But at the same time his writing appeared to defy the new authoritative view of fiction as an organic art form which had evolved through the influence of Flaubert and Henry James. Developing standards of criticism in the earlier twentieth century were deeply affected by Jamesian aesthetics, by Bloomsbury's belief in the autonomy of art, and by a severely formalist approach to literature. Huxley's practice of the novel ran counter to these trends: 'From a Jamesian perspective that insisted on rigidly delimiting a fictional world through a filtering consciousness with which the reader was asked to identify but could never wholly rely on, Huxley the novelist was inevitably unsatisfactory' (Firchow, p. 7). To many observers the failure of Huxley's fiction either to adopt a traditional posture or to adhere to a formalist criterion meant that he was stuck in an untenable sort of writing which hovered indecisively between the novel and the essay.

Huxley's critics were slow to realize that he held a different concept of fiction. Like Quarles in *Point Counter Point*, he readily admitted the problems he had in creating conventional plots: 'I don't think of myself as a congenital novelist—no. For example, I have great difficulty in inventing plots. Some people are born with an amazing gift for storytelling; it's a gift which I've never had at all' (*PR*, p. 205). But the telling of stories, for Huxley, was only a small part of what fiction could accomplish. He wrote to Eugene Saxton on 24 May 1933: 'I probably have an entirely erroneous view about fiction. For I feel about fiction as Nurse Cavell felt about patriotism: that it is not enough. Whereas the "born storyteller" obviously feels that it is enough' (*L*, p. 371). The popular style of fiction written by Dumas, Scott, or Stevenson could not satisfy Huxley. Also, as much as he appreciated Arnold Bennett's friendship and advice, he recoiled from the elaborate realism of books like *Riceman Steps* (*L*, p. 228). Throughout his life Huxley sought to write another kind of fiction. 'My own aim,' he told an early interviewer, 'is to arrive, technically, at a perfect fusion of the novel and the essay, a novel in which one can put all one's ideas, a novel like a hold-all' (Maraini, p. 78). The drive to synthesize multifarious attitudes towards life moved Huxley to develop an integrative approach to fiction which in its breadth, he hoped, would transcend the limits of purist art. In this radically changed sense Huxley believed that fiction, along with biography and history, 'are *the* forms':

My goodness, Dostoevski is six times as profound as Kierkegaard, because he writes *fiction*. In Kierkegaard you have this Abstract Man going on and on—like

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Coleridge—why, it's *nothing* compared with the really profound Fictional Man, who has always to keep these tremendous ideas *alive* in a concrete form. In fiction you have the reconciliation of the absolute and the relative, so to speak, the expression of the general in the particular. And this, it seems to me, is the exciting thing—both in life and in art (*PR*, pp. 213–14).

Huxley at heart cherished the belief that the synthesis of an integrative, not organic fiction, of fiction which would 'bring it all in' as he told Laura (his second wife), would evolve into a comprehensive vision for modern man which could, ultimately, contribute some healing power to a ravished world.<sup>2</sup>

If critical neglect of his positive aims bothered Huxley, he rarely showed it. His responses to his critics were infrequent, oblique, usually private. On occasion he replied in correspondence to a reviewer, such as Henry Seidel Canby on *Point Counter Point* (No. 52), or to a friend, such as Sybille Bedford on *Grey Eminence* (*L*, p. 476). But he told an interviewer near the end of his career that his critics

. . . never had any effect on me, for the simple reason that I've never read them. I've never made a point of writing for any particular person or audience; I've simply tried to do the best job I could and let it go at that. The critics don't interest me because they're concerned with what's past and done, while I'm concerned with what comes next (*PR*, pp. 199–200).

Sybille Bedford confirms the point in her recollection of the Huxleys' home in southern France during the 1930s:

There were no papers. No *Times*, no *New Statesman*; in fact, Aldous took no English newspaper at all, though I remember seeing an occasional copy of the *Continental Mail*. . . . There were, inevitably, stacks of literary reviews sent to him from all over the world. These for the most part remained not only unread but unopened (*MV*, p. 140).

If at all typical those reviews would have included, besides questions about a cavalier attitude toward the art of fiction, three other recurring objections to Huxley's work: indecency, heartlessness, and overproduction. *Limbo* and *Antic Hay* ran into publication difficulties because of their irreverent contents (see below, pp. 7, 9) and *Brave New World* was banned in Australia for four years on grounds of obscenity. Huxley defended himself in part when he spoke, later, of the 'salutary proceeding' of 'sticking pins into episcopal behinds' (*PR*, p. 212). But Huxley's larger purpose surely went beyond the value of shock-for-shock's-sake. Miles Fanning in 'After the Fireworks' reflects Huxley's position when

he tells Pamela that the unadulterated truth, however shocking and humiliating, must be told. Pamela writes in her diary:

And M[iles] said it would take a whole generation of being shocked and humiliated and lynching the shockers and humiliators before people could settle down to listening to that sort of truth calmly. . . . And he says that when they can listen to it completely calmly, the world will be quite different from what it is now . . . (*Brief Candles*, p. 261).

To the sometimes comically conflicting charges that his treatment of sex was too libertine or too puritan, Huxley remained quizzically silent.

A related, perhaps more durable charge was that Huxley was too severe with the human weaknesses of his characters. When his novels first appeared, recalls Juliette Huxley, their 'bantering tone, the merciless showing-up of human foibles, an acid undertow, underlay the admirable style and discouraged many readers' (*MV*, p. 42). In 1927 Beverley Nichols complained: '. . . I always feel that he must write with a sharp fountain-pen, filled with ink that has first been clarified and then frozen. . . . [His characters] are the last sort of people whom one would ever wish to visit one in a sick-room' (p. 137). Somerset Maugham later suggested that Huxley's failure to acquire 'the great position as a novelist that his talent seems to authorize' could be attributed to 'his deficient sympathy with human beings' (No. 106). Asked about his alleged heartlessness, Huxley replied with a rare explicit statement on the source of his irony:

I don't feel myself to be extremely heartless. But the impression is partly my fault. I have a literary theory that I must have a two-angled vision of all my characters. You know how closely farce and tragedy are related. That's because the comic and the tragic are the same thing seen from different angles. I try to get a stereoscopic vision, to show my characters from two angles simultaneously. Either I try to show them both as they feel themselves to be and as others feel them to be; or else I try to give two rather similar characters who throw light on each other, two characters who share the same element, but in one it is made grotesque.<sup>3</sup>

Had Huxley stated his position so forthrightly more often, critical misunderstandings would have been reduced, for his 'stereoscopic vision' also explains why his novels never could be expected to maintain a single, Jamesian center of consciousness.

Cyril Connolly was foremost in raising the charge of overproduction, although some reviewers of Huxley's books in the 1930s also questioned what seemed to them too much repetition in the volumes of stories and novels. In *The Condemned Playground* (1936) Connolly pro-

claimed: 'The first forty years of Aldous Huxley's literary career have been marred by over-production, for which the present economic system is to blame.' Connolly clarified what he meant by 'the present economic system' when he confided, shortly, that Huxley was 'bound to his publisher by golden cords' (p. 115). Connolly continued his attack with a devastating parody of *Eyeless in Gaza* and soon, in a review of *Ends and Means*, he rebuked Huxley for doing 'much harm to literature' (No. 90). Huxley apparently never replied in print to Connolly, but Bedford describes the delicacy of their relationship in the early 1930s (*B*, I, pp. 260-2). It must be noted, too, that Connolly in 1928 had praised Huxley's style in *Point Counter Point* as 'impeccable' (No. 47).

The binding 'golden cords' were in fact a series of three-year contracts which Huxley signed with Chatto & Windus, his British publishers, from 1923 continuously until his death. The first contract, completed in January 1923, called for Huxley to submit 'two new works of fiction per annum (one of which two works shall be a full length novel) written by himself during the next three years,' an arrangement which, Bedford observes, was 'commonplace enough to the Victorians, but what writer of today—of similar talent and literary conscience—would, *could*, take on such an engagement? Yet that kind of contract in those post-war years was by no means rare' (*B*, I, pp. 130-1). As the years went by, the obligation was gradually relaxed. By the time of the signing of the fifth agreement in March 1935, Huxley was asked to do three books of fiction or nonfiction in three years, and after his move to America he worked exclusively on a royalty basis (details of all the agreements are in *B*, I and II, *passim*).

The effects these dealings had on Huxley's work are not easy to assess. Few persons will deny that his was a demanding task. Detractors may well urge that without the pressure of contracts Huxley might have written that one consummate masterpiece his critics always anticipated. The *Letters* and the biography reveal that Huxley often felt the burden of his commitments, and in some of the novellas the interpolating style may seem little more than padding. Connolly refers directly to the early contracts in *Enemies of Promise*:

A contract to produce two books a year forced him to vitiate that keen sense of words with which he started and as he had less to say, so, by a process which we have noticed, he took longer in which to say it. For such a writer who had to turn out two hundred thousand words a year, the Mandarin style was indispensable (p. 60).

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The examples Connolly quotes from *Eyeless in Gaza* confirm that Huxley was prone, at times, to a labored and redundant style. But Connolly, possibly, overstates his case. Huxley's publishers, much to their credit, adhered more to the spirit than the letter of their agreements. By the end of the first three-year period, for instance, Chatto's had accepted two novels (*Antic Hay* and *Those Barren Leaves*), two volumes of short stories (*Little Mexican* and *Two or Three Graces*), and two books of nonfiction (*Along the Road* and *Jesting Pilate*) as fulfilling the commitment. When Huxley found it difficult to complete *Point Counter Point* on time, C. H. C. Prentice and Harold Raymond were glad to give him an extension of the deadline (*B*, I, p. 191). Moreover, Huxley would have been a prolific writer whatever his contractual situation. Even before the 1923 agreement he had produced six books and large amounts of occasional journalism. He wrote *Crome Yellow*, for example, in two months. 'I rarely take a complete holiday,' he said, 'as I find that my health begins to break down as soon as I stop working. Holidays are healthful only to those who dislike their work. I happen to find mine tolerably agreeable.'<sup>4</sup> The financial security provided by the contracts went a long way toward releasing Huxley from a Grub Street livelihood. It is unlikely that he would have gained such a large measure of immediate professional autonomy on his own. Though the initial requirements were imposing, Huxley's publishing agreements were markedly to his advantage and probably had, in sum, a quite beneficial effect on his career.<sup>5</sup>

## EARLY SUCCESS TO 1928

Soon after the end of World War I an American friend invited Richard Aldington to write an article for the *Outlook* to identify young writers Aldington thought would become known. 'I made a choice which I modestly think wasn't bad for 1919,' says Aldington in *Life for Life's Sake*: 'James Joyce, T. S. Eliot, D. H. Lawrence, Aldous Huxley, H.D., and Marcel Proust. I received a letter from the editor in these terms: "For God's sake, Richard, can't you think of somebody who has been heard of or is ever likely to be heard of?"' Aldington protested; his piece was sent for arbitration to Logan Pearsall Smith, 'who decided that my writers would never be heard of; and the article was rejected' (p. 219).

In 1919 Huxley's reputation was limited. Three years earlier the London *Nation* had published three of his poems, 'but by mistake over the signature of Leonard Huxley, who, Aldous says, received a letter

from A. C. Benson congratulating him on the extreme beauty of his verse' (B, I, p. 66). Huxley was then well-known in Oxford circles, partly for the unorthodox way he secured his First in English: 'Instead of answering the questions,' L. A. G. Strong told F. W. Bateson, 'Huxley made fun of them; but so cleverly that the examiners could not refuse him his alphas.'<sup>6</sup> Outside of Oxford Huxley did attract some attention with his early poetry. H. W. Massingham wrote to tell Huxley 'how much he liked "Mole" and asked Aldous to send some poems to the new quarterly *Forum*' (B, I, p. 62). According to Ford Madox Ford, one of Huxley's poems created a teapot scandal among London's literati (No. 8), while Arthur St John Adcock said Huxley 'made an early sensation with the stark realism of such poems as "Frascati,"'<sup>7</sup> first published in *Wheels*, 1919.

Two years later Aldington's selection of Huxley for his list was vindicated. With the publication in 1920 of what he called 'my two children—*Limbo* and *Leda*' (B, I, p. 109), and with the appearance the following year of *Crome Yellow*, Huxley broke onto the postwar literary scene with some abruptness (see No. 17). The off-beat quality of the 1920 volumes proved fresh and grating. Arnold Bennett thought 'Leda' 'the best modern poem I have read for years' (*Journal*, p. 706), but the *Sunday Times* review contained that blend of qualified praise and admonition which would recur so frequently in coming responses to Huxley's work:

The writer is energetic and voluptuous, without affectation; and in his language as well as in his imagery he shows proof of that intellectual basis which is essential to poetry of a high order. . . . But most of the lyrics are violently ugly, with a determination to shock and astonish, which is highly displeasing (23 May 1920, p. 5).

The shocking substance of *Limbo*, according to Frank Swinnerton in his autobiography, placed its publication in jeopardy. A senior partner at Chatto's, it was said, having read a set of the proofs, 'refused absolutely to publish anything so appallingly gross, blasphemous, and horrible.' Swinnerton interceded, Huxley agreed to 'three small revisions' in his script, and publication ensued (p. 311). First-year sales in England were only 1,600 copies (B, I, p. 108), but the book made an impact. Cyril Connolly remembers borrowing it at school 'from one master only to have it confiscated by another . . .' (*Condemned Playground*, p. 114). Despite reservations about 'youth and cleverness' (No. 2), the general response was expressed in the *NYTBR*'s contention that the reader



finishing *Limbo* 'will feel sure of Mr. Huxley as an authentic figure in English letters of the day' (15 August 1920, p. 29).

The publication of Huxley's first novel, *Crome Yellow* (1921), was greeted with widespread cries of delight. 'Almost overnight,' Firchow exclaims, 'Huxley became an internationally famous figure' (p. 62). The book won high praise from F. Scott Fitzgerald (No. 15) and H. L. Mencken:

I have a good deal of confidence in the future of this Mr. Huxley. There is about him an air of unshakable sophistication. . . . The obscene farce about him engages his bludgeon, but also arouses his delight. . . . He sees the intrinsic buffoonery, the vaudevillian bombast and imbecility, and he knows how to present it dramatically and amusingly.<sup>8</sup>

The *New York Tribune* put *Crome Yellow* on its list of recommended books ' . . . because it is the latest work of one of the most interesting personalities recently come to the literary front in England' (7 May 1922, sec. vi, p. 6), and three weeks later it had made the paper's 'Six Best Sellers' list. Hart Crane wrote Allen Tate that he liked Huxley's work (*Letters*, p. 90), Max Beerbohm wrote Huxley that he liked *Crome Yellow* (to which Huxley delightedly replied—*L*, p. 206), and Marcel Proust, rather unaccountably, claimed that Huxley 'occupies an unassailable position in the English literary world of to-day'.<sup>9</sup>

The novel nonetheless caused some ill feeling among those who were identifiable models for its characters. As Peter Quennell recalls, several readers were aware that Priscilla Wimbush and Crome 'unmistakably owed a good deal to Lady Ottoline [Morrell] and her Garsington household . . .' (*Sign of the Fish*, p. 120). Huxley's biographer advises that 'Lady Ottoline was offended by *Crome Yellow* and a breach ensued that lasted many years' (*B*, I, p. 123).<sup>10</sup> Dora Carrington, who used to sleep on the roof of Garsington Manor with Huxley, took note of her appearance in the novel as Mary Bracegirdle and concluded 'it's a book which makes one feel very ill' (*Letters*, p. 200). With some justification Frank Swinnerton argued that the 'caricatures annoyed those who were laughed at. By them, Aldous was considered very cheap, and not really at all first class' (*Figures*, p. 188).

The least favorable of *Crome Yellow*'s reviews—which were overwhelmingly positive—urged Huxley to consider the importance of being earnest (No. 13). *Antic Hay* (1923) provoked a more mixed reaction and some graver objections. When it was first published, states Jocelyn Brooke, the novel 'acquired an undeserved reputation for

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"obscenity", and several of the more respectable libraries refused to stock it' (p. 15). Reports circulated that *Antic Hay* 'was burnt in Cairo (of all places) and banned in the Irish Free State.'<sup>11</sup> Yoi Maraini amused Huxley with the revelation that he had met two American readers who told him they had burnt the book (p. 78). More significantly, George H. Doran recounts in *Chronicles of Barabbas* that when he issued *Antic Hay* in New York the censor was alerted to it 'as a highly immoral book':

He in turn reported it to the District Attorney of New York, who sent for me before taking action; for it had developed that the censor had been more struck by its irreverence than by its plain speech and morals. The District Attorney was rational and understanding. He said to me very frankly that he found the book to be fascinating and artistic, but technically some parts of the book might be misconstrued into the pornographic.

The District Attorney told Doran he would make no protest if the publishers 'did not stress the pornographic aspect' and if they avoided any publicity over threatened seizure (p. 174). Doran of course agreed to the conditions, but not all readers would have agreed with the District Attorney's decision. One of Harvey Curtis Webster's 'old teachers' remarked that 'we'd be much better off if it [*Antic Hay*] had never been written. There is so much disillusionment, so much cynicism . . .' (pp. 196-7). James Douglas added vehemently that if *Antic Hay* 'escapes uncastigated and unpilloried the effect upon English fiction will be disastrous' (No. 19).

Huxley was moved to respond to objections lodged against the book by his father, Leonard Huxley, who, judging by Aldous's letter, must have been emphatic in his strictures:

I am sorry you should have found my book so distasteful. Like you, I have no desire to enter into argument about it . . . I will only point out that it is a book written by a member of what I may call the war-generation for others of his kind; and that it is intended to reflect—fantastically, of course, but none the less faithfully—the life and opinions of an age which has seen the violent disruption of almost all the standards, conventions and values current in the previous epoch.

Huxley went on to identify the artistic impulse which lay behind *Antic Hay* as well as a number of the subsequent novels:

The book is, I may say without fatuity, a good book. It is also a very serious book. Artistically, too, it has a certain novelty, being a work in which all the ordinarily separated categories—tragic, comic, fantastic, realistic—are combined so to say chemically into a single entity, whose unfamiliar character makes it appear at first sight rather repulsive.

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I can't say that I expected you would enjoy the book. But on the other hand I expected that my contemporaries would; and so far as I know by what people have written to me, they have (*L*, p. 224).<sup>12</sup>

The reaction of another member of the family, Arnold Ward (son of Huxley's aunt, Mrs Humphrey Ward), was, if less dignified, at least as emphatic as Leonard Huxley's must have been. Osbert Sitwell related an inebriated Ward's comments on his cousin: "' . . . If I were to meet him now in Piccadilly I should bloody well take his trousers off and leave him there.'" "Dear me," said Osbert "and why, may I ask?" "Because," A.W. replies "because I consider (hiccough) that he's disgraced his ancestors'" (*L*, p. 233). Huxley's offense was writing *Antic Hay*.

Among the reviewers, allegations of savagery and misanthropy drowned out the few hesitant acknowledgments of the novel's imaginative power. Joseph Wood Krutch (No. 25) was one of a minority of readers who sensed the underlying seriousness which Huxley claimed for his book in the letter to his father. But *Antic Hay* did achieve a certain distribution (first-year sales in England, 5,000 copies according to *B*, I, p. 142, were double those of *Crome Yellow*), and it appealed, as Huxley wished, to the younger generation of the 1920s. Angus Wilson remembers being given *The Forsyte Saga* and *Antic Hay* at an early age. The Forsyte values 'were what my family paid lip service to, they were what I was in revolt against. But *Antic Hay!* *Antic Hay* was all that I had devoutly hoped for. . . . Aldous Huxley was the god of my adolescence' (p. 73). Isaiah Berlin would later call Huxley 'one of the great culture heroes of our youth' (*MV*, p. 146). Especially for those souls described by Gertrude Stein as the 'lost generation,' *Antic Hay* offered 'the very last word in freedom and self-expression.'<sup>13</sup>

Meanwhile Huxley was publishing more volumes of short stories, which were largely well-received, although there was a strong undercurrent of concern over the random structure of his fiction. Krutch had stated that, 'considering its formlessness, *Crome Yellow* is a novel only by courtesy' (No. 14). Bennett found it difficult to accept Huxley's sketchy treatment of his characters in the long story opening *Little Mexican* (No. 29). Another older novelist, Thomas Hardy, was more puzzled than Bennett by the Huxley manner. Mrs Hardy asked Virginia Woolf if she knew Huxley:

I said I did. They had been reading his book, which she thought 'very clever'. But Hardy could not remember it: said his wife had to read to him—his eyes were now so bad. 'They've changed everything now,' he said. 'We used to

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think there was a beginning and a middle and an end. We believed in the Aristotelian theory. Now one of those stories [probably 'Nuns at Luncheon,' *Mortal Coils*—ed.] came to an end with a woman going out of the room' (*Writer's Diary*, p. 93).

Other readers were quick to defend Huxley's 'modern' approach to fiction. The *TLS* reviewer of *Little Mexican*, anticipating purist objections to the leisurely opening of 'Uncle Spencer,' proclaimed truculently that he would 'let the purists have their say: we would not lose a word of it' (No. 28). Too, the *NYHTBR* praised the stories in *Two or Three Graces* for 'the endings which strike their last notes with the apparent casualness and the actual carefulness of a Chopin nocturne or a Chopin scherzo' (6 June 1926, p. 6).

The argument over Huxley's disruptive attitude towards conventional notions of fiction was naturally magnified by the publication of his third novel, *Those Barren Leaves* (1925), which sold 8,000 copies in its first year in England (*B*, I, p. 152). Isabel Paterson thought that 'Mr. Huxley's aunt, the late Mrs. Humphrey Ward, would disapprove thoroughly of her nephew's work' (*Bookman*, March 1925, lxi, p. 85), and Lytton Strachey told Lady Ottoline that '*Those Barren Leaves* fluttered from my hand before I had read more than four of them' (Holroyd, p. 515). But the *Sunday Times* summarized both the contending issue and the prevalent attitude of the novel's reviewers:

If there were ever any doubts as to Mr. Aldous Huxley's claims to be considered as an original artist, they must be dispelled by the publication of his new novel, 'Those Barren Leaves'. It is a book which cheerfully breaks every rule devised in the past by lesser men for their own guidance. Its story is unfolded by fits and starts, which must horrify the conventional spinner of yarns. Sometimes, indeed, the story is altogether forgotten and another is introduced. Yet, after reading through these brilliant and fascinating pages, one is conscious of both form and cohesion. . . . The new book may not be a masterpiece, but it is assuredly a stepping-stone to very big things (25 January 1925, p. 9).

Even though Gerald Gould (No. 32) and Conrad Aiken (No. 36) led a protest against the digressive style and the lengthy conversations, *Those Barren Leaves* prompted several other readers to believe that Huxley 'is a very good and very likely will be a great novelist' (No. 30).

By the mid-1920s Huxley was writing with the assurance that he was supported by a substantial reputation. Adcock's estimate of the critical reception of Huxley's work through *Jesting Pilate* (1926) was accurate: ' . . . It was greeted with acclamations loud enough to drown the out-

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cries, here and there, of any scandalised dissenters' (p. 136). He had worked extremely hard, to the point where he 'realized that there is a price to pay for writing two books a year' (B, I, p. 152). But, as one result, Edwin Muir could declare in 1926 that 'no other writer of our time has built up a serious reputation so rapidly and so surely.'<sup>14</sup> Huxley was bolstering that reputation with the travel essays in *Along the Road*, reviewed most appreciatively by Edmund Gosse (No. 38), and *Jesting Pilate*, which Ernest Boyd in the *Independent* called 'the most arresting and original volume of its kind which has appeared in a generation' (13 November 1926, cxvii, p. 561). A clear sign of Huxley's spreading influence was the effect that he was already having on other writers, such as William Faulkner and Nathanael West (see Tuck, p. 130; Millgate, pp. 73, 75; and Reid, pp. 60-3). Further, Grant Overton reported, in 1924, that prices for first editions of Huxley's books were singularly high: 'A first edition of a new Huxley is something to put aside carefully. The distinction is unusual among living writers and, in the case of a man under thirty, possibly unique' (No. 27).

In spite of recurring critical reservations Huxley's work had generated enough momentum and enthusiasm to justify greater expectations. The characteristic outlook by 1927 was the one which Thomas Wolfe confided to his notebooks: 'The young writer with the highest potentiality—Aldous Huxley' (p. 113).

## GROWTH TO FAME 1928-1935

For the large majority of Huxley's readers, the potential discerned by Wolfe was realized in the next two novels, *Point Counter Point* and *Brave New World*. Published in October 1928, *Point Counter Point* sold 10,000 copies in its first year in England (B, I, p. 198). The files of Doubleday and Doran indicate that over 40,000 copies were sold in America in the next six years. The novel's distribution was accelerated by its selection as a book-of-the-month by the U.S. Literary Guild, which by itself sold 55,000 copies in 1929. The book 'enjoyed a huge vogue in France and Germany, broadened Aldous's English public and became one of the cornerstones of his international reputation, not to say his fame' (B, I, p. 200). Perhaps a measure of the book's status appears in Evelyn Waugh's note, 8 October 1928, on a luncheon companion: 'I detected him talking about "Point Counter Point" before he had read it' (*Observer*, 8 April 1973, p. 19). Gabriel Marcel, then a critic for the *Nouvelle revue française*, was 'most anxious to have it translated at

once' (*L*, p. 303). Without question *Point Counter Point* initiated the spread of Huxley's reputation to a hitherto unprecedented degree.

The full reception given the book, however, was by no means uniformly favorable. Wolfe found it 'better than I thought' (*Notebooks*, p. 361), Sinclair Lewis called it 'an admirable novel' (*Letters*, p. 289), and John Cowper Powys (though he disliked the title) said it was 'Huxley's most exciting work' (*Letters*, p. 40). Huxley wrote his brother, Julian: 'I had a very nice note from H. G. Wells about it today, and I gather from the various letters I've had about it that it has pleased' (*L*, p. 303). But Huxley's wife, Maria, was upset by the death of little Phil (*B*, I, p. 207), which Arnold Kettle later described as 'a piece of deliberate masochism' (p. 168). According to his biographer, John Middleton Murry was not especially pleased by the Burlap portrait: 'In fact, he had been more outraged by Burlap than he cared to admit. His first impulse had been to challenge Huxley to a duel . . .' (*Lea*, p. 249). Two leading Bloomsberries privately expressed disapproval of the novel. Virginia Woolf remembered *Point Counter Point* while she was struggling with the composition of *The Years*:

Not a good novel. All raw, uncooked, protesting. A descendant, oddly enough, of Mrs. H. Ward: interest in ideas; makes people into ideas. . . . I have a horror of the Aldous novel: that must be avoided. But ideas are sticky things: won't coalesce: hold up the creative, subconscious faculty; that's it, I suppose (*Diary*, pp. 238-9).

Perhaps more surprisingly, Lytton Strachey rejected the novel as 'a bad book, in my opinion. The man can't write; his views are rotten; and the total result of his work is a feeling of devitalisation and gloom' (Holroyd, p. 571). André Gide found the novel unreadable (No. 59). D. H. Lawrence told Aldington that 'within a year Huxley would be in a lunatic asylum' (*Portrait*, p. 338). Though Lawrence wrote Huxley, reservedly, that he admired his courage (No. 53), in another context he voiced marked distaste for the book:

An English novel like *Point Counter Point* has gone beyond tragedy into exacerbation, and continuous nervous repulsion. Man is so nervously repulsive to man, so screamingly, nerve-rackingly repulsive! This novel goes one further. Man just *smells*, offensively and unbearably, not to be borne. The human stink! (*Phoenix*, p. 270).

Lawrence's poem 'I am in a Novel' revealed his displeasure with the Rampion portrait, which he rejected more vehemently in a letter to

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William Gerhardt: 'No, I refuse to be Rampioned. I am not responsible. Aldous' admiration is only skin-deep, and out of the Mary Mary quite contrary impulse' (Nehls, p. 265).

The reviews of *Point Counter Point*, though, were with few exceptions exceedingly favorable. *TLS* questioned whether the novel was really 'a good example of the craft of fiction' (No. 44), Henry Seidel Canby advised Huxley to write essays (No. 52), and Louis Kronenberger objected to the savagery of his satire (No. 51). But praise far outweighed the adverse criticism. L. P. Hartley said Huxley 'has a power akin to Donne's of investing [scientific fact] with poetry' (No. 45). Cyril Connolly declared him 'admirably gifted for a modern Petronius' (No. 47), while Robert Morss Lovett called the novel 'the modern *Vanity Fair*' (No. 49) and Krutch contended 'it vindicates Mr. Huxley's right to be considered the most able of contemporary satirists' (No. 48).

*Point Counter Point* concluded Huxley's novels of the 1920s and opened that period in which his critical reputation would reach its zenith for his lifetime. As Clark points out, the novels of the 1920s made Huxley's name: 'The four books established Huxley as a writer who would be listened to' (p. 219).

Yet, as powerful a mark as he had made, in some respects Huxley's serious reputation rested on shaky grounds. According to G. M. A. Grube, for instance, St John Irvine complained of a hatred of existence in nearly everything Huxley wrote. Grube's response was that Irvine 'without any justification' was 'generalizing from Spandrell and his type.' Grube submitted that 'a writer who is so thoroughly misunderstood by an eminent critic has not yet written enough to be understood by the majority of his readers' (*Canadian Forum*, 2 August 1930, x, p. 402). There is indeed much to Charles J. Rolo's contention that the 'twenties painted a false picture of Huxley in their own image' (p. 114). A good deal of his early general popularity, added Harold Watts, 'rested less on a clear view of Huxley's real concern in *Point Counter Point* than on a scandalized and delighted enjoyment of some of the by-products of that concern to be found in the novel' (Introduction, *Point Counter Point*, p. viii). During the 1920s an occasional critic here and there—Krutch, or A. C. Ward—recognized the underlying quest for values in Huxley's work. But Grant Overton's masterly penetration of his contemporaries' oversights was rare, if not unique (No. 27). By far most readers were slow to see beneath the surface of Huxley's concentrated irony.

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Such misunderstandings account for some of the attacks on Huxley at the turn of the decade. Desmond MacCarthy said in a 1931 radio broadcast on 'What England Reads' that Shaw, Wells, and Galsworthy had lost some of their vogue. The post-war generation, in its disillusionment, was more 'interested in the cold, discontented cynicism of an Aldous Huxley . . .' (*New York Times*, 7 September 1931, p. 18). The spread of Huxley's reputation beyond leisured intellectual circles into the broader reading public led Hugh Gordon Porteus to warn that 'a writer who takes the trouble, for mercenary reasons, to make his works popularly accessible, should be rather more alive to his responsibilities' (p. 10). A concerted assault came from the citadel of T. S. Eliot, who had earlier called Huxley one who had to write thirty bad novels in order to produce a good one (No. 43). A reviewer of *Music at Night* for Eliot's *New Criterion* dismissed Huxley as 'a literary journalist' who 'has heard of everything and thought about nothing' (January 1932, xi, p. 373). Eliot himself in *Thoughts After Lambeth* (*Criterion Miscellany* No. 30) charged:

. . . If youth has the spirit of a tomtit or the brain of a goose, it can hardly rally with enthusiasm to these two [Huxley and Bertrand Russell] depressing life-forcers. (Not that Mr. Huxley, who has no philosophy that I can discover, and who succeeds to some extent in elucidating how sordid a world without any philosophy can be, has much in common with Mr. Russell) (p. 9).

But overall Huxley's stock going into the early 1930s was clearly on the rise. Sewell Stokes recalls that during this period John Galsworthy told him 'how greatly he admired' Huxley's work (p. 977). In Maugham's *Cakes and Ale* (1930) Huxley was mentioned as a possible successor of Hardy to the position of Grand Old Man of English Letters. James Joyce, if half-jokingly, advised Nino Frank to translate something by Huxley instead of Eliot or Lawrence for *Bifur* (Ellmann, p. 628). André Maurois (No. 58) and Gabriel Marcel (No. 85), who reviewed *Those Barren Leaves* and *Point Counter Point* for the *Nouvelle revue française*, were eagerly introducing his work to the French reading audience, which, René Lalou soon reported, welcomed it with enthusiasm (No. 94). In spite of a vigorous rebuttal from Ernest Hemingway (No. 62) and Chesterton's lively assault (No. 74), Huxley's influence, now starting to reach the Continent, promised to outgrow that of his contemporaries as a new decade turned increasingly to him for leadership.

Nevertheless, the appearance of *Brave New World* (1932) provoked a



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bewildered diversity of reactions—incomprehension, resentment, and hostility not the least among them. The book offended the Australian censors (see above, p. 3) and moved H. G. Wells, says Gerald Heard, to write Huxley an angry letter charging treason to science.<sup>15</sup> Derek Patmore recollects that Wells 'said to me savagely: "*Brave New World* was a great disappointment to me. A writer of the standing of Aldous Huxley has no right to betray the future as he did in that book."<sup>16</sup> Wells was joined by Wyndham Lewis, who referred to the novel as 'an unforgivable offence to Progress and to political uplift of every description' (*Letters*, p. 226). Reviewers were quick to mistake Huxley's satire for a lack of seriousness. H. G. Harwood in the *London Saturday Review* felt the book was 'chiefly intended as a Lark' (6 February 1932, cliii, p. 152), the *New Statesman* called it 'a thin little joke' (6 February 1932, iii [n.s.], p. 172), the *London Mercury* dismissed it as 'poor satire, and half-hearted writing' (March 1932, xxv, p. 493). The American reception was discouragingly cool. Granville Hicks indignantly rebuked Huxley for being 'effectively insulated from the misery of the masses' (No. 71), while Margaret Cheney Dawson rejected his novel as 'a lugubrious and heavy-handed piece of propaganda' (No. 70). Confusion over the book even reached the point, John Hawley Roberts related, where 'some readers have concluded that Huxley approved of his horrible creation' (p. 551).

Joseph Needham's comment that perhaps 'only biologists and philosophers will really appreciate the full force of Mr. Huxley's remarkable book' (No. 64) was largely a correct assessment of the immediate response. Early readers often shared Alan Reynolds Thompson's composed reflection: 'And let him be as savage as he likes, we sit easy in the knowledge that his Utopia is in no danger of materializing; his Utopians are perfectly impossible creatures' (*New York Bookman*, March 1932, lxxix, p. 691). But readers who looked beyond the pale of literary criticism, such as Bertrand Russell (No. 67) and Rebecca West (No. 63), quickly recognized the novel's applicability to the existing world. Hermann Hesse found in Huxley a kindred spirit (No. 72), and it remained for Ralph Straus, then regular fiction reviewer for the *Sunday Times*, to sum up the reactions of a small segment of discerning respondents:

Many people will be terribly shocked by this book. Some who may be rather deeper in their lines than they would care to admit will find in it nothing but the nastiest nonsense. For myself I would regard it not only as a triumph of satirical writing, but as a highly moral tract. Ugly and depressing it may be, but nobody

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can read it without taking stock of himself, and of how many novels can that be said in this enlightened era of ours? (7 February 1932, p. 9).

Looking backward, Denis Gabor observed with accuracy that *Brave New World* 'had a devastating effect on the intelligentsia of the Western Hemisphere' (p. 10). Coming only four years after the fast-selling *Point Counter Point*, *Brave New World* would gradually develop into Huxley's most popular novel. The book sold 13,000 copies in its first year in England, 10,000 copies the year after (B, I, p. 251). In America, according to Doubleday's files, it sold 15,000 copies in 1932-3, and another 18,125 copies during the next five years. The book was eventually translated into nineteen languages; it continues to sell about 2,000 hard-cover copies per year on each side of the Atlantic. Huxley's sophisticated grasp of impending science, his sliding irony and literary horse-play, would intrigue a steady flow of readers finding in the book, with Cyril Connolly, 'a touch of genius' (*Sunday Times*, 22 February 1959, mag.sec., p. 13).

By the mid-1930s Huxley's critical reputation was nearing its peak. Theodore Roethke, writing to Dorothy Gordon on 26 September 1933, could refer to what was still one of the old chestnuts of less appreciative criticism:

I do think he's quite witty and learned. His faults are so obvious that they don't bother me so much. I remember I. A. Richards saying that Huxley was very good second-rate, that he got much of his best stuff from repeating conversations of his brilliant friends (*Selected Letters*, p. 7).

But lingering objections were now being overwhelmed by very high acclaim. C. P. Snow thought 'Huxley is on the way to becoming an English institution' and called him 'the most significant English novelist of his day' (No. 73a). Thomas Mann advised a correspondent, Karl Kerenyi, that he discovered in Huxley's work a splendid expression of the West European spirit (*Briefe*, p. 353). Robert Nichols praised Huxley as 'a genius of European stature' and 'the only living English novelist who at present enjoys and deserves a European reputation' (*Observer*, 8 December 1935, p. 9). In 1935 enough of Huxley's work had crossed the Channel to prompt Dmitri Mirsky, in *The Intelligentsia of Great Britain*, to declare that 'French critics consider him one of the greatest writers of the present age . . .' (p. 129). Positive criticism of some depth was forthcoming from the Continent (No. 75) and the United States (No. 77). Very soon after their arrival in America, an

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amazed Maria Huxley wrote her sister: 'You have no idea how *famous* Aldous is here' (B, I, p. 344).

Fame both abroad and at home was plainly his. In 1928 a friend of C. E. M. Joad's had conducted a survey to see 'which books appeared most frequently on the shelves of contemporary undergraduates at Oxford.' At that time the works of Lawrence were predominant, but a similar survey in 1935 revealed 'a considerable majority of the works of Huxley':

Huxley is read [Joad continues] by undergraduates, dons, teachers, artists, reviewers, critics, even politicians—in a word, by all those who, in the last resort, form the tastes and mould the opinions of their fellow-citizens. He is, indeed, *par excellence*, the novelist's novelist, as Bach is the musician's musician and Spenser the poet's poet.<sup>17</sup>

By 1936, suggests Ronald Clark, 'he was possibly the best-known Huxley of them all . . .' (p. 233). Peter Quennell, echoing Joad, paid tribute to Huxley's impact on other writers, avowing that 'a whole generation of spirited performers is in his debt.' As the troubled 1930s moved closer to a second global conflict, readers waited with growing anticipation to see where Huxley would turn next: 'What course Mr. Huxley's destiny will now assume,' Quennell concluded, 'is one of the most interesting literary problems of the present decade' (*English Novelists*, p. 278).

## PERIOD OF NEW TRIAL 1936-1946

P. H. Houston in the *American Review* summarized the position of Huxley's readers in 1934: 'So accurately has he reflected the spirit of his age that now, since the publication of *Point Counter Point* in 1928, his whole emancipated generation seems to have accepted him as their official spokesman before the world' (p. 211). Houston expressed an essential hope of Huxley's international audience as it approached the crucial middle years of the 1930s:

If he chooses to abstract himself from the cynicism and pose and exhibitionism in the midst of which he has lived, and really to study his own nature, he can accomplish something worthy of his brilliant gifts and of paramount value to an age blindly seeking some guide out of the depths of its despair (p. 232).

In the years following *Point Counter Point* Huxley had indeed been struggling to identify some affirmative response to the challenges posed in his own fiction of the 1920s. By 1936 he was ready to take his stance.

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The significant results of his stance in terms of his critical heritage were threefold: the explicit message of the later fiction struck most readers as being detrimental to its artistry; criticism of Huxley's craft often became indistinguishable from criticism of his ideas; the popular response to Huxley's work continued to grow, but the critical reception declined.

While they were looking to him for guidance, practically none of Huxley's readers were prepared for the directions he took in coming books. His critics had so consistently overlooked the deeper import of the earlier work that the new outspoken idealism seemed an abrupt reversal, if not a contradiction of attitudes. The net result of the appearance in 1936 of Huxley's pacifist pamphlet, *What Are You Going to Do About It?*, and his 'conversion' novel, *Eyeless in Gaza*, was to leave large groups of his readers feeling baffled and betrayed. George Woodcock in *Dawn and the Darkest Hour* recalls that the 1930s generation was 'disturbed and disappointed at what seemed a retreat into obscurantism on the part of one of the writers we most admired. It seemed another case of the Lost Leader' (p. 16). Stephen Spender in the *Left Review* took vigorous exception to Huxley's plan of appeasement for the emerging power blocks:

What you in fact propose to do with your conference is to sacrifice the freedom and even the lives of oppressed pacifists and socialists in Italy, Germany and Austria on the altar of a dogmatic and correct pacifism, using the militant dictators as priests to perform the human sacrifice (p. 541).

C. Day-Lewis countered Huxley's pamphlet with one of his own, in which he acknowledged Huxley's great talent and achievement but stated ruefully: 'Now it looks as though he is turning his back on us forever' (No. 86). Julian Bell's reaction, expressed privately in a letter on 22 October [1936], was not very uncharacteristic: 'I think Aldous and Gerald Heard must be slightly mad—since I can't believe they are bribed, and that's the only other explanation I can see of their opinions' (p. 165).

The intensity of such remarks indicates the degree of importance which the 1930s had attached to Huxley's contribution to the age. That *Eyeless in Gaza* was awaited with growing interest is attested by its first-year sales in England which, at 26,700 copies (*B*, I, p. 317), were more than double those of *Brave New World*. The reviews of *Eyeless in Gaza* were the fullest and quite often the most analytical of any novel Huxley wrote. Despite grave reservations about the unorthodox time

sequence (No. 78), the diary passages (No. 79), and the new ideology (No. 81), the novel did not escape praise. The *Times* reviewer brought up the perennial issue of Huxley's approach to fiction:

The definition of the word 'novel' must be greatly enlarged if it is to take in such a work as Mr. Aldous Huxley's *Eyeless in Gaza*. For it is much less a story or even a psychological analysis than a philosophy—and even when that is said we are left wondering whether it should not rather be called an assemblage of philosophies, a ballet of ideas. . . . We are left fairly astounded at the mental energy and versatility displayed throughout this unflagging narrative of 600-odd pages (19 June 1936, p. 22).

Day-Lewis, his reply to Huxley's pamphlet notwithstanding, thought it 'not, perhaps, his best novel,' but readers 'will be brought up all standing by the exacting morality which the author openly proposes to them at the end,' and he concluded 'this new humanity makes [the novel] by far his most appealing and promising' (*Daily Telegraph*, 19 June 1936, p. 8). The high ideals of the book, of course, elicited severely conflicting opinions from many sources. J. Donald Adams in the *NYTBR* saw *Eyeless in Gaza* as 'a novel which is at least the equal, if not the superior, in intellectual and spiritual content, of any in our time' (No. 84). H[erschel] Brickell, conversely, agreed with the harsher critics of Huxley's ideas: 'There are spots of good writing, as might be expected, but the thinking is either absent or so wholly unrelated to reality that it has no value.'<sup>18</sup>

The appearance in 1937 of *Ends and Means* accelerated the controversy over Huxley's position. '*Ends and Means* became a kind of Bible to the Peace Pledge Union,' says Bedford. 'It greatly affected some young men' (*B*, I, p. 356). As such, the book drew much fire. A spirited debate arose in the pages of the *New English Weekly*, with A. Romney Green classifying Huxley among 'the most dangerous kind of false prophets' and George Orwell replying in Huxley's defense:

The fact that a book like Mr. Huxley's contains a certain amount of self-righteousness (we are all self-righteous in different ways), and is written too much from the standpoint of a middle-class intellectual, is beside the point. Anyone who helps to put peace on the map is doing useful work.<sup>19</sup>

Elsewhere, Reinhold Niebuhr would not allow that Huxley was doing useful work and roundly attacked his 'unrealistic dreaming': 'In its more articulate forms our culture suffers from illusions which weaken its will and its right to survive' (p. 779). The reviewers as a whole gave *Ends and Means* a respectful hearing. With Llewelyn Powys, they admired the

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clarity of Huxley's style, the force of his argument, and the integrity of his vision, but objected to an aura of aloofness, possibly of *naïveté* in his attitude: 'It is an illuminating book,' Powys wrote a member of his family on 5 January 1938, 'and you should try to get hold of it. It throws light on many matters. I admire the clearness of his mind when not clouded by his new religious views and foolishness about the "non-attached" man' (*Letters*, p. 248).

The reception of *Ends and Means* was emblematic of the response to Huxley at the approach of World War II. It is necessary to dwell on the character of this response because Huxley's pronounced idealism, together with his decision in the late 1930s to remain in America, inevitably colored the critical reception of his later work. High praise was by no means lacking during this period. *After Many a Summer* won the University of Edinburgh's James Tait Black prize as the best novel of the year, and Ernst Kohn-Bramstedt grouped Huxley with Thomas Mann as 'the two greatest literary figures the twentieth century has hitherto produced in England and Germany' (p. 471). But soon after 1936, H. M. Champness recalls, 'ugly rumours began to circulate':

The master was slipping. His tone and his language were growing more and more theological, the snippets of French and Italian were giving place to Sanskrit, and there were frequent and apparently serious references to the Divine Ground. As a ship will leave a sinking rat he was deserting his *métier*—only to become, of all things, a Hollywood swami. It was too much. From once-devoted adherents the later books received a good deal less than justice. There was applause for their undiminished eloquence of exposition, but there was also regret and laughter (p. 109).

Huxley's 1930s contemporaries felt that a direct confrontation of the problems of war and evil was, in Jules Menken's words, 'a responsibility which he owes to his generation' (*Fortnightly Review*, February 1938, cxliii, p. 247). As Clark observes, Huxley's critics acidly remarked that in *What Are You Going to Do About It?* 'crossing the Atlantic was not among the recommended answers' (p. 242). Once in America, says Bedford, there was 'a curious barrier' between the Huxleys and their friends in England (*B*, I, p. 345). In fact Harold Nicolson records in his diary for 2 April 1940 a dinner with Kenneth Clark, William Somerset Maugham, Mrs Winston Churchill, and Leslie Howard:

We discuss the position of those English people who have remained in the United States. . . . We all regret bitterly that people like Aldous Huxley, Auden and Isherwood should have absented themselves. They want me to write

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a *Spectator* article attacking them. That is all very well but it would lose me the friendship of three people whom I much admire (*Diaries*, p. 165).<sup>20</sup>

The shift of emphasis in Huxley's work introduced during the war years a period of new ferment and trial for his critical reputation. The volume of response never slackened; if anything it increased. At the close of the 1930s, George Woodcock submits, 'a great many young people regarded Huxley not only as one of the finest novelists of the time, but also as a prophet who spoke on their behalf' (*Dawn*, p. 14). Some reviewers had seen *Eyeless in Gaza* as marking the close of an era (Nos 84 and 85). Before long, Huxley came to be regarded as a leader of the new spiritual thought of the 1940s. Charles I. Glicksberg asserted that *Ends and Means* 'marks the beginning of a new ideological current' (p. 175). William Soskin believed Huxley was 'laying the ground for the modern religious renaissance with much fervor and a high idealism' (*NYHTBR*, 28 January 1940, p. 2). The popularity of *Time Must Have a Stop* and *The Perennial Philosophy* would presently verify that Philo M. Buck, Jr, in the early 1940s, was hardly alone in his appraisal of Huxley as 'one of the most significant critics of contemporary life and ideas in Europe, and also one of the best qualified' (p. 170).

But the very thought which placed Huxley in the front ranks of the new romantics was to prove a most grating point with his critics. Buck went on to identify the central issue in Huxley's fiction both at this time and as a whole:

It has repeatedly been said by critics that literature, pure literature if there be such a thing, must not be propaganda. I am not so sure when I think of Dante and *Faust*. It depends on the perfect blending of the author's intellectual or moral purpose with his imagination (p. 181).

Reviewers were quite insistent that Huxley did not achieve such a perfect blending in *After Many a Summer Dies the Swan* (1939). The majority opinion of the novel, voiced by Derek Verschöyle in the *Spectator*, was that Propter's monologues 'occur much too frequently and at infinitely too great length,' making the book 'periodically static' and destroying 'the effect of what has preceded them' (13 October 1939, clxiii, p. 522). Thomas Merton summarily denounced Propter as 'the dullest character in the whole history of the English novel' (No. 98) while, incompatibly, *Time Magazine* praised Propter's speeches as 'some of the firmest, most beautifully articulate essays Huxley has ever written' (29 January 1940, xxxv, p. 72). To most readers Huxley appeared altogether too willing to abandon art for morality. 'His love

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of pure art has died,' complained Malcolm Cowley in the *New Republic*, 'like the swan of his title. Though he still consents to tell us a story, it is intended primarily as the text and adornment of a moral lesson' (12 February 1940, cii, p. 216). Huxley's own description of *After Many a Summer* reveals that his approach to fiction was basically unchanged from the days of *Antic Hay*: '[It is] a kind of fantasy, at once comic and cautionary, farcical, blood-curdling and reflective' (*L*, p. 441). But the critical audience at large agreed with Frieda Lawrence's feeling that the book 'is queer stuff' (p. 279).

*Time Must Have a Stop* (1944) was accorded an improved reception despite substantial objections to the 'Epilogue' and some mystification over Huxley's sally via Eustace Barnack into the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*. Huxley told Thomas Barendseld in 1943 that he thought he had now 'learned the art of embodying the ideas more into the substance of the novel' (p. 2). He later admitted a preference for this over his other novels because 'it seemed to me that I integrated what may be called the essay element with the fiction element better there than in the other novels' (*PR*, p. 206). Edmund Wilson allowed that 'his handling of the religious element' was here better than in the previous novel (No. 108); Theodore Spencer did not (No. 110). Several commentators concurred with Cyril Connolly's judgment that this was 'Mr. Huxley's best novel for a very long time' (No. 113). Thomas Mann wrote that the book 'gave me extraordinary pleasure—it is without doubt an audacious, top-ranking performance in the contemporary novel' (*Story*, p. 96), though in his correspondence he cited some grave reservations about Huxley's thought (No. 107). The didacticism of the book alienated more than one reader, leading for instance the *TLS* reviewer coolly to conclude: 'It seems a little odd that so incommunicable a sense of indwelling superiority should lead him to write a novel about human beings at all' (No. 112).<sup>21</sup> In this vein, George Dangerfield would shortly declare that the way of life advocated in *Time Must Have a Stop* 'put a number of readers into such a fury that they scarcely bothered to find out whether Huxley had succeeded in saying what he had so carefully set out to say' (*New Republic*, 23 August 1948, cxix, p. 21).

In the meantime Huxley's popularity, quite independent of his besieged critical status, had reached such an extent that his 'little book' on visual re-education, *The Art of Seeing* (1943), sold out its British first edition of 10,000 copies in its first few days of publication (*L*, p. 488). Published a year earlier in America, the book by September 1943 had



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there sold 'about twenty-three thousand' (L, p. 493). Gai Eaton estimated that the publication of *The Perennial Philosophy* 'must have doubled, in the course of a few weeks, the number of people in England and the United States who have some slight interest in the Oriental doctrines . . .' (p. 167). According to Philip Thody, over 12,000 copies of *The Perennial Philosophy* were sold before the official publication day (p. 81). In America, says Bedford, the book 'sold 23,000 copies within weeks' (B, II, p. 111). *Time Must Have a Stop* in America 'sold at once some 40,000 copies (B, II, p. 96) and, publishers' records indicate, the novel there achieved a total hard-cover sale of about 55,000.

But the important nonfiction that Huxley published during the war years, *Grey Eminence* (1941) as well as *The Perennial Philosophy* (1945), noticeably intensified the outcry against his position. *Grey Eminence* won considerable praise in some respects. MacCarthy in the *Sunday Times* said 'Huxley has shown himself an artist in biography' (28 December 1941, p. 3), Crane Brinton said the book was 'a historical work of a very high order' (No. 104). Wyndham Lewis reported from Toronto: "'Grey Eminence"' by Huxley has been a wow over here' (p. 316). It is probably a sign of Huxley's still spreading fame that Benedetto Croce was reading *Grey Eminence* a few years later; he disagreed with some of the premises, but pronounced it 'a very penetrating book of history' (*Quaderni Della 'Critica'*, November 1946, ii, p. 85). Adverse criticism, nonetheless, was cutting. In the *New Statesman and Nation* Raymond Mortimer offered that something should be said on Father Joseph's behalf: 'Having decided, however mistakenly, that a particular end was desirable, he was not so spiritually self-centred as to leave the dirty work to other people' (29 November 1941, xxii [n.s.], p. 458). Richard V. Chase regretted the loss of the 'fine strain of biological irony' in the early novels and alluded to Huxley's position as one of 'the current aberrations of the bourgeois mind' (No. 105). Similarly, *The Perennial Philosophy* was pounced upon by Irwin Edman in the *NYHTBR* as 'a symptom of a failure of nerve in both the author and in a whole group of intellectuals of our time' (7 October 1945, p. 3). Although men of the calibre of William Inge (No. 116) and Jacques Maritain<sup>22</sup> would applaud Huxley's efforts, Joad represented the impatience of other readers when he rejected Huxley as a 'sour-faced moralist' (No. 115).

A convergence of two major strains of protest, then, had formed the axis of response to Huxley's work by the mid-1940s. It is one of the persisting ironies of Huxley's career that while he was bringing all his

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forces to bear on the discovery of a scheme of positive values for the contemporary world, he was most severely criticized for abandoning his kind:

One is tempted to regard the cloistered ecstasies of Huxley's present period as a luxury that should be only sparingly indulged today; indeed they seem something of a betrayal of a humanity sadly in need of teachers for more mundane concerns, chief among them its own survival (H. T. Webster, pp. 380-1).

In addition readers began to feel, with George Orwell, that the later novels 'are much inferior to his earlier ones' (*Collected Essays*, IV, p. 253). On the heels of David Daiches's influential 1939 attack on Huxley as a novelist (No. 95) came a battery of tough synoptic assessments. Edwin Berry Burgum followed Cowley in comparing the dying swan in the 1939 title to 'Huxley's flagging powers as a creative novelist . . .' (*Antioch Review*, p. 62). William York Tindall deplored the effect Huxley's new piety had on his novels and chided him for retreating into the California desert with Gerald Heard. In the most graceful and dispassionate of accounts, Frederick J. Hoffman submitted that the key difference between the earlier and later novels lay in a change from the dramatization to the exposition of ideas. In a variety of ways Huxley's critics had made it plain by 1946 that, if anything, they preferred to be entertained by his wit rather than instructed by his wisdom.

## POSTWAR DECLINE 1947-1963

By 1947 Huxley's ideological position, both in itself and in its effects on his fiction, had caused extensive damage to his critical reputation. Cyril Connolly sensed that Huxley had 'made a brilliant recovery' since the later 1930s (*Enemies*, p. 4), but growing incomprehension of his career now impeded any such recovery. An editor of a large-circulation American magazine rejected Huxley's ecologically advanced essay, 'The Double Crisis,' 'with the private comment that its hot air content was high' (*B*, II, p. 142). Joyce Cary, in a private letter on 16 November 1948, claimed Huxley 'is not really very strong in the head': '[His type] are escapists who dodge the troublesome job of moral and political decision by going up a rabbit hole and saying "All is darkness"' (Foster, p. 292). Articles appeared which sounded like premature obituary notices in their assumption that Huxley's productive life was over:

The despair with which he contemplates a world which now seems derelict and

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whirling toward the final plunge is a projection of his despair of himself. One thinks of Horatio's farewell to Hamlet: 'Now cracks a noble heart. Good night, sweet prince' (Handley-Jones, p. 247).

In America *The World of Aldous Huxley* (1947) sold a disappointing 5,000 copies instead of the expected 15,000 (L, p. 581n).

Readers of *Ape and Essence* (1948) frequently criticized the carriage and overlooked the baby. The reviewers recoiled from the horrid forecast of the book, the 'ape,' in many cases without acknowledging its generating idealism, the 'essence.' In his column for the *Sunday Times* MacCarthy speculated that Huxley 'does not care enough what happens to mankind, or he would not describe their degradation in that particular way' (20 February 1949, p. 3). Some readers, such as Teilhard de Chardin, seem entirely to have ignored the novel's concluding sequences:

. . . One cannot escape the feeling, reading the book, that, at the depth of himself, the author believes that science leads primarily to destruction, and sex to corruption. And this is precisely the 'complex' which has, by all means, to be eradicated from the modern mind, both in religious and literary circles! (*Letters*, p. 207).

But *Ape and Essence* clearly was not one of Huxley's better novels and, therefore, it confirmed the belief in many minds that his significant creative career was at an end.

The 1950s witnessed the ebb of Huxley's critical reputation to its lowest point. *Brave New World* now seemed to most critics to be Huxley's only book which would much longer survive. 'There is a good chance,' wrote Andrew Hacker in the *Journal of Politics*, 'that Huxley's work [the book] will be as long remembered as Dostoevsky's [*Brothers Karamazov*]' (November 1955, xvii, p. 600). George Woodcock conceded regretfully that Huxley 'as an artist' has been 'a particularly disappointing failure' (*World Review*, p. 52). In 1950 R. C. Bald thought it well to be grateful for the pleasure and entertainment in Huxley's novels, 'so long as one does not take him too seriously as a novelist' (p. 187). As this most conservative decade wore on, Huxley's status among the critics continued to erode. Sean O'Faolain presently questioned Huxley's intelligence (pp. 21-2), Walter Allen ignored him in his chapter '1914 and After' in *The English Novel* (1955).<sup>23</sup> Arnold Kettle made an influential critique of Huxley's most respected novel as a novel:

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It is no good trying to say what is wrong with *Point Counter Point* in terms of construction, style, characterization and the technical weapons of literary analysis because what is wrong is wrong at the very heart. There is no respect for life in this novel and without such fundamental respect words curdle and art cannot come into being (p. 170).

Some of the attacks, for example Roy Campbell's scornful description of Huxley as 'the great Mahatma of all misanthropy' (p. 166), were personal and vindictive. In a remarkably scathing assault, John McCormick called Huxley's later work 'monstrous and horrible' and urged that 'Huxley's own inability to love turned into a hatred of women and of humanity':

In re-reading Huxley the conclusion is inescapable that his vaunted brilliance is the pseudo-brilliance of the precocious schoolboy, the clever undergraduate, written for schoolboys and undergraduates. His erudition is little more than information smacking of the encyclopedia and smatterings of esoterica (p. 286).

The year after Huxley's death the *Year's Work in English Studies* would submit that he 'has been virtually ignored since he was dismissed as a novelist in the early 'fifties' (1964, xlv, p. 344). As recently as in 1971 John Wain wrote: 'There have been times, since about 1955, when I wondered if he was going to disappear altogether' (*New Republic*, 11 September 1971, clxv, p. 27).

But Huxley, generally impervious to the reputation mill, continued to work and to shape anew his career. With the production of *The Devils of Loudun* (1952) and *The Doors of Perception* (1954), he elicited a response similar to the pattern of a decade earlier. *The Devils*, like *Grey Eminence*, commanded much respect; *The Doors*, like *The Perennial Philosophy*, provoked much confusion. The *Spectator* reviewer typified several reactions to *The Devils* in his objection to its 'extremely unpleasant taste': '[This] new book displays a great talent hideously misapplied' (3 October 1952, clxxxix, p. 440). But another reviewer, aptly comparing the book with *Point Counter Point*, recognized that Huxley was still searching for new varieties of literary form (No. 125). The *NYTBR* called *The Devils* the 'peak achievement of Mr. Huxley's career' (5 October 1952, p. 1).

Predictably, *The Doors of Perception* upset large numbers of readers. 'Self-respecting rationalists saw fresh evidence of quackery and intellectual abdication while the serious and religious were bothered by the offer of a shortcut . . .' (B, II, p. 280). This book led John O'Hara to

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speculate on 'mad dogs and Englishmen': 'Well, dear Reader, when a writer starts talking about Not-self and Otherness, your boy slips out quietly to bay at the moon' (p. 50). Alastair Sutherland in the *Twentieth Century* labelled Huxley 'the Witch Doctor of California' (p. 447), prompting Humphrey Osmond to reply good-naturedly that Sutherland was 'a peeping Tom at a knot-hole in the Doors of Perception' . . . (p. 522). A variety of disagreements came from such men as Thomas Mann (No. 127), Martin Buber, Arthur Koestler, and R. C. Zaehner.<sup>24</sup> Nonetheless, Huxley's reputation was strong enough in some circles that a few respondents, with J. Z. Young in the *Sunday Times*, 'felt prepared to listen and to learn from his great capacity for exploring the human problem' (14 February 1954, p. 5). The poles of reaction to Huxley's reports of his drug experiences in the 1950s may be represented by the conflicting comments of two other men of letters on *Heaven and Hell*. Kingsley Amis in the *Spectator* thought Huxley's 'present role' is 'that of a crank' (16 March 1956, cxcvi, p. 340); Richard Eberhart in the *Nation* thought this was 'a transporting book' (14 April 1956, clxxxii, p. 309).

What sales figures are available suggest that in the 1950s Huxley's popularity modulated downward from its peak in the earlier two decades. Paperbacks and the printing of Collected Works editions of Huxley's books (see Appendix III) render analyses of trends, even where at all possible, excessively complicated. But, for example, first-year American hard-cover sales of *The Genius and the Goddess* (1955) and *Island* (1962), not much over 20,000 copies apiece, were noticeably less than *Time Must Have a Stop*. And yet the changes in the popular reception seem to have been modest by comparison with the sharp downward curve of Huxley's reputation among the critics.

Like one of Yeats's gyres, though, Huxley's critical reputation at its most reduced moment still had within it an impulse toward recovery. Reviews of *The Genius and the Goddess* displayed that mixture of condescension and *déjà vu* which usually signals the twilight of real interest in a writer's work. But even when the established opinion was at its least flattering there existed along with it a steady undercurrent of tenacious belief that Huxley was a writer of contemporary significance. As Marvin Barrett observed in the *Reporter*:

Huxley's attitude in the last two decades has been to most critics an exasperating one. An intellectual of the deepest dye, he has embraced a violent anti-intellectualism; a prodigious aesthete, he has dismissed art in all its forms as, in the final analysis, worthless. . . . He has sawed off the limb he himself is perched