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ALDOUS HUXLEY AND THE
ANATOMICAL VISION

DISSERTATION

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By

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I wish to express my indebtedness to Harper and Brothers, Inc., for granting me permission to quote extensively from the works of Aldous Huxley, and to The Viking Press for their permission to quote from The Letters of D. H. Lawrence.
INTRODUCTION

Aldous Huxley has been called a great artist, a great fraud, and a universal genius. He has been praised for his encyclopedic learning and condemned for his sophomoric delight in displaying his knowledge. He has been hailed as a defender of art, science, and culture, and damned as a cynical and misanthropic enemy of all human values. Above all, he has been praised and blamed for his constant emphasis on the unpleasant, sordid, painful, and even obscene aspects of man's physical life. The diversity of these responses to Huxley suggests the complexity of his art and, thus, the need for a careful attempt to understand what he has implied about the human condition.

"Murder, rape, and suicide—caro! how shall we live through the days?"¹ was D. H. Lawrence's reaction to Point Counter Point. In the world that Huxley creates in his books, it is indeed a pertinent question. In that fictive Huxleyan world—the world which, despite its strangeness, is always frighteningly like our own—the key question is repeated on virtually every page: "How ought one to live? what values are worthwhile? and what ideals ought one to

follow?" If we were given an answer to these questions, how on earth would we follow the ideals in a world gone mad? Even a perfect knowledge of the right way seldom enables one to follow it. And the reason is, as Huxley implies in all of his books, that we are locked in our soma-sema, our body-tomb, which imprisons us and makes nonsense of ideals, aspirations, and pretensions. The reality of flesh is Huxley's dominant theme; it is the force in his work which defines the intrinsic quality of his art.

Somerset Maugham has said that Huxley sees all humanity with the eye of the anatomist, and that his constant emphasis on the anatomical basis of experience "gives rise in the reader to a certain discomfort." No doubt; but we should add that the anatomical vision also gives rise in some readers to a great deal of laughter. It does not matter if it is at times that dry, despairing, hysterical laughter which Baudelaire inveighed against in his L'Essence de rire; it is still laughter. Huxley's satiric vision of the sordid and banal aspects of physiological experience is not always painful—not always despairing. It is sometimes jovially Rabelaisian. In fact, the

anatomical vision can be almost anything Huxley wants it to be. One thing, however, is consistently true about it: it is always the central feature of Huxley's satiric voice.

This essay is a study of Huxley's use of anatomical or physiological imagery for satiric purposes in his fiction. In its simplest form Huxley's technique consists of combining spiritual images with physiological ones, and setting one against the other agonistically. The result of such a combination is a dualistic paradox or satiric oxymoron—a merging of antithetical values. A brief series of examples will illustrate this satiric oxymoron as it achieves epigrammatical expression. "Art can be many things, but usually it is nothing more than the mental equivalent of alcohol and cantharides";³ "The ductless glands secrete among other things our moods, our aspirations, our philosophy of life";⁴ "The Bach prelude continued as a strain of pure rapture—pure rapture produced by the balanced elements of Pongileoni's snout, cat's intestines, and eternal verities";⁵

Has it ever struck you . . . that the paintings of angels are entirely incorrect and unscientific? . . . A seventy-kilogram man, if he developed wings, would

³After Many a Summer (New York, 1939), p. 175.
⁵Point Counter Point (New York, 1928), p. 28.
have to develop colossal muscles to work them. And big flying muscles would mean a correspondingly large sternum, like a bird's. A ten-stone angel, if he wanted to fly as well as a duck, would have to have a breast bone projecting at least four or five feet. Tell your father that, next time he wants to paint a picture of the Annunciation. All the existing Gabriels are really shockingly improbable.

But oh, the sound of simian mirth!
Mind, issued from the Monkey's womb,
Is still umbilical to Earth.
Earth its home and earth its tomb.

The passages quoted above show the flesh-spirit paradox functioning as an isolated rhetorical flourish, as a technique of producing satiric wit, almost by formula. But underlying the apparently facile and formulistic wit is a complex of judgments, attitudes, and feelings which informs Huxley's works, not only at the relatively non-complex level of isolated utterances, but also at the more complex levels of structure, plot, and character. *Point Counter Point* is perhaps the best known example of an entire novel whose structure is informed by the author's sense of the tension between the physical and spiritual aspects of experience. The same tension functions in Huxley's other works as an informing agent, and it is at the core of his attitude toward the world, the human race, and himself.

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My thesis, then, is that dualistic irony of this kind is the most important element in Huxley's work—in both his "form" and his "content." In other words, I propose to base this study upon the assumption that an understanding of the paradox is essential to a full understanding of Huxley's work. It is possible that the approach to Huxley through the flesh-spirit paradox is not the only useful one; but I have been convinced by my reading of reviews and critiques using other points of departure that no fully satisfactory treatment has yet been offered.

The plan of the study calls for four chapters:

(1) Fiction and Physiology: The Problem of Genre. This chapter will review several significant critical reactions to Huxley's work, suggest that dualistic irony is the main cause of many of these adverse critical judgments, and attempt to clarify the generic position of his novels. A close study of critical reactions to Huxley's work indicates that his art is widely misunderstood. Much of the misunderstanding has apparently been caused by Huxley's fairly consistent use of the flesh-spirit paradox as an aid to creating characters. Somerset Maugham's objection to Huxley's "anatomical" view of human beings is typical of the reactions of many critics: "He dissects out their nerves, uncovers their arteries with precision, and peers
into the ventricles of their hearts. The process gives rise in the reader to a certain discomfort." The consensus of adverse critical opinion is that Huxley has failed as a novelist because he distorts his characters either by making them talking anatomical charts or mouthpieces for absurd ideas. Since, from the viewpoint of the novelist, a failure to create realistic characters is a grave fault, his detractors have capitalized on this point and his defenders have tried valiantly to prove that the accusation is untrue and unfair. What is needed, it seems to me, to clarify the issue of the reality or unreality of Huxley's characters is not a step-by-step analysis of the figures in his ten novels and numerous short stories, a process that would be tedious as well as inconclusive. My approach to the problem will be an attempt to establish and define the generic quality of Huxley's works—an attempt, in other words, to show that his "novels" need not be judged as novels at all. They may be judged, more accurately I think, as prose satires. Northrop Frye's discussion, in the *Anatomy of Criticism*, of the Menippean satire and its later development is particularly suggestive. Though Huxley's prose fictions, with the possible exception of *Brave New World*, are not "pure" Menippean satires, it can be shown that most of his work comes closer to the satiric tradition than to
the tradition of the novel. Huxley, to put it another way, is probably closer to Swift, Voltaire, Peacock, and Anatole France than he is to Richardson, Flaubert, and George Eliot. Clearly, if the genre of his work is established, the way will be open for a fairer and more objective estimate of his achievement; and, also clearly, critics will be able to see in Huxley's use of the flesh-spirit paradox, not the fatal shortcoming of the novelist, but the strongest rhetorical virtue of the satirist.

(2) Physiology as Weapon. This chapter will document the early development of Huxley's view of the biological nature of human experience, trace the development of his idea on the role of physiology in culture, and discuss the reasons why physiological detail is an effective satiric weapon. The question of influences on Huxley's use of the flesh-spirit paradox is crucial. The theological, philosophical, and psychological preconceptions about the values of flesh and spirit which conditioned the responses of his readers also conditioned Huxley's style. If he used physiological detail as a satiric weapon, it is clear that he, like most of his readers, had been brought up to believe that the physical was lower and more animalistic than the spiritual. Among the diverse influences on the young Huxley we find not
only the traditional literary, philosophical, and scientific education, but also a multitude of personal forces. His family's traditional interest in biology, his early ill health, his ambition to study medicine, his failing sight and temporary blindness, and the frequent nervous disturbances which caused him to feel pain from even the slightest physical sensations—all of these personal influences contributed to his constant (and perhaps obsessive) preoccupation with flesh. He was, as he quipped on one occasion, his own *memento mori*. But his style, the "anatomical vision," was also affected by influences other than his own state of health. He named Laforgue and Anatole France as his models; but the careful reader will also see vestiges of Rabelais, Swift, Peacock, Norman Douglas, and D. H. Lawrence—to name but a few—in his ideas and his style.

(3) **Point Counter Point** and the Ambiguities of Flesh. The most strikingly significant phenomenon in Huxley's major satiric works is the gradual development of an ambivalence which, in my view, informed their characteristic style and established their satiric complexity. I am thinking of the ambivalence, the tension, between the idea that the physical world is sordid and thus an effective satiric agent and the idea, slowly being formed under
the influence of D. H. Lawrence, that flesh and the physical world ought not to be relegated to the purely animal level of existence. During the period between 1920 and 1932 the importance of a revaluation of physical life was a central theme in his "novels," his stories, and his essays. And in Point Counter Point he set out to recommend Lawrence's "blood-wisdom" as the key to wholeness, harmony, and health in society and the individual. But—and here is the crucial point—the pessimism of the anatomical vision continued to operate stylistically in the book, and implied the contrary evaluation of physical life. Thus, Point Counter Point advocates Lawrence's philosophy at the same time that it negates it. The "content" said one thing, the "form" another. One result was that Lawrence wrote to Huxley in 1928 that it would be better if they broke off their friendship for a while. The impact of the satiric novels cannot, it seems, be rightly understood except in terms of Huxley's ambivalent dramatization of the flesh-spirit paradox.

(4) Flesh and Spirit. "Mysticism" is a semantically impossible term; it is impossible frequently for the non-mystic to understand what the mystic is trying so carefully to explain. Huxley, with all of his talent for precise expression, fails to clarify his mysticism. But
one central and all important feature of Huxley's mysticism is made abundantly clear by his writings since *Eyeless in Gaza*: the road to spiritual fulfillment and the Divine Ground (whatever they may be) must begin in flesh. Huxley's emphasis on spiritual phenomena is frequently an emphasis on their underlying physiological prerequisites. Perhaps the most widely known aspect of his physiological mysticism is his work with mescaline, lysergic acid, and other drugs which induce mystic states by altering the chemical balance of the blood. There are other examples in Huxley's later period of his continuing interest in the physical conditions necessary for spiritual experience. Huxley's physiological mysticism brings up a serious problem in this study. When we see mysticism as an outgrowth from a frame of mind that is preoccupied with the ferocious irony of man's physiological nature, we are at first glance tempted to conclude that the mysticism is simply an escape from the sordid and painful world of reality into a dis-embodied realm of pure spirit. But a reading of Huxley's late works makes it clear that this conclusion would be false. Under the dominating belief in a spiritual approach to life, experience, and something mystics call "ultimate reality," Huxley's work continues, in the same satiric manner, to emphasize the absurdities and banalities of
flesh. The final problem of this study, then, is to discover how and why the anatomical vision can serve the purpose of Huxley's mysticism. The implications about the relations between flesh and spirit which arise in this final aspect of the study will suggest, I think, a theoretical explanation for the satiric effect of the anatomical technique.

Before proceeding with chapter one, some clarification of a basic term is needed. At several points in Huxley's writings and in critical commentaries on his work, the word "dualism" becomes crucial; and it is only natural that "dualism" will be one of the major concerns in a study of the effects and causes of an author's use of physiological imagery. In relation to Huxley's art, the term becomes confusing when we see it applied to those utterances of his which seem to imply a pure materialistic concept of humanity. On many occasions he seems to say that mind is an illusion, that nothing exists beyond flesh. Strictly speaking, such an implication ought to be called "monistic." My use of the term will be clear, however, if we bear in mind that there is more than one kind of dualism. Traditionally, the term refers to the belief that flesh and spirit are two distinct and separate entities. In the Christian theological tradition the
flesh-spirit dichotomy is frequently tinctured with judgments associated with the Manichean heresy. Thus, dualism is frequently a belief that flesh is evil and spirit potentially good. But there is another variety of dualism—the dualism implied, for example, by Freudian psychology which holds that flesh and spirit are interrelated rather than distinct and separate. The theory of sublimation provides us with what might be called "neo-dualism." It is the idea that spirit is a "result" of flesh, that mind is a displacement or transformation of physiology. This idea seems at first glance to be, in effect, monistic. But to hold that spirit originates in flesh is not to hold that spirit does not exist. There is still a dualism. This neo-dualism is Huxley's frequent implication. Even when he appears to be blatantly materialistic, or monistic, he is still conscious of the presence of two orders of human experience. Thus, the term "dualistic pessimism," though applied to a frame of mind which regards religion, art, ideals, and the like as illusions covering the brute reality of vile flesh, will be clear if we understand which sort of dualism is involved.
One problem a critic must face is that of defining the forms in which his subject created his view of the world. In many cases the generic problem is a simple one; Homer was obviously an epic poet, and Sophocles was obviously a tragedian. No one is likely to mistake Shakespeare for a novelist, Swift for a dramatist, or Shaw for a lyricist. The genre of most writers is obvious; no problem of definition is presented. A few, however, present a difficult problem; and if the critic is not careful to discover the specific forms and techniques of his subject, his analysis and evaluation are likely to be beside the point. The problem of genre is particularly difficult for the critic concerned with fiction. Fiction can take many forms, fulfill many functions, and employ many differing sets of conventions and methods. Fiction can be among other things an allegorical romance, a satiric denunciation of wickedness and folly, or a symbolic concretization of the meaning and value of the human condition. A confusion of any two of the genres of fiction can result in a critical absurdity. And, for the most part, few
critics are likely to go far wrong on the genres of fiction written before the novel came into prominence in the eighteenth century. Few critics are likely to condemn Pilgrim's Progress, for example, or Euphues, or Gulliver's Travels for failing to do what a novel is supposed to do. But critics of fiction writers after Richardson have too frequently judged all fiction by the standards—ordained by themselves—of the novel. The result, in most cases, is a failure from the beginning to understand the particular genius of the artist being considered.

It seems necessary, therefore, to begin this study of Aldous Huxley's satiric style with an examination of the genre-defining characteristics of certain aspects of his work. These characteristics are his constant display of wide learning, his emphasis on the discreditable, sordid or banal aspects of physical life, and his fondness for portraying his characters as stick figures and hollow men. These constant features of Huxley's art can provide us with significant clues about the fictional genre to which his work comes closest to conforming. If, to be precise, Huxley's typical character is a deliberate distortion, a deliberate reduction of the human being to the status of an encyclopedic farrago or a Yahooish saccus stercorius, we
can be fairly sure that his work does not conform to the
genre of fiction which is concerned primarily with cre­
ating characters and events with a fidelity to real exper­
ience. We can be fairly sure, in other words, that the
fiction Huxley has written ought not really to be labelled
as "novels"—that is, if the term is strictly defined as
a representation of social reality. It would be more ac­
curate to call his books satires—distortions and devalu­
ations of social reality.

We can clarify this question of the genre of Huxley's
work by examining a few of his typical critics. Articles
by R. C. Bald, Derek Savage, and Somerset Maugham are
particularly illuminating. They are valuable for two
distinct reasons: first, because their descriptions of
Huxley's technique are accurate and, second, because their
conclusions provide us with clear examples of the dangers
of failing to define a writer's generic position. Profes­
sor Bald's article¹ on Huxley's penchant for borrowing and
transforming material from previous writers is an inter­
esting case in point. He argues that, because Huxley is
a borrower, an assimilator of other people's ideas, he is
not to be taken seriously. After showing that a paragraph

¹R. C. Bald, "Aldous Huxley as Borrower," College
in Point Counter Point describes a comic situation similar to one in David Copperfield, that the character of Lypiatt in Antic Hay is based on Benjamin Robert Haydon, and that Time Must Have a Stop uses the same style in places as Joyce's Portrait of the Artist, Bald quotes T. S. Eliot's dictum that borrowing is artistically justified only when the borrower succeeds in making the material uniquely and organically his own, ennobling it with his individual artistic integrity. But Huxley, says Professor Bald, has not ennobled what he has borrowed; he has degraded what was originally artistic. "It is his misfortune to have a positive talent for defacing what he takes, and if he succeeds in making it into something different, it is something shoddier, more vulgar, than the original." One "thing of beauty" which Huxley vulgarizes quite unforgivably is Bach's B-Minor Suite, the work played at the Tantamount party in Point Counter Point. "In his description of the concert he does not even seem to want to separate the music from the conductor's 'swan-like undulations from the loins,' and he finds it amusing to record that the sounds which seem so significant are merely 'vibrations in a cylindrical air column' blending with the noises produced as 'the fiddlers draw resined horse-hair across the
stretched intestines of lambs.Ί

The suite, in a word, becomes "shoddy." Ergo, the argument concludes, Huxley is no artist.

Derek Savage's chapter on Huxley in The Withered Branch,3 though a more penetrating analysis, takes a position similar to Bald's. Savage, however, objects more to Huxley's debasement of his characters than to his vulgarization of art. Huxley, says Savage, fails as a novelist because his characters are too often impersonal and detached—in a word, non-human. As his title implies, Savage is concerned over the lowered position of the novel in our century; he feels that it is the branch of literature which has withered most in the "dry wind" of skepticism and scientific indifference to the meaning and value of life.

Huxley's malady is diagnosed in Kierkegaardian terms: Huxley suffers from "the fundamental disorientation which afflicts all human existence not lived under the rubric, Faith." He, like most of his generation, has the "sickness unto death" which is despair. Further, the "sickness unto death" has ruined Huxley's fictional characters as well as his own personality, thus vitiating a remarkable talent.

2Ibid.

It is particularly significant that Savage, like so many other, less perceptive critics, seizes upon what he understands as Huxley's inability to create realistic, whole, well-rounded characters as the explanation for the "odd and unpleasant" quality of his novels. "If we say of Huxley's characters that they are static and isolated, that a certain impersonal detachment shows itself in their creator's attitude towards them, and that at the same time their existence presumes a context of pointlessness, we shall have sketched a readily recognizable picture of Huxley's constant frame of reference." Stasis, isolation, pointlessness—all enforce the psychic disturbance in Huxley and his creations, and all infect his novels with Kierkegaard's Disease, the sickness unto death.

Savage goes on in the rest of his essay to describe the specific forms which Huxley's stasis, isolation, pointlessness, and "dislocation of personality" have taken. In simple terms, Huxley suffers from an excessive preoccupation with the dualistic irony of vain idealism in conflict with the sordid reality of vile flesh. "The mental structure upon which Huxley was to raise his successive fictional edifices is discoverable with little difficulty in

\[4\text{Ibid.}, \ p. 131.\]
his first novel *Crome Yellow* (1921). A dualism of mind and matter, of spirit and body, of the ideal and the actual is fundamental to it, and is the source at once of Huxley's pessimism, of the purely static and episodic quality of his work, and of his humour." Working constantly under this obsessive and morbid dualistic irony, Huxley invariably evokes a world in which spiritual values succumb, pointlessly and hilariously, to the non-values of insignificant and brutal flesh. "Life," in these novels, "is a dance of puppets, grimly, savagely pointless." "And, necessarily, this positive acceptance of the meaninglessness of human life . . . has its implications for art. When human life is seen as intrinsically meaningless and evil, then the work of the novelist, whose task is to present a picture of that life in terms of its significance and value, is deprived of all justification. Art and life must be thrown overboard together."6

These criticisms by Savage are indeed serious objections to Huxley as an artist and as a novelist. What they amount to in the last analysis—at least in Savage's last analysis—is that both Huxley and his generation have failed, not only as artists, but also as human beings. One

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5Ibid., p. 132. 6Ibid., p. 155.
does not read far in *The Withered Branch* before being confronted with the author's baldly stated preconceptions about what art ought to be. "Because the life of western man stands inescapably in a relationship to the Christian faith which has provided the foundation for his culture and his civilization, so his art is . . . in a similar relationship." The implication is that Huxley's life stands in the wrong relationship to Christian faith and that the wrongness of the relationship ruins his art. Savage goes on to point out that the twentieth century is suffering from the disintegration of Christian faith and, mutatis mutandis, also from the disintegration of the Christian personality. Art, life, and faith are interdependent; when one falls, the others slip with it into the abyss of non-life and non-art. The heroic mission of the artist—"to uncover the pattern in the formless flux, that which is meaningful in the midst of the sordid and the

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7*Ibid.*, p. 15; but on page 150 Savage quotes Huxley's commentary on the ethical value of satire, a commentary which indicates Huxley's ambition to mold his art into a significant moral force: "On the strictly human level, there was nothing that deserved to be taken seriously except the suffering men inflicted upon themselves by their crimes and follies. . . . No, a good satire was much more deeply truthful and, of course, much more profitable than a good tragedy. The trouble was that so few good satires existed, because so few satirists were prepared to carry their criticism of human values far enough." *After Many a Summer* (New York, 1939), p. 169.
banal, to give it symbolic concretization"—has lost out by default in the twentieth century. Huxley is a great example of the failure; he might be of value only as a useful object lesson for future, more hopeful generations.

Indeed, if the aesthetic, religious, and existential analyses by Bald and Savage are accurate, it would seem that Huxley must be relegated to immediate obscurity as an inconsequential writer. Pointless proponents of pointlessness might be of no importance, and despair as the dominant mood of a writer's novels might really preclude his serious acceptance by responsible critics. The arguments are well taken, but—and here the inevitable difficulty arises—responsible critics must consider the possibility that pointlessness can be its own point, that the imaginative projection of disorder might also be a valid artistic enterprise. After all, is it always true that the artist is obliged to mold his creations into forms which affirm order, pattern, and meaning in the "formless flux" of life? Before a full answer can be attempted, more development of the central critical problem is necessary. At the moment it is sufficient to suggest the possibility of an aesthetic position contrary to those of Bald and Savage.
Somerset Maugham's objection to Huxley's novels implies a set of artistic standards which are similar to Savage's, after the religious, sociological and existential trappings are removed. "If he has never quite acquired the position as a novelist that his great talent seems to authorize, I think it is because of his deficient sympathy with human beings. The novelist must be able to get into the skin of the creatures of his invention, see with their eyes and feel with their fingers; but Aldous Huxley sees them as an anatomist. He dissects out their nerves, uncovers their arteries with precision, and peers into the ventricles of their hearts. The process gives rise in the reader to a certain discomfort." In other words, Huxley fails as an artist because his art creates a vague unhappiness in Somerset Maugham. In Bald's terms the feeling produced is that noble things have been vulgarized and debased; in Savage's terms the feeling is that life and art have been stripped of meaning and value. I suspect that Huxley had the same effect on all three of these critics—Bald, Savage, and Maugham—and that each of them retaliated in the terms appropriate to his own special concept of what a novel ought to be.

8Introduction to Modern English and American Fiction, pp. 335-36.
Though Maugham's criticism can hardly be called objective, the specific terms of his reaction are strikingly important for an understanding of Huxley's technique. Maugham does not like Huxley's habit of emphasizing the physiological aspects of his characters, their nerves, arteries, bones, and blood. The constant presence of such things "gives rise in the reader to a certain discomfort." The same unpleasantness occurred to Savage as the main fault in Huxley's view of human beings—"a dualism of mind and body" causes the "static and episodic" quality of his work. Regardless of whether we personally agree or disagree that a preoccupation with dualism is fatal to the artist, we must examine the proposition carefully to see what its implications are about the nature of the novel. Following the proposition to its conclusion, we discover that, in its terms, the novelist ought to "get into the skin" of his characters, but he ought not to meddle with their nerves and arteries. To press the matter farther, one assumes that the novelist is permitted to analyze the feelings, but not the ventricles, of the human heart. He may describe emotion, but not the operation of the hypothalamus; he may shed the blood of his characters, but he may not emphasize the chemical balance of this blood; he may describe human beings in states of excitement or shock,
but he may not describe the functioning of the endocrine system; he may create fools, knaves, and harlots, but he may not create human beings whose chief characteristic is an animal body. And so on. Implications arising from Maugham's distinction between "characters with skin" and "characters with arteries" can be multiplied indefinitely. The principal point is that Maugham, like many sensitive readers, does not enjoy being reminded of his physiological self. Skin, limbs, fingers and the like will add to the verisimilitude of a fictional character, but the internal equipment will inevitably give rise to the "certain discomfort." Inevitably; for physiological detail—such parts of the body as ventricles, nerves, glands, and viscera—is what Huxley is fond of calling a memento mori.

Our conclusion is an obvious paradox: the procedure of the novelist bans the use of certain aspects of human beings as aids to characterization. The scientific facts of life, when constantly put on display, produce an effect of painful unreality. The paradox is particularly important; the true nature of humanity—or at least part of its true nature—gives an illusion of unreality. Most of the time our images of reality do not consciously include internal, biological organs and functions. Some parts of
the body are irrelevant. In a word, Huxley is unrealistic because he is too unflinchingly realistic.9

The evaluations of Bald, Savage, and Maugham seem unavoidable if we accept their concept of what a novel ought to be. If the art of the novel is the art of creating characters and actions which are faithful to man's "real" experience, or at least grounded in a sense of the putative dignity of man; and if Huxley's constant use of physiological imagery and static characters distorts that dignity and so does not come to grips with that "reality"; then Huxley fails as a novelist. The argument is well taken; but the crucial point is that the argument is, for the most part, irrelevant to the type of fiction Huxley creates. A careful attention to the forms of Huxley's "novels" will show that he does not write the kind of novel these critics are concerned with. If we examine his books in relation to traditional definitions of genre, we will see that it is more accurate to call him a writer of prose satires than to call him a novelist. And if his

9For an interesting exposition of this paradox, see Wyndham Lewis, Men without Art (London, 1934). Lewis disclaims the moral function of satire. Satire, he asserts, is simply the truth. "That objective, non-emotional truth of the scientific intelligence sometimes takes on the exuberant sensuous quality of creative art; then it is very apt to be called 'Satire,' for it has been bent not so much upon pleasing as upon being true."
"novels" are not novels in the usual sense, but satires, it is possible that the "faults" in his art that Bald, Savage, and Maugham pointed out are in reality "virtues."

Before the process of transposition can occur—i.e., the process of shifting elements from the debit to the credit column—some clarification of the characteristics of the genre is required. For even when we define the novel more fully than Bald, Savage, and Maugham would (and I think we must), we shall find that Huxley will more accurately be labelled a satirist than a novelist.

II

The distinction between novels and prose satires, if such a distinction exists, is likely to be confused in the minds of most modern readers. We tend to speak of prose fiction as if it were all of the same kind. To the elaborate attempts by literary historians to define the limits of the novel, many readers have reacted by announcing that the novel has no limits at all. It saves much critical hair-splitting if one simply labels as novels all prose fictions of more than fifty thousand words. In a word, we are novel-centered. The bewildering variety of forms which prose fiction has taken seems to suggest, none the less, that a broad generic definition of the novel is
Inadequate. Take Candide, for example, or Gulliver's Travels, Erewhon, L'Ile de Penguines, Headlong Hall, or Brave New World; must one judge them by standards appropriate to Clarissa, Madame Bovary, Portrait of a Lady, and Swann's Way? Obviously, "fiction" is a classification which includes many separate types. It is necessary here to find out the distinguishing features of one of these types of fiction—satiric fiction.

Northrop Frye's Anatomy of Criticism offers what seems to be the most perceptive commentary on the problem of distinguishing novels from satires. "No one," he writes, "will challenge the statement that the literary ancestry of Gulliver's Travels and Candide runs through Rabelais and Erasmus to Lucian. But while much has been said about the style and thought of Swift and Voltaire, very little has been made of them as craftsmen working in a specific medium, a point no one dealing with a novelist would ignore. Another great writer in this tradition, Huxley's master Peacock, has fared even worse, for, his form not being understood, a general impression has grown up that his status in the development of prose fiction is that of a slapdash eccentric. Actually, he is as exquisite and

precise an artist in his medium as Jane Austen is in hers.\textsuperscript{11}

Frye's central thesis is that, "if a writer is not a novelist, it is bad criticism to deal only with his defects as a novelist." But the problem remains: how can the forms of fiction be defined? They are mixed "like racial strains, not separable like the sexes."
The mixture of genres complicates the issue, but the complexities must be understood nevertheless. A description of the form of satiric fiction, wherever it occurs in a relatively pure example, is the best way to discover its distinguishing features. Frye suggests some of the aspects of satiric fiction by citing a series of contrasting examples: "Most people would call \textit{Gulliver's Travels} fiction but not a novel. It must then be another form of fiction, as it certainly has a form, and we feel that we are turning from the novel to this form, whatever it is, when we turn from Rousseau's \textit{Emile} to Voltaire's \textit{Candide}, or from Butler's \textit{The Way of All Flesh} to the \textit{Erewhon} books. The form thus has its own traditions, and, as the works of Butler and Huxley show, has preserved some integrity even under the ascendancy of the novel."\textsuperscript{12}

\textsuperscript{11}Ibid., pp. 308-09. \textsuperscript{12}Ibid., p. 308.
The formal distinctions between novels and satires must be derived from differences in techniques of creating characters and in the attitudes underlying the techniques. Taking for his models the satires of the Greek Menippus and the Roman Varro, Frye presents a composite of the character types in prose satires.

This genre deals less with people as such than with mental attitudes. Pedants, bigots, cranks, parvenus, virtuosi, enthusiasts, rapacious and incompetent professional men of all kinds, are handled in terms of their occupational approaches to life as distinct from their social behavior. The Menippean satire thus resembles the confession in its ability to handle abstract ideas and theories, and differs from the novel in its characterization, which is stylized rather than naturalistic, and presents people as mouthpieces of the ideas they represent. Here again no sharp boundary lines can or should be drawn, but if we compare a character in Jane Austen with a similar character in Peacock we can immediately feel the difference between the two forms. Squire Western belongs to the novel, but Thwackum and Square have Menippean blood in them.13

Prose satire does not take for its purpose the novelistic creation of characters which are faithful to nature, however conceived. Quite the reverse is true. Prose satire produces a distortion of nature by portraying human beings as stylized types and mouthpieces for ideas.

The distortion of character, however, is not the only distinguishing feature of Menippean satire. The

13Ibid.
presence of a figure usually known as the *philosophus gloriosus* is of central importance. This figure might be called the pedantic archetype, the ebullient bore who holds forth at great length on all possible subjects. He appears in Roman prose satire, in Chaucer, and in Rabelais; he appears as Dr. Pangloss in *Candide*, as Hafen Slawkenbergius in *Tristram Shandy*, as the academicians of Balnibarrbi in *Gulliver's Travels*, as practically all of Peacock's characters, and as most of Huxley's characters. His presence in prose satires serves a dual, ironic purpose. He is the satiric commentator on life at the same time that he is himself, because of his pedantry, an object of satire. "Evil and folly," writes Frye, "are social diseases" to the novelist; "but the Menippean satirist sees them as diseases of the intellect, as a kind of maddened pedantry which the *philosophus gloriosus* at once symbolizes and defines." He gives rise in satire to the free play of intellectual fancy and the kind of humorous observation that produces caricature—of himself as well as of the society which we see through his eyes.

The presence of the *philosophus gloriosus*, fulfilling his dual role as satirist and victim, makes necessary in satires one of their most common and most obvious features—the dramatic display of extreme erudition. The
tradition of filling out prose satires with recondite learning goes back, according to Frye, to Varro. "The Saturnalia of Macrobius is a typical ancient satire where people sit at a banquet and pour forth a vast mass of erudition on every subject that might conceivably come up. The display of erudition had probably been associated with the Menippean tradition by Varro, who was enough of a polymath to make Quintillian, if not stare and gasp, at any rate call him vir Romanorum eruditissimus." Thus, we have what is perhaps the beginning of a tradition which continues into the twentieth century in Huxley's works. "The tendency to expand into an encyclopedic farrago, in Rabelais, Sterne, Erasmus, and Voltaire suggests that a magpie instinct to collect facts is not unrelated to the type of ability that has made them famous as artists." We find in prose satires very frequently the inclusion of a symposium or cena, a gathering of extraordinarily learned men who hold forth absurdly and amusingly in the style of the philosophus gloriosus. A modern development of the satiric cena produces the country house weekends in Peacock and Huxley and their imitators in which, writes

14 Ibid., p. 311.
Frye, "the opinions and ideas and cultural interests expressed are as important as the lovemaking."

We have pointed out two distinguishing features of the traditional form of satiric fiction—stylized characters and the erudition of the philosophus glorigosus. We must add one other important aspect of most satires, and it is particularly strange that Frye neglected to mention it. (It is characteristic of verse satire as well as prose satire; perhaps that is Frye's reason for ignoring it.) Most satires contain a conspicuous element of sexual or excrementitious obscenity. The vast knowledge of the philosophus glorigosus is frequently a knowledge of the scabrous and purely physical aspects of history, theology, and philosophy. He is unduly happy, for example, that Richelieu died of an anal fistula, that Bishop Berkeley did not include hemorrhoids in his system, that Schopenhauer's philosophy was perhaps inspired by thirty years of constipation, that Luther hurled ein Furz at dem Teufel, and that St. Augustine's most believable pronouncement was, "Homo inter urinam et faeces nascimur." Aristophanes creates a carnival of obscenity, Chaucer laughs at the libidinous misadventures of the human race, and Rabelais cheerfully lectures, in learned terms, on dung, tripes and
codpieces; Voltaire catalogues the terrors of the flesh with superficial good humor, Sterne finds comedy in castration, and Smollett evokes a world of flying chamber pots. And Huxley, in the words of a Catholic critic, creates pictures "grotesque and horrible, and not always decent." Most satire, then, contains a large element of obscenity and, what's more, depends for its satiric effect largely on the rhetorical effects created by the obscenity. Unfortunately, the unpleasant, the unmentionable, and the unprintable must concern anyone who intends to study a writer in the satiric tradition. Discretion may be a virtue in most people, but it is a definite vice in the critic of satire.

We can now make a rough sketch of the chief characteristics of prose satires. Prose satires project their characters, in a consciously unrealistic way, as attitudes and occupational types. A frequent figure is the extreme pedant, the philosophus gloriosus, whose monologues satirize himself as well as his society. In addition to this specific stylized character and the other miscellaneous stick figures and hollow men—like the ingénue and the misanthrope—the prose satire contains a curious mixture

15Catholic World, CLXVIII (January 1949), 335.
of deep learning and obscenity. In some cases the obscenity is sexually pornographic, as in *The Golden Ass* and the *Satyricon*, at other times only subtly insinuated, as in *Candide* and *L'Ile de Penguines*, and at other times grossly scatological, as in *Gargantua* and *Gulliver's Travels*. The physiological imagery in satires is very often associated, not only with what we understand as smut, but also with extreme violence, pain, and disease. The syphilitic condition of Pangloss in *Candide*, the excremental attacks of the Yahoos in *Gulliver's Travels*, the use of chamber pots as weapons in *Roderick Random*, the genital injuries in *Tristram Shandy* which recur like a horrendous leitmotiv—these are but a few examples of the satirist's constant use of the obscene as a violent weapon—as a means, perhaps, of outraging his well-bred readers at the same time that he subjects his characters, along with the cultural institutions which they represent, to pain and ridicule.

As a final note to this brief description of the conventions of prose satire, it is well to re-emphasize Frye's cautionary remark that the genres of fiction—romance, novel, confession, and satire—are not clearly separable but intermingled like racial strains. We often
find elements from several genres in the same work—The Way of All Flesh, for example, contains elements of the confession, the novel, and the satire. Even though the elements are often mixed, it is necessary to recognize them in any work that is being studied. Otherwise, a critic's remarks will sometimes be totally off the point. The analogy is not quite exact, but to condemn a satire for not being a novel is rather like condemning a sword for failing to be a plowshare.

III

Our discussion of the traditions and conventions of the prose satire should suggest that Huxley's works of fiction embody enough of these traditions and conventions to qualify as satires. On the occasions when he describes his own work—either as it is or as it should be—Huxley pictures himself consciously as a writer in the tradition of satire. In Crome Yellow, for example, a speaker expatiates on the fictive Tales of Knockespotch: "'Oh, those tales, those tales! Fabulous characters shoot across the pages like gaily dressed performers on a trapeze. . . . Intelligences and emotions . . . move in intricate and subtle dances. An immense erudition and an immense
fancy go hand in hand. All the ideas of the present and past, on every possible subject, bob up in the Tales, smile gravely or grimace a caricature of themselves, then disappear to make a place for something new. The verbal surface of the writing is rich and fantastically diversified. The wit is incessant." In *Point Counter Point* Phillip Quarles, one of Huxley's many autobiographical characters, discusses the kind of narrative which is more concerned with ideas than with people: "The chief defect of the novel of ideas is that you must write about people who have ideas to express—which excludes all but .01 per cent of the human race. Hence the real, the congenital novelists don't write such books. But I never pretended to be a congenital novelist." We can take Quarles's word for it; neither he nor his creator are "congenital

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novelists." They are writers of satires, with more interest in "intelligences and emotions" and stylized behavior than in realistic characterizations.

In another passage Quarles outlines his technique for producing novels in which the chief interest is derived from the mixture of ironically contrasting points of view. The points of view, he makes clear, are not those of fully developed characters but of occupational preconceptions and personal hobby-horses. "The essence of the new way of looking is multiplicity. Multiplicity of eyes and multiplicity of aspects seen. For instance, one person interprets events in terms of bishops; another in terms of the price of flannel camisoles; another, like that young lady from Gulmerg . . . thinks of it in terms of good times. And then there's the biologist, the chemist, the physicist, the historian. Each sees, professionally, a different aspect of the event, a different layer of reality. What I want to do is to look with all those eyes at once. With religious eyes, scientific eyes, economic eyes, **homme moyen sensuel** eyes. . . . Queer. A very queer picture indeed."\(^\text{18}\)

Huxley's technique, obviously, calls for the same complexity of viewpoints; and these many points of view

\(^\text{18} \text{Ibid.}, \ p. \ 228.\)
always become more important than the action being seen. **Point Counter Point** provides many illustrations of the "multiplicity of eyes" technique. Rampion, who is the mouthpiece in the book for D. H. Lawrence's "blood-wisdom," sees all experience as documentation for his idea that civilization has atrophied the human soul; Burlap interprets everything in a sweetly spiritual way; Spandrell, who is a Baudelairean mystic and diabolist, finds evidence everywhere that life is intrinsically brutish, nasty, and short; Webley, a fascist, sees creeping socialism in every occurrence; Lord Edward, a biologist, can understand human experience, passion, love, and idealism only in terms of blood chemistry, pancreatic structure, and the glycogenic function of the liver. The same diversity of occupational viewpoints establishes the "queerness" of Huxley's other books. **Antic Hay** is another good example; in it Huxley assembles a physiologist, a devil-worshipper, a wildly emotional artist, a cynically emotionless journalist, two nymphomaniacs, an innocent virgin, a capitalist, an idealistic architect, and a pedantic Latinist. The resulting clashes and ironic juxtapositions leave no room for the kind of careful psychological characterization that one expects in a novel. There is only room for the
kind of stylized figures and comical hollow men that are traditional in prose satire. In other words, the people in these books are not real people, and were not meant to be. They are only points of view, mixed together and carefully arranged for the best effect.

The *philosophus glorusus* is one of Huxley's best known characters. He appears in a relatively pure form as Scogan in *Crome Yellow*, as Cardan in *Those Barren Leaves*, as Mr. Beavis in *Eyeless in Gaza*, as Peddley in *Two or Three Graces*, as Pordage in *After Many a Summer*, and as Eustace Barnack in *Time Must Have a Stop*. In addition to these obvious incarnations of the traditional satiric pedant, most of Huxley's characters illustrate, in one way or another, the absurdity of the pedantic display of erudition. "The novel of ideas," as Quarles pointed out, is not concerned with humanity as such; it is peopled with mouthpieces, pedants, and intellectual monsters. As a preface to his book on Huxley, John Atkins sketches a memorable composite picture of the *philosophus glorusus* in his Huxleyan avatar:

You might meet him anywhere; in the long gallery, with its rows of respectable and rather boring Italian primitives, Chinese sculptures, dateless furniture; in the panelled drawing-room, where the huge chintz-covered armchairs were cases of comfort among the flesh-mortifying
antiques; in the morning-room, with pale lemon walls, Venetian chairs, rococo tables; in the library, rich in portentous folios; or the dining room, 'solidly, portwinily English'. The moment he saw you he would mark you down as a potential victim—a victim of his marvellous erudition, his restless critical spirit. You would become an audience whose role was simple enough. You would be a sympathetic ear for the cascade of witty generalisations that would pour effortlessly and serenely, on whatever subject that presented itself. You might be standing outside the house, admiring its lines and masses—particularly its masses. That would be sufficient. His eye would take it in at a glance and he would comment on its challenge to nature. He would quote Shelley's Epipsychidion, and then demolish the quotation. A large part of his discourse would be devoted to the thesis that we grow steadily more imbecile. Our forefathers built for effect. We, on the contrary, employ our wealth and knowledge to belittle man's title to grandeur. Life becomes progressively saddening as an experience.¹⁹

And Huxley himself often played the role in real life. In a recent memoir Edith Sitwell recalls some of the younger Huxley's conversations.

He was then, as he is now (when uninterrupted), one of the most accomplished talkers I have ever known, and his monologues on every conceivable subject, are astonishing floriated variations of an amazing brilliance, and, occasionally, of a most deliberate absurdity. The animal and vegetable worlds became endowed, under the spell of his talk, with human characteristics, usually of a rather scandalous nature. I remember one monologue of this description on the subject of the amours of the octopus tribe—the tribe in question being,

¹⁹Atkins, p. 7.
according to Aldous, conversant with Ovid's theory on love. He expatiated on the advantages possessed by the octopus in every amorous adventure . . . so many arms with which to enfold the beloved. His enthusiasm grew as he proceeded. We were, at the moment, on a platform in Sloane Square underground station. It was Sunday morning, the platforms were crowded, and the passengers waiting for trains listened to Aldous's monologue as to a sermon. Another monologue dealt with the loves of the melon. No melon, apparently, was safe from the advances of any other melon. Nor was there any prohibited degree of kinship. That was why gardeners kept them so closely under glass.

Huxley, then, could be the *philosophus gloriosus* at times himself.

Erudition, like stylized characters, is a traditional satiric device employed in Huxley's books. Apparently it is acceptable in a satire but unacceptable in a novel. Most critics have agreed that the constant display of erudition is out of place in a serious attempt to objectify the conditions of human experience. On one occasion Osbert Sitwell even went so far as to suggest that erudition is fatal to the artist—that learned men could not possibly be great writers. V. S. Pritchett, along with many others, defined Huxley's weakness as his love for the learned cena: "He has all the gifts except that

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20"Personal Encounters," *The London Observer*, November 13, 1960, p. 25. Max Beerbohm's full-length caricature of Huxley is reprinted with the article.
fine single voice of the artist who does not argue or
discuss because he knows, limits, feels and tells.\textsuperscript{21} Another criticism puts the matter very amusingly: "He winds up his characters like talking clocks, and they keep up a steady ticktock of aphorisms, epigrams and reflections."\textsuperscript{22} These critics would seem to deny a twentieth-century artist the right to work within the tradition of satire.

The use of physiological imagery is another all important traditional satiric device in Huxley's books. It, too, has caused critics to brand him as a poor novelist. My contention is that Huxley's use of the physiological as a weapon is the most significant aspect of his art, and that his art cannot be understood until his "obscenity" is understood. Because this aspect of his work requires a more complete analysis than is practical at this point, it can be considered now only in the most general terms. A careful analysis will be possible only after it becomes clear that physiological imagery need not be thought of as mere smut or adolescent prurience. Used properly and manipulated in the proper rhetorical way,


\textsuperscript{22}Time, LXVI (August 29, 1955), p. 88.
obscenity, as the example of Swift will prove, can be one of the most powerful weapons in the satirist's arsenal.

A brief series of examples will illustrate Huxley's method of using physiological imagery to distort or devalue concomitant images of higher, more intellectual, or more spiritual matters. "She'd been chattering . . . about the spirit of love and its incompatibility with a meat diet, and the necessity of mortifying the body for the sake of the soul, about Buddha and St. Francis and mystical ecstasies and, above all, herself . . . . There was a physiological basis of course. The woman did have pains in her head from time to time. It was only to be expected; she was run down, through not eating enough; she didn't take sufficient exercise, so she had chronic constipation; chronic constipation probably set up a slight chronic inflammation of the ovaries; and she certainly suffered from eye-strain—you could tell that from the beautifully vague, spiritual look in her eyes, the look that comes from uncorrected myopia."23 "He was fifty. It's the age when clergymen first begin to be preoccupied with the underclothing of little school girls on trains, the age when eminent archaeologists start taking a really

passionate interest in the Scout movement." In The Genius and the Goddess the wife of a great physicist cannot survive the rigors of living with the scientific mind:

"Poor woman! She simply wasn't strong enough to play the parts assigned to her—mistress to an indefatigable lover, business manager to an absentee half-wit, secretary to a man of genius, and womb, placenta and circulatory system to the psychological equivalent of a foetus. After two miscarriages and a nervous breakdown, she packed up and went home to her mother. Henry was on the loose, all four of him—foetus, half-wit, genius and hungry lover."25

After religion and science, art and philosophy receive the same kind of physiological treatment. Art is the "mental equivalent of alcohol and cantharides."26

"[If Berkeley is right,] it's a pity the human mind didn't do its job of invention a little better while it was about it. We might, for example, have made our symbolic abstractions of reality in such a way that it would be unnecessary for a creative and possibly immortal soul to be troubled

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26 After Many a Summer, p. 175.
Finally, the physiological imagery devaluates the human species in general:

The leech's kiss, the squid's embrace,
The prurient ape's defiling touch—
And do you like the human race?  
No, not much. 28

The varieties of physiological experience in Huxley's books are endlessly detailed and almost inexhaustible. And, as in the examples quoted above, the obscenity is always employed as a means to a satiric end.

Huxley's fiction, we must conclude, continues many of the traditions of prose satire. Such genre-defining elements as stylized characterizations, extreme and often pretentious erudition, and, most important, obscenity as a technique of devaluing associated ideas are abundantly present in Huxley's fiction. He must, it seems, be judged as a satirist. When Bald condemned Huxley as a novelist because of his talent for making fine things seem debased and "shoddy," he was working from a correct description of Huxley's technique, but, because he judged him as a novelist instead of as a satirist, the evaluation did not follow. Savage's essay exhibited the same shortcoming. He condemned Huxley for emphasizing the "sordid


and banal" aspects of life and for failing to transcend the brutal claims of vile flesh—as all great novelists apparently should. Savage forgot, however, that many satirists have taken as their primary function the pointing out of the sordid, banal, and brutal claims of vile flesh. And in Somerset Maugham's terms, Huxley's novels, "give rise in the reader to a certain discomfort." Satire, obviously enough, always affects some of its readers in this way.

My arguments against Huxley's adverse critics are not intended to imply that he has no faults as an artist. Whatever faults he has, however, must be seen from the point of view of satire. My personal view is that Huxley is an excellent writer of satire; but I will not press the matter. My purpose is descriptive, not evaluative. But before the description can proceed, Huxley's work must be seen in its proper historical perspective. The criticisms offered against him as a novelist recall the opening lines of one of his favorite poems, the "Chorus Sacerdotum" by Fulke-Greville, Lord Brooke:

Oh wearisome condition of humanity!
Born under one law, to another bound. 29

29 The poem appears as the epigraph to Point Counter Point.
Huxley was, so to speak, born under the laws of satire; and, naturally, his critics have bound him to the laws of the novel. What follows in the next three chapters is an attempt to understand Huxley on his own terms—as a satirist.
D. S. Savage and Somerset Maugham were right, I think, when they pointed to Huxley's constant use of physiological imagery as the main reason why his books have a "negative" or uncomfortable effect on readers. They were probably right in their descriptive statements about Huxley, but, as we have seen, they were not necessarily right in their evaluations based on that description. And, leaving evaluation out of the problem, it is certainly not enough simply to point out the obvious in Huxley's style and to consider the matter closed. Given the fact of physiological imagery as his dominant stylistic device, and given, also, the fact that this stylistic device displeases some readers, we are still confronted with the key questions: Why and how does physiological imagery create its effects? And also, what motivated the writer to make extensive use of this imagery? In this chapter I propose, first, to suggest a few possible reasons why Huxley took a constant interest in the discreditable facts of physiology, second, to sketch briefly the development of his stylistic and intellectual uses of physiological imagery,
and, third, to offer some speculations on the nature of the rhetorical effects caused by this imagery.

I

Some discussion of Huxley's personal life—especially during his formative years—is necessary. Because the details of his early life are for the most part unavailable, and because many of those that are available seem irrelevant to our chief concern here, this discussion will be relatively brief. One of the problems which arises when we apply biographical detail to an artist's work is that we can seldom be certain that the events actually did condition his creative personality. I have suggested, for example, that Huxley was born under the laws of satire. But the metaphor seems to imply a deterministic concept of art, and deterministic concepts, whether one believes in them or not, are always difficult to document. If Huxley was born into the right time and place with just the right accidental circumstances to mold him mentally and spiritually into a satirist—a rejector of human conventions and ideals—he was thus predetermined to view the world through cynical and pyrrhonic eyes. But causation, even without the difficulties raised by Hume, is extremely difficult to establish,
in the laboratory as well as in the uncontrolled complexities of life. I do not, therefore, intend to picture Huxley's early experiences as a set of foreordaining stimuli which robbed him, like everyone else, of all hopes of achieving what the theologians are fond of calling "free will." The uncontrolled complexities are, quite simply, too complex and too uncontrolled. One cannot know all causes.

Nevertheless, there are enough known facts about Huxley's early life to suggest, if not to demonstrate, that his later satiric view of humanity followed, perhaps inevitably, from the circumstances of his formative years.

The most important fact about Huxley's youth is the most obvious one. The scientific and literary tradition of his family was apparently a strong influence on his early attitudes. Since the time of T. H. Huxley biology had been the family's claim to distinction, and in the early period of their lives both Aldous and his brother Julian aspired to carry on the family's scientific tradition. Before blindness interrupted his plans in his teens, Aldous was intent upon becoming a doctor and doing physiological research. Julian, as everyone knows,
has become an eminent biologist. The family tradition continues.¹

Professor Huxley's son Leonard, the father of Aldous and Julian, was acutely aware of the high distinction of his family and that of his wife, the Arnolds. He considered it a grave duty to see that his children were given every opportunity to develop themselves. The following poem, inept as it is, clearly indicates the sincerity of his feelings toward his children:

Baby mine, how strange to see
Other faces blent in thine,
Other greatness touching thee,
Baby mine.
Something in a curve or line
Here revives thine ancestry:
Each on thee has laid his sign.
And myself? Ah, thou for me
Shalt this heritage enshrine;
All I was not, thou shalt be,
Baby mine.²

The importance of ancestry in the bequeathing of mental gifts is of course in dispute. But the consciousness of great talents in one's ancestors is likely to encourage

¹For a more complete biographical discussion of Huxley, see John Atkins, Aldous Huxley (New York, 1956), and Alexander Henderson, Aldous Huxley (London, 1935). Atkins goes into greater detail about the possible influences on Huxley of his eminent forebears. His thesis, which is convincingly argued, is that Matthew Arnold is the most important hereditary influence on Huxley's work.

²Quoted by Atkins, p. 37.
ambitions in certain directions. So, even if none of the intellectual prowess of T. H. Huxley, Matthew Arnold, and Thomas Arnold passed into the chromosomes of the later generation, the later generation still had the advantage of feeling that it might be heir to a vast store of intellectual riches.

But my chief concern here is not the intellectual ability as such of the young Huxley, but the fields toward which that ability was directed. Though genius cannot scientifically be called hereditary, it is often clear that fields of interest can develop from the environmental influences of a family tradition. It is almost a critical commonplace to say of Aldous Huxley that at first he followed in the footsteps of T. H. Huxley and later, after blindness made science impractical, followed his other great ancestor Matthew Arnold into art and social criticism. At first glance, the description of Huxley's interests seems roughly accurate. On a closer inspection of the actual situation, however, it will be seen that his "shift" from science to art was not really a shift at all. It was more like a transition from one form of expression to another, not from one field of interest to another. In his poetry and fiction, the

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3See Henderson, p. 33.
scientific emphasis continued. In *Point Counter Point* he spoke of himself as the "Zoologist of Fiction," and it is clear from his other work that the label is justly applied. Any statement about his relationship to his two great ancestors must, therefore, make clear the fact that his mature works embody elements characteristic of both of them—the scientific, biological emphasis and habitual omnivorous reading from Professor Huxley, the artistry and social criticism from Arnold. His work is a genetic synthesis.

It is of course impossible to know whether Huxley would have succeeded in medicine if blindness had not interrupted his training. It is probable that he would not have become a prolific writer of fiction if his scientific aspirations had been realized. So, in the purely practical sense, the eye disease *keratitis punctatis* can be cited as one of the causes of Huxley the artist. But the *keratitis punctatis* apparently did more than force him to abandon one career for a second choice. The pain and the blindness conditioned his view of the world and made it, if not inevitable, at least understandable, that

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4For Huxley's discussion of his blindness, see *The Art of Seeing* (New York, 1942).
his view of the world would be pessimistic. When the disease first struck him in 1910, he became almost totally blind, and it seemed probable that all possibility of an active career of any kind was destroyed. For eighteen months he was forced to depend on Braille for reading and a guide for walking. Even when the condition improved he was left with one eye just capable of light perception and the other with just enough vision to permit him to read the largest letter on a Snellen chart from ten feet. At first he read with a magnifying glass, then graduated to powerful spectacles. But at best he suffered from continual strain and fatigue and was often overcome by a sense of complete physical and mental exhaustion.

The important point here is that most of Huxley's early works were written against a background of pain, despair, and the constant reminder of the sad inadequacy of flesh. And in addition to his knowledge of the sad inadequacies of flesh, he was forced to the more deeply pessimistic conclusion that all of man's highest and most idealistic aspirations are chained, limited, and often destroyed by random quirks of physiological functions. Dualistic logic thus became the key to his own experience and, by extension, to all human experience. In other
words, mind and soul, whatever they may be, are still "umbilical to earth," and pain is a stronger force than will.  

For the most part, Huxley did not make specific references to his blindness in his books. One rare instance, in "The Cicadas," evokes his deeply pessimistic mood:

I hear them sing, who in the double night
Of clouds and branches fancied that I went
Through my own spirit's dark discouragement,
Deprived of inward as of outward sight:
Who, seeking, even as here in the wild wood,
A lamp to beckon through my tangled fate,
Found only darkness and, disconsolate,
Mourned the lost purpose and the vanished good.  

Another reference to his blindness appears in the essay "Silence Is Golden": he rejoices that "a beneficent Providence has dimmed my powers of sight so that at a distance of four or five yards I am blissfully unaware of the full horror of the average human countenance."  

5Though blindness was certainly an important physical influence on his work, we must also note that he was apparently seldom in the best of health. In a letter to Ottoline Morrell, Lawrence mentioned that Huxley suffered continually from a bad liver and that the bad liver might account in part for the ironic pessimism of his books. See Collected Letters, p. 745.


Though blindness does not figure as a major theme in his fiction, a great many of his characters, especially those who seem to be partly autobiographical, are marked by some painful and obvious physical disability. The Monster in *Antic Hay* is a physical derelict; Lord Hovenden in *Those Barren Leaves* and Brian Foxe in *Eyeless in Gaza* suffer from ludicrous speech impediments; Phillip Quarles in *Point Counter Point* walks with a limp; and Bernard Marx in *Brave New World* had his growth stunted by a superfluity of alcohol in his blood surrogate.

II

Although Huxley did not often refer directly to his own physical problems, it is clear that his books do contain a great many physiological details. In fact, a cursory reading of his novels might give the impression that he was obsessed with the terrors of the flesh in all forms. Our next step in this approach to an understanding of Huxley's use of physiological detail is to determine the extent of his use of it. We are obliged to document our assertion that his satiric technique is basically physiological, and to show the development of his ideas on man's physical nature.
His preoccupation with the horrors of the flesh was apparent from the beginning of his writing career. In his "First Philosopher's Song" we find this rather typical passage:

But oh, the sound of simian mirth!
Mind, issued from the monkey's womb,
Is still umbilical to earth.8

His implication is that man may have a mind, a soul, or whatever one prefers to call it, but it is still chained by the brutishness of its animal origin. We notice here, of course, the influences of Darwinism and of his grandfather T. H. Huxley; the evolutionary monkey still crops up in his later novels—as in After Many a Summer and Ape and Essence. The animal origin of mind becomes even more terrifyingly apparent when he writes, in "Soles Occidere et Redire Possunt," of his dead friend John Ridley:

Sunk to his eyes in the warm sodden morass
Of his own guts . . .
Cesspool within, and without him he could see
Nothing but mounds of flesh and harlotry.9

The link between man and nature—not the nature of the poets with its formalized charm, but the "steaming, proliferating reality"—is too strong to be broken and too painfully obvious to be ignored.

8Leda, p. 38. 9Ibid., p. 68.
The animal origin of mind enforced in the younger Huxley's thought a deeply pessimistic dualistic logic which can be summed up as follows: Since man is hopelessly a slave to his physiology, and since his physiology is an unspeakable mess, it follows that the noble ideas of men are nothing but illusions covering the corruption within. If one could believe in the immortality of the soul—in the ultimate release of mind from its animal body—there would be some basis for optimism. But here the decline of the old religion had left Huxley with the unbreakable "umbilical to earth" which refuses to release pure mind from the tyrannies of flesh. Cardan, a sophisticated philosophus gloriösus in Those Barren Leaves, states the matter sardonically; after seeing a moronic girl sicken on putrid fish and die vomiting, he ponders the ever-advancing corruption. "Only the tragedy of the spirit can uplift or enoble," he thinks, "but the greatest tragedy of the spirit is that sooner or later it succumbs to the flesh. The spirit has no real significance, there is only the body. ... When it is young, the body is beautiful and strong. It grows old, its joints creak, its life goes out, and it rots away." 10

All is rottenness in the end.

10Those Barren Leaves, p. 336.
This dualistic pessimism strongly affected Huxley's view of sexuality. Sex is primarily a physiological function; therefore, it is an ignoble function. In Music at Night he quotes a violent harangue by Bishop Odo of Cluny, a medieval father of the church, concerning the nastiness of women: "If men could see beneath the skin... then the sight of a woman would be nauseous unto them. All that beauty consists but in phlegm and blood and humours and gall. If a man consider that which is hidden within the nose, the throat, and the belly, he will find filth everywhere; and if we cannot bring ourselves, even with the tips of our fingers, to touch such phlegm or dung, wherefore do we desire to embrace this bag of filth itself?" Huxley quotes the passage as an example of the unhealthy extremes of physical disgust to which moralists have gone, but anyone conversant with his other books will recognize in Odo's harangue a thought which permeated most of Huxley's ideas. Although the Huxley of the twenties and thirties presents a glittering façade of fastidious aloofness and intellectual detachment, under the glittering façade these same fears of the physical are constantly lurking. The view of woman as a "saccus stercor.us" appears

explicitly in Antic Hay, Ape and Essence, and The Genius and the Goddess. Clearly, a deep disgust with sexual life, with all of man's more ignoble functions, is a constant force in his work.

The physiological obsession takes many forms in his novels. In Crome Yellow, Henry Wimbush, a dedicated antiquarian, is delighted with the fact that his home was designed around the location of the privy. Sir Ferdinando, who built the house several hundred years before, had installed the privy at the top of the house because "the necessities of nature are so base and brutish that in obeying them we are apt to forget that we are the noblest creatures in the universe." Therefore the privies should be placed as close to heaven as possible.12 In Antic Hay the physiological obsession establishes the sardonic tone of the book. "Does it ever occur to you," says one character while walking through the streets of London late at night,

that at this moment we are walking through the midst of seven million people, each with distinct and separate lives? Seven million people, each one of whom thinks himself quite as important as each one of us does. Millions of them are now sleeping in an empested atmosphere. Hundreds of thousands of couples are at this moment

12Crome Yellow, p. 103.
engaged in 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 diseases, or simply because they have lived too long. Thousands are drunk, thousands have overeaten, thousands have not had enough to eat. And they are all unique and sensitive, like you and me.13

Huxley's technique of creating characters is strongly influenced by the dualistic pessimism. One of the most memorable of his character types is the emancipated new woman, the blue-stocking of the Freudian epoch. Mary Bracegirdle in Crome Yellow is the first of these, but she seems positively maidenly when compared with those that follow. Myra Viveash in Antic Hay is the first fully developed Huxleyan siren. After the death of her lover in 1918 her life becomes a perpetual quest to recapture her lost sense of purpose. The quest leads from one affair to another, from random flirtations to desperate attempts to escape the ineluctable boredom of everything. Jazz, alcohol, and sex—well, what else is there? Myra Viveash (does the name mean "living death"?) seems always to be speaking from a death bed, expiringly and with a

13Antic Hay, pp. 50-51.
perpetual death-rattle in her pronunciation. "Tomorrow," she says, "tomorrow will be as awful as today." And for her it always is.\textsuperscript{14}

Another incarnation of the Huxleyan female sensualist, and in many ways the most thoroughly delineated, is Lucy Tantamount in \textit{Point Counter Point}. She, like Myra Viveash, is promiscuous; and, also like Myra Viveash, she is totally bored with her promiscuity. She has had all the experiences and has become tired of them all. "Youth at the prow and pleasure at the helm. . . . It's silly, it's monotonous. Energy has so few ways of manifesting itself." In her tireless search for new sensations, Lucy begins to contemplate the illegal pleasures of the Marquis de Sade. When Spandrell asks her why, she can only answer with a shrug of the shoulders: "Curiosity, you know. One's bored." Sex, as she says to her shy but ardent lover, Walter Bidlake, is not much fun any more. It is just another hygienic function—like brushing one's teeth.\textsuperscript{15}

The sexual act is therefore both tedious and pointless in many of Huxley's early books. In \textit{Antic Hay} Coleman

\textsuperscript{14}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 248.

\textsuperscript{15}\textit{Point Counter Point}, pp. 164-65.
tries to escape its tedium by making it more deeply repulsive. "That's the beauty of the grand passion," he roars at his terrified mistress; "it is revolting." He quotes Odo of Cluny thunderously and then launches into a kind of Delphic rhapsody on the sordidness of flesh. "What sensualists those old fellows were! They pretended they were trying to dissuade people from vice by enumerating its horrors. But they were really only making it more spicy by telling the truth about it. . . . What nauseating embraces! To conjugate the copulative verb, boringly, with a sack of tripe—what could be more exquisitely and piercingly vile?" Coleman continues by telling his mistress that it is a pity she does not believe in God. Every outrage is much more intense when one believes in heaven and, especially, in hell. "How prodigiously much more you'd enjoy it if you could believe you were committing a sin against the Holy Ghost—if you kept thinking calmly and dispassionately all the time the affair was going on: All this is not only a horrible sin, it is also ugly, grotesque, a mere defecation."  

16 Sex for most of Huxley's characters, however, remains tedious, and for Lucy Tantamount the tedium once becomes so intense that she begins to consider "the ultimate

16 Antic Hay, p. 216.
perversion, chastity." Some of the characters make the changed sexual mores the topic of learned lectures for the edification of their listeners. In *Crome Yellow* Scogan laments the new unhealthy attitudes toward sex in modern times. In the time of the "amiable Brantôme," he says, every young debutante was invited to dine at the king's table. Her wine goblet was specially decorated for her delectation. As she drank the wine a series of erotic scenes engraved inside the goblet became visible. The court would follow each sip of the wine with breathless anticipation. If the maiden blushed, they laughed at her innocence; if she did not, they laughed at her for being too knowing. "The point is that for them sex was completely frank." The only century which was not characterized by this cheerful openness was the nineteenth. "With what one must suppose was a deliberate disregard of history, it looked upon its horribly pregnant silences as normal and natural and right; the frankness of the previous fifteen or twenty thousand years was considered abnormal and perverse. It was a curious phenomenon."17

The twentieth century, continued Scogan, brought the reaction, but like all reactions it was violent and

17 *Crome Yellow*, pp. 151-52.
excessive and, as Huxley said on several occasions, too horribly serious. Love and lust had become scientific and at times pedantic. "It is all very estimable," says Mr. Scogan, "but still I for one would like to see, mingled with this scientific ardor, a little more of the jovial spirit of Rabelais and Chaucer." Attitudes toward sex cannot be jovial and Rabelaisian in the twentieth century, however. Such a free and healthy outlook, Mr. Scogan continues, could be the fruit only of tolerance, and tolerance was impossible in the existing state of affairs. The intellectuals were in violent rebellion against the middle class, which with its dismal Victorian virtues had become the collective laughing stock of the new generation. In Music at Night Huxley describes unpleasant details of the suppression, by London officials, of D. H. Lawrence's work. Mrs. Grundy, he laments in the essay "To the Puritan All Things Are Impure," still reigns supreme. Her creed is militantly enforced: "I believe in one heterosexual Love, monogamous and indissoluble. And I believe in Respectability. And above all in Silence." The world is filled with "smut-hounds" who foam at the mouth, like Pavlov's dog, each time the "pornographic bell" is rung. The puritanical
middle class is thus given the blame for the sexual excesses which they so violently deplore. If Mrs. Grundy would have the good sense to stop getting so volubly upset at the goings-on of flaming youth, flaming youth would, without a doubt, begin to settle down.\textsuperscript{18}

Part of the trouble could be blamed on English education. Most young Englishmen in these books have been exposed during their formative years to the full force of the English literary tradition. Idealism, the spiritual and transcendental aspects of love, and the firm conviction that love should be romantic and holy had adequately prepared the young Englishman for the inevitable disgust with its physiological aspects. Pure, beautiful, ideal love is the dream of Huxley's young men. But when they grow up they find that the fascination of Mrs. Viveash and Lucy Tantamount is too strong to resist. Their sex life becomes "one damned thing after another"—a constant process of disenchantment.

In the symbolic night-club play in \textit{Antic Hay} the Monster almost goes mad with longing for pure love. After his encounter with a somewhat scabrous prostitute, the Monster soliloquizes on the subject. "Somewhere," he

\footnote{\textit{Music at Night}, pp. 180-83.}
cries, "there must be love like music. Love harmonious and ordered: two spirits, two bodies moving contrapuntally together. Somewhere, the stupid brutish act must be made to make sense, must be enriched, be made significant. . . . Somewhere love like sheets of silken flame; like landscapes brilliant in the sunlight; like the solution of a cosmic problem; like faith, somewhere, somewhere. But in my veins creep the maggots of the pox, crawling towards the brain, crawling into the mouth, burrowing into the bones. Insatiably."  

In the same novel Gumbril complains, rather less histrionically, of the situation. In his brief infatuation with Emily he has a momentary glimpse of pure and beautiful love. He sleeps chastely with her, and experiences something very like a mystical ecstasy: "Time passed flowing in a dark stream, stanchlessly, as though from some profound mysterious wound in the world's side. . . . He did not desire her; to desire would have been to break the enchantment." But Gumbril cannot forget that, in the eyes of all his friends, chastity is just the ultimate perversion. He succumbs again to the flesh, to flesh

19 *Antic Hay*, p. 173.
incarnate in Myra Viveash. Emily's rose-covered cottage is waiting for him, but he goes instead on a pointless ride around town. He knows that he is too hopeless to save himself. It is in the nature of things, it seems, that spirit always succumbs to the tyrannies of flesh. "Well," he says, "let everything go. Into the mud. Leave it there and let the dogs lift their hind legs over it as they pass."

Huxley repeats the same situation over and over again in his books. Chelifer in *Those Barren Leaves* gives up his Barbara for the temporary lustfulness of some enchantress. Walter Bidlake in *Point Counter Point* is driven almost to madness by Lucy Tantamount. Anthony Beavis in *Eyeless in Gaza* becomes entangled with Mary Amberly, another siren of the Viveash-Tantamount variety. In most of these cases the women involved are not fully developed projections of character at all; they are abstractions, symbolic figures whose role is simply to emphasize the sordidness of physical life.

Huxley's disgust with physiological functions, and especially his disgust with the sexual one, is indeed apparent in his early work. But even the sardonic irony of *Antic Hay* and *Point Counter Point* seems lightly comic
when compared with the appalling flesh-hatred of *Eyeless in Gaza* and *Time Must Have a Stop*. *Eyeless in Gaza* is a kind of rhapsody of disgust with physiology. In one memorable scene Helen Amberly steals a kidney from a butcher shop, because she has vowed, for no reason at all, to steal something from every shop she enters. The butcher shop presents a very difficult problem. She hates the place; it is filled with blood and viscera and stinking animal corpses. Nevertheless, she has vowed to steal something from all of the shops. She forces herself to sneak the kidney into her purse, and when she is leaving the store she has the terrible fantasy of taking the obscene thing into her mouth. Other aspects of this fantasy are even more appalling, and Helen comes close to collapsing on the street. Later in the book flesh is once again forced upon her. While she and her lover, Anthony Beavis, are lying *au naturel* on the roof of his house, feeling at peace with the universe, a dog falls from a passing airplane and lands on the roof next to them. The dog explodes on the hard roof, and the two

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21 It is interesting to note that Huxley had by this time followed flesh-hatred into one of its logical conclusions: he had become a vegetarian. See W. Y. Tindall, "The Trouble with Aldous Huxley," *American Scholar*, XI (April 1942), 452-64.
lovers are covered with blood and gobbets of flesh. For reasons too subtle for her to understand Helen finds that, after this traumatic experience with flesh, she cannot bear to continue her relationship with Anthony. Sex, death, and obscene flesh are too closely associated in their partnership.

The climax of Huxley's physiological pessimism comes in *Time Must Have a Stop*. Here the influence of mysticism, supported by parapsychology, is apparent. Several chapters are devoted to the sensations of Eustace Barnack after his death. He has stuffed himself with rich foods and brandy and has died of a heart attack while seated on the toilet. In his state of spiritual suspension after death the former debauchee is able to see dim and cloudy visions of the activities on earth. He sees, among other horrors, the recurring apparition of his last mistress's navel, like a "prim Victorian mouth." And he sees, intermingled with erotic scenes, the gruesome death of his nephew, Jim Poulshot, on a Pacific island in 1943.

Jim was lying at the foot of a clump of bamboos, and three or four little yellow men with guns in their hands were standing over him. . . . They broke out simultaneously into loud, almost good-natured guffaws . . . and the whole universe shook and howled with laughter. . . .
Then suddenly one of them raised his foot and stamped on Jim's face. There was a scream. The heel of the heavy rubber-soled boot came down again...

Among the little yellow men there had been a short gloating silence. Then one of them said something and, as though to illustrate his meaning, drove his bayonet into Jim Poulshot's face. Grinning, the others followed suit—in the chest, in the belly, in the throat and the genitals—again and again, until at last the screaming stopped.22

The shade of Eustace can see no horror in this scene; the whole universe continues to laugh with an epileptic violence. And the death scene repeats itself, this time mixed up with more erotic imagery: "The horror and the bayonets, but all somehow mixed up with Mimi... Adesso commincia la tortura—and then the fumbling, the dandling, the fondling. Ave Verum corpus, the true body, the prim Victorian mouth, the brown-blind breast-eyes. And while the bayonets stabbed there was the shameful irrelevance of a pleasure that at last died into a cold reiterated restless friction."23 Here Huxley, the soi disant pyrrhonic aesthete of the twenties, has written a condemnation of physical life that would have put even Bishop Odo of Cluny to shame.

22Time Must Have a Stop (New York, 1944), p. 234.
23Ibid., pp. 234-35.
After *Time Must Have a Stop* Huxley's treatment of physical life is not quite so violent. In his last two works of fiction a slightly less pessimistic attitude is apparent. Even amidst the desperate horrors of nuclear and biological war in *Ape and Essence* the image of physical relationship which is projected does not approach the deep pessimism of the earlier books. At the close of *Ape and Essence* there is a slight possibility that Dr. Poole and Loola may be able to enjoy a spiritually satisfactory sexual relationship. The odds are against them, but the possibility is still there. And in *The Genius and the Goddess* an illicit affair between John Rivers and Katy Maartens is far from horrifying. It recharges Katy with her spiritual vitality, with health, and with her strangely therapeutic radiance. Temporarily, this affair accomplishes the ideal of sexuality expressed by the nightclub Monster in *Antic Hay*: "The stupid brutish act must be made to make sense, must be enriched, be made significant." Katy is rejuvenated by the act; the fact that it also indirectly causes her death seems almost irrelevant. Evil results have continued, but a few good ones have been added.
This brief survey of Huxley's attitudes toward physical life is of necessity incomplete. But even a rough sketch of the most common terms of his ideas and his satiric statements suffices to make the point—the point that Huxley throughout his entire writing career so far has been preoccupied with flesh and its role in shaping human experience. But now that we have briefly sketched the development of Huxley's use of physiological imagery we are faced with the crucial problem of why his physiological imagery produces a satiric effect. His use of anatomical detail has been called the chief defect in his art, because it degrades, distorts, and devalues human experience. It seems, however, that we will have more chance of coming to terms with the particular features of Huxley's artistic methods if we make the initial effort to suspend judgment while the investigation is proceeding. In other words, I think that we will have more chance of understanding Huxley's technique if we read him without reference to artistic flaws and other evaluative terms. Judgments, if Korszybsky and Hayakawa are correct, tend to stifle thought; but from the semantic point of view it is virtually impossible to use language
without implying judgments. In the following discussion, none the less, we will attempt to describe Huxley's rhetoric of distortion and devaluation without intent to make judgments.

To return to our principal concern, why does physiological imagery play such an important role in Huxley's satiric technique? We must see, first of all, what Huxley himself thought of physiological satire. We find Huxley's commentaries on the role of the body in imaginative literature in several of his collections of essays printed in the twenties and thirties. His essay "Vulgarity in Literature" is his most direct and particular defense of his technique. In that essay we discover, somewhat surprisingly, that Huxley did not consciously intend to write satire. He did not mention the term in any of his early essays. Physiological detail, he says, is essential to a comprehensive work of art. It is essential, what's more, not because it functions satirically, but because it creates a texture of

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wholeness and completeness, gives his work the quality of the grand synthesis of total reality. If his books seem "queer," it is, he said, because total reality is always queer. Perhaps his insistence on the "Whole Truth" has inspired most of his serious critics to judge him as an apostle of "absolute realism," the realism which refuses to ignore any of the facts of existence, however irrelevant and however unpleasant they may appear. But it should be clear that "absolute realism" results, not just in realism, but in satiric realism.

"Vulgarity in Literature" clearly presents the issues involved, but presents them without direct reference to satire. Huxley's thesis is that what has often been dismissed as vulgarity is actually the most important ingredient of serious literary art. He begins with an analogy between refined young ladies and refined literature:

To be pale, to have no appetite, to swoon at the slightest provocation—these, not so long ago, were the signs of maidenly good breeding. In other words, when a girl was marked with the stigmata of anemia and chronic constipation, you knew she was a lady. Virtues are generally fashioned . . . out of necessities. Rich girls had no need to work; the aristocratic tradition discouraged them from compromising their maiden modesty by taking anything like violent exercise. . . . The virtues of Fresh Air had not yet been discovered and the Draft was still the commonest,
as it was almost the most dangerous, manifestation of the Diabolic Principle. More perverse than Chinese foot-squeezers, the topiarists of European fashion had decreed that the elegant should have all her viscera constricted and displaced by tight lacing. In a word, the rich girl lived a life scientifically calculated to make her unhealthy. A virtue was made of humiliating necessity, and the pale ethereal swooner of romantic literature remained for years the type and mirror of refined young womanhood.

Something of the same kind happens from time to time in the realm of literature. Moments come when too conspicuous a show of vigor, too frank an interest in common things are signs of literary vulgarity. To be really lady-like, the Muses, like their mortal sisters, must be anemic and constipated. On the more sensitive writers of certain epochs circumstances impose an artistic wasting away, a literary consumption. This distressing fatality is at once transformed into a virtue, which it becomes a duty for all to cultivate.

He continues the point with a reference to Villiers de l'Isle-Adam's comment: "Vivre? Nos valets le feront pour nous." The very process of living is intensely and unremittingly vulgar. The quotidian details of life are best ignored because they are always in deplorable taste. "The vulgarity of this having to walk and talk; to open and close the eyes; to think and drink and every day, yes, every day, to eat, eat and excrete. And then this having to pursue the female of one's species, or the male, whichever the case may be; this having to cerebrate, to calculate, to copulate, to propagate. . . .
No, no—too gross, too stupidly low." Living is therefore in wretched taste; but that is not the worst of it. Dying is even worse, dying is the final triumph of bad taste. Buddha commented on the vulgarity of reality after the sight of a corpse rotting by the roadside had set him thinking. "A corpse, poor thing, is an untouchable and the process of decay is, of all pieces of bad manners, the vulgarest imaginable. For a corpse is, by definition, a person absolutely devoid of savoir vivre. . . . But in every greatest king, in every loveliest flowery princess, in every poet most refined, every best dressed dandy, every holiest and most spiritual teacher, there lurks, waiting, waiting for the moment to emerge, an outcaste of the outcastes, a dung carrier, a dog, lower than the lowest, bottomlessly vulgar."

Reality, then, is vulgar and ill-mannered. It follows that the responsible artist, the artist who wishes to create reality in his work with a fidelity to nature, will inevitably shock his less realistic readers with his vulgarity and bad taste. It is here that the "modern artist" has, according to Huxley, the advantage over many of the classical artists of the past. On the French classical stage, for example, it was vulgar to mention the word "handkerchief" in a tragic play.
The case of the handkerchief is a particular and rather absurd application of a very widely accepted artistic convention. This convention is justified by the ancient metaphysical doctrine which distinguishes in the universe two principles, mind and matter, and which attributes to mind an immeasurable superiority. In the name of this principle many religions have demanded the sacrifice of the body; their devotees have responded by mortifying the flesh and, in extreme case, by committing self-castration and even suicide. Literature has its Manichaean as well as religion: men who on principle would exile the body and its functions from the world of their art, who condemn as vulgar all too particular and detailed accounts of physical actuality, as vulgar any attempt to relate mental or spiritual events to happenings in the body. The inhabitants of their universe are not human beings, but the tragical heroes and heroines who never blow their noses....

To enforce their ascetic code the classicists had to devise a system of critical sanctions. Chief among these was the stigma of vulgarity attached to all those who insisted too minutely on the physical side of man's existence. Speak of handkerchiefs in a tragedy? The solecism was as monstrous as picking teeth with a fork.

Following this discussion, Huxley offers what might be called his artistic credo. He is "by nature a natural historian," and as such he cannot force himself to live and to create in the unnaturally pure demi-monde of classical art. He is obliged to tell the whole truth about the world, and to tell it with as much fervor as he can muster.

I cannot accept the Classicists' excommunication of the body. I think it not only permissible, but necessary, that literature should take cognizance of physiology and should investigate the still obscure...
relations between mind and body. True, many people find the reports of such investigations, when not concealed in scientific textbooks and couched in the decent obscurity of a Graeco-Latin Jargon, extremely and inexcusably vulgar; and many more find them downright wicked. I myself have frequently been accused, by reviewers in public and by unprofessional readers in private correspondence, both of vulgarity and of wickedness—on the grounds, so far as I have ever been able to discover, that I reported my investigations into certain phenomena in plain English and in a novel. The fact that many people should be shocked by what he writes practically imposes it as a duty upon the writer to go on shocking them. For those who are shocked by truth are not only stupid, but morally reprehensible as well; the stupid should be educated, the wicked punished and reformed. All these praiseworthy ends can be attained by a course of shocking; retributive pain will be inflicted on the truth-haters by the first shocking truths, whose repetition will gradually build up in those who read them an immunity to pain and will end by reforming and educating the stupid criminals out of their truth-hating. For a familiar truth ceases to shock. To render it familiar is therefore a duty. It is also a pleasure. For, as Baudelaire says, "ce qu'il y a d'enivrant dans le mauvais goût, c'est le plaisir aristocratique de déplaire."

It is particularly strange that Huxley could thus speak of his work without once using the term satire. The process of "reforming and educating the stupid criminals out of their truth-hating" by means of "retributive pain" is almost precisely the traditional concept of the satirist's function. He follows the traditional concept further in his pronunciation that unawareness is the gravest
social sin, the "seminal sin," so to speak, from which all others spring. "The stupid," in a word, "are wicked." The greatest moral force, therefore, is the force of insistent truth. Moral reform is not to be brought about by the old method of simply drilling people in what they ought and ought not to do. Moral reform can succeed only by educating them to see life steadily and see it whole; and the process of seeing it steadily and whole inevitably results in what we have come to call satire. Hamlet blowing his nose, Oedipus with wind, Beatrice Cenci constipated—the body is satiric. It gives rise in the reader to a certain discomfort, the discomfort of truth, the discomfort of a memento mori.

It is probable, however, that some readers will object to Huxley's moral stance as mere casuistry. And perhaps we do need more evidence to demonstrate the moral validity of a method which tends to reduce everything to a physiological function. For our purposes of analysis here, however, we can put aside the question of a moral justification for satire. Our present concern is with the technique of satiric utterances, not with the motives underlying them. It is sufficient that we have seen how Huxley, like so many other satirists of the past, has
felt the need to announce that his work is intended to purify society of its crimes and follies.

Leaving out the moral problem implied by satire, we can safely describe satire as a process of devaluing an object, as a process of lowering the connotative value of a person, idea, institution, doctrine or pattern of behavior. A specific normative implication may or may not develop as a result of the devaluation: satire does not depend on it. The use of physiological detail is one way to effect the satiric downgrading of a target. When an object is placed in conjunction with an object of contrasting value, the higher value usually descends toward the lower one. Physiology, for many complex psychological reasons, is a very low value, and its connotative lowness makes it well suited to act as a means of lowering other values.

The proposition that high values descend toward the level of associated low values—a phenomenon which I will henceforth call the principle of "semantic gravity"—must be considered in detail. If physiology can be said to devalue spirit, the reason is probably that man's physiological make-up is not a conscious element of the "normal" person's concept of reality. If it were,
it would not cause a distorted image. An interesting dis-
cussion of how anatomical detail can function as an in-
strument of distorting and devaluation can be found in
Alexander Henderson's analysis of the following passage
from **Point Counter Point**: "A cell had multiplied itself
and become a worm, the worm had become a fish, the fish
was turning into the foetus of a mammal. Marjorie felt
sick and tired. Fifteen years hence a boy would be con-
firmed. Enormous in his robes, like a full-rigged ship,
the Bishop would say: 'Do you here in the presence of
God, and of this congregation, renew the solemn promise
and vow that was made for you at your Baptism'? And the
ex-fish would answer with passionate conviction: 'I do'."

The humour [writes Henderson] arises from the
violent, grotesque contrast, from the swift revela-
tion of the disparity between man's physical origin
and his prodigious emotional and religious claims.
... It is a kind of comedy possible only in a
society highly civilized, as we at present measure
civilization, and extremely self-conscious. Further,
it is a kind of comedy which may, in time, become
completely unfunny. We laugh now at the ex-fish
saying "I do," because we are still living in the
shadow of the conflict between science and religion
which Darwin started. Let us suppose, for the mo-
ment, that we are all practising agnostics—we base
our lives on lack of faith and the assumption that
the scientific view of the world is correct—never-
theless, the religion which was important to our
fathers and grandfathers still casts its shadow
over us, and we are so conditioned that attacks
on the once sacrosanct faith still cause an emo-
tional tremor, a shock which usually expresses
itself, owing to our agnosticism, as a laugh. This
effect is also due to the fact that the scientific
knowledge we all theoretically know has by no means
been absorbed into our psychological systems. We
all know that the human embryo passes through a
fish stage in the womb—that is to say we have once
or twice read statements to that effect—but this
knowledge does not enter into our daily life. It
is something on the far fringe, in the distant polar
regions of our consciousness. Thus A, deciding whe­
ther he shall or shall not marry B, does not take
into account the fact that he is an ex-fish. That
he was once a kind of worm does not determine his
acceptance of a post in Nigeria. Only his thoughts
and feelings as a completed human being are impor­
tant in these decisions. But a time may come when
every one will be fully aware that he or she was
once a potential fish with gills—as fully aware
of this fact as we are now that we have arms and
legs, bones and blood. If that should ever be so,
a statement that "the ex-fish would answer with
passionate conviction, 'I do'" will cease to be
funny, just as it would not be funny to write,
"The boy, consisting of bones, tissue and blood,
answered, 'I do'."26

Henderson's analysis brings up some interesting
points, some of which are crucially important for our
speculations on satiric style. But before we can proceed
it is necessary to consider briefly his comments on the
"comedy" in the passage. The idea that a merging of
spiritual and biological terms would be funny only in a
highly civilized society "like our own" seems, despite
its apparent cogency, strangely irrelevant. The question
of whether the ex-fish is funny or unfunny, now, in the

26Henderson, pp. 41-42.
past, or in the future, is irrelevant to the primary function of the utterance. Man, fish, worm, foetus, Bishop, and Church of England are brought together in this passage for the purpose of satirically devaluing the higher elements in the cluster. In other words, this regrouping of elements causes the high connotative value of religious experience to descend toward the lower connotative value of biological fact. When the super-human is seen from the vantage point of the sub-human, the super-human is forced downward—in a word, satirized. Any laughter which the manipulation of elements might cause is not the central result.

Some readers—Somerset Maugham, for example (who is a "practising agnostic")—were not moved to laughter by this and similar passages in Huxley's work. They were moved to anger, to retaliation. Laughter, it is true, can be the result of a sudden pairing of incongruous elements, and it can also result from the satiric process of degrading. But when reactions to such a pairing are mixed—both laughter and anger—we can recognize satire as its point. In other words, comedy is one means to a satiric end.

Henderson's idea that our customary lack of preoccupation with the facts of biology is the reason for the
effect of the passage suggests some interesting and significant points. We did not experience foetal life consciously and we do not recall how things were when we were fish, so we do not really know that we were ever in such a state. We do not usually perceive ourselves and others as ex-fish, or, for that matter, as ex-children or ex-adolescents. In other words, some known facts about the things we see do not take a position in the configurations of our perception. To use Wolfgang Köhler's convenient terminology, the Gestaltqualität of an object is highly selective. Some aspects of objects are excluded from our images of them. It is a fact, for example, that my desk consists of swirling, electrically-charged sub-atomic particles; but I do not normally include the fact in my perceptual image of it.

Now the question arises: Does the insertion of a previously excluded fact into a perceptual image produce a satiric effect? Sometimes, but not always. The insertion always alters an object's Gestaltqualität, but not always for the worse. When my image of a desk was altered so as to include sub-atomic particles, the desk obviously enough was not lowered in connotative value. Desks, I suppose, cannot be satirized. If we say, however, that
Senator So-and-so's nose is constructed of sub-atomic particles, we have made a satiric alteration of Senator So-and-so's image, by emphasizing one rather unimportant part of his anatomy and by further distorting the image with a reminder of scientific or empirical truth. We have distorted a perceptual image by inserting facts into it which were not there before, and the new facts have connotative values lower than those of the original image. Semantic gravity caused the higher values to descend toward the lower ones. The senator, in a word, has been satirized.

We can conclude, I think, that Henderson was not quite accurate when he stated that the ex-fish passage created its effect only because of our customary unawareness of the biological facts. A satiric effect can be produced in such passages only by inserting into a perceptual image a new element which is of lower value. Thus, our image of a young man being confirmed is altered—and altered for the worse—by inserting the incontestable, though irrelevant, fact that the young man was once a fish with gills. The entire image is distorted so as to produce a grotesque, decidedly unrealistic, effect. And, paradoxically, the unrealistic effect is created by a strict adherence to reality.
Wyndham Lewis's theory of satire is particularly appropriate to this discussion. Satire, he writes in *Men without Art*, is not primarily a distortion at all, and not a purification; it is simply the blunt facts of the matter. Satire is not only the truth; the truth is almost always satiric. In a world where most people view reality in a distorted way, all truly realistic projections will seem distorted. "It will only appear 'grotesque' . . . to those who are accustomed to regard the things of everyday, and everyday persons, through spectacles couleur-de-rose." But Lewis cannot so simply solve the problem. Reality is multi-faceted, and if satire is an insistence on truth at all costs, what sort of truth does it insist on? Can one order of reality be called "The Satiric Order"? Lewis offers a key distinction: "There is the 'truth' of Satire and there is the 'truth' of Romance.—The term Satire suggests off-hand some resolve on the part of the 'satirist' to pick out disoblighingly all that is objectionable and ill-favoured in a given system of things, and to make of that a work of art. . . . Indeed often it is nothing but people's

vanity that causes them to use that term [satire] at all: often they are, in what they call 'satire', confronted with a description of their everyday life as close to the truth as that found in any other artistic formula. It is merely a formula based rather upon the 'truth' of the intellect than upon the 'truth' of the average romantic sensualism."

To put the matter another way, in the terms of Horace Walpole's epigram, "Life is a comedy to those who think, a tragedy to those who feel." The quality of an action is defined not by the action itself, but by the way one sees it. And the way one sees an action depends on his relation to it—that is, perception depends on the degree of personal involvement. Lewis clarifies the point by making the distinction between self-images and images of others: "All men are some sort of hero to themselves; equally there is no man who is not, to somebody or other, a disagreeable person, as unsightly as a toad, or else a first-class figure of fun. How are we to reconcile these opposites—the seeing-of-ourselves-as-others-see-us, and the self-picture? It is difficult to see how the objective truth of much that is called 'Satire' can be less

29Ibid., p. 46.
true than the truth of lyrical declamation, in praise, for instance of a lovely mistress. There is, in both cases, another truth, that is all. But both are upon an equal intellectual footing I think—only the humanly 'agreeable' is more often false than the humanly 'disagreeable'. That is unavoidable, seeing what we are."

Lewis's description of satire as "simply the truth" is valuable to a study of satiric style, even though we cannot follow him into all of the logical extensions which he draws. The most important concept emerging from his discussion is his insistence on externalistic style as the proper mode of satire. If the writer wishes to portray a character satirically, he must, according to Lewis, stay out of his thoughts, must avoid an intimate and deeply personal knowledge of his private identity. In other words, the satirist is obliged to restrict himself to outside features of his characters, because an inside description would force the reader to see them as they see themselves—as "some sort of hero." The approach from the outside, the strictly objective and scientific projection, makes it inevitable that readers will see the characters as "first-class.

\[30^{\text{Ibid.}}, \text{p. 47.}\]
figures of fun" or as monsters "unsightly as toads." The satirist, then, is supposed to be an artist of the "Great Without"—Lewis ignores the significant pun here—and a scorners of the "Great Within."

Lewis's concept of satiric style is stimulating, but it is, in the last analysis, incomplete. It is not enough, it seems to me, simply to ordain that externals are satiric agents and that internals always produce a sympathetic effect. The inevitable question arises: Why does external detail, or any other kind of detail, act as a satiric agent, as a value, that is, with a downward tendency? And, given an answer to this crucial question, is it not still probable that internal detail can also function satirically? We have seen, I think, that physiological detail and the facts of one's animal nature can serve as satiric agents because they have lower connotative values than those of our usual images of persons and things. Lewis was undoubtedly correct, as far as he went; some external detail is satiric. A wart on Lady Fredigonde's nose in The Apes of God was enough to satirically lower her value. The wart was perhaps the chief characteristic that differentiated the way she saw herself and the way others, including readers, saw her. But the
wart, if it satirized her, did not do so only because it was external; it satirized her because warts have lower connotative values than eminent old dowagers.

The concept of the satiric external becomes complicated when we consider Huxley's use of internal, physiological detail for satiric purposes. It appears that we must hold to our concept of semantic gravity as the more useful key to satiric function. To explore the implications of semantic gravity further, we can recall one of the passages quoted in Chapter One, the passage in which a woman's spirituality is seen as a result of myopia, inflammation of the ovaries, and chronic constipation. The association of spiritual and physical images causes a satiric devaluation. This is self-evidently the case, and because it is self-evident, some will consider the matter closed, already sufficiently explained. But we still have the question before us of why the insertion of constipation into a spiritual Gestalt inevitably brings down, like the power of gravity, the original values. We need more development of the various related problems before this question can be answered. At this point we can only attempt to clarify the phenomenon itself. The passage under consideration establishes an equation of spirituality with physiological disorder. Psychosomatic
theories of one kind or another have accustomed us to the idea that physiological malfunctions can be caused by psychic disorders, so if the passage in question had implied that the woman's visceral problems were caused by her spiritual malaise, we would not feel that the equation is ironic. But the passage implies quite the reverse of the psychosomatic theory; it implies that her "good" spirituality is a result of her "bad" physiology. This kind of satiric "God-guts" equation will be seen as a crucial rhetorical maneuver at a later point in the study.

If we take another example from a completely different area, we will see that the same process of satiric devaluation occurs. In The Devils of Loudun Huxley describes Richelieu's last illness. The Cardinal was suffering from a suppurating anal fistula, and he created so malodorous an atmosphere that state visitors, church dignitaries, his friends, and even servants dreaded coming into his presence. The inner chambers of the greatest political and religious power of the age had become indescribably vile. When he was very close to death—to his "last, sad, most physiological hour"—he took a medication offered by a well-meaning peasant, a concoction of water, herbs, and cow's dung. The medicine was a failure, and

Huxley reports that the Cardinal's death was a relief to all concerned. Whether or not the episode is historically accurate, its result is satiric. The pairing of Richelieu and the lowest of human and animal functions effects a reduction of the higher toward the lower values. In other words, Richelieu's image descends in connotative value toward the connotative value of the anal function. The reverse movement does not occur; the anal function does not ascend toward the level of Richelieu.

The semantic gravity hypothesis can be tested with random examples. In each of the following specimen statements we see a pairing of high and low images, or an insertion of a low element into a high configuration:
"Queen Victoria had gall-stones;" "Tchaikovsky was a homosexual;" "Schopenhauer's pessimism was a result of thirty years of constipation;" "Dali is addicted to coprophagia;" "[Life] is a tale told by an idiot;" "Homo inter urinam et faeces nascimur;" "God, being anthropomorphic at the same time that he is a spirit, must be biologically placed in the order of Gaseous Vertebrates;" "Scatet totus orbis;" and so on. High images descend toward the level of associated low images.

We have pointed out, I think, a simple operational key to much of Huxley's satire. His constant insistence
on the facts of a situation—the facts which Lewis called the "truth of satire"—results in a satiric devaluation of all associated higher images—including, at times, the speaker. And, for Huxley, the "truth of satire" was often the truth of biological science. The biological facts, when coupled with spiritual and intellectual facts, function satirically. We might conclude from this discussion that science is in itself satiric, that the scientific type of truth frequently of its own nature effects a devaluation. In a sense, Copernicus, Darwin, and Freud were great though unwilling satirists. Their work, regardless of their intentions, has produced the effect of devaluing a great many of the ideals of European culture. They inserted new facts into humanity's image of itself, and the result, generally speaking, was satire—a connotative decline of the image.
It would appear from the preceding discussion that Huxley's satire is simple, facilely formulistic, and thoroughly misanthropic. For the satiric effect, he had only to insist on the generally unpleasant realities of flesh and to place them, "vulgarly," in conjunction with higher, more spiritual and intellectual realities. "The ductless glands secrete among other things our moods, our aspirations, our philosophy of life." It is a simple process; through the force of what I have called semantic gravity, the spiritual values are drawn downward toward the level of the physical values. The result, quite obviously, is satire.

A closer look at Huxley's works, however, suggests the possibility that his satire is not as simple and as formulistic as it first seems. We sense in many passages in Huxley's novels the presence of complex ambiguities;

1"And Wanton Optics," in Music at Night, p. 40. In this essay on science and literature Huxley takes note of the "ironic effects" that can be produced by combining physical and intellectual imagery. He credits Jules Laforgue for suggesting the technique. He is content, however, to simply label the technique as "ironic." He does not pursue its implications.
we sense, in other words, that the author's evaluations of flesh are not precisely the same as we expect them to be. Flesh on many occasions is ambiguous; and for that reason our foregoing analysis of his physiological satire is incomplete without a deeper study of its context—a deeper study of Huxley's characteristic ideas. It is not enough simply to point out that flesh can be used for satiric purposes and that Huxley's preoccupation with it informed his satiric method. This is particularly obvious when we recall the essays in which Huxley argued for a revaluation of flesh and physical life. The essays point out the intrinsic absurdity of that Manichean consciousness which has been conditioned to regard flesh as wicked, weak, and vile. They point out the absurdities, and yet, paradoxically as we have seen, Huxley has employed that Manichean consciousness in his satiric style—for semantic gravity depends of course on the connotative lowness of flesh in the minds of readers and also, it would seem, in the mind of the author. We are confronted here with a paradox of the first importance. Huxley directed flesh imagery as a weapon against his satiric victims at the same time that he was insisting on a more balanced and less Manichean evaluation.
This ambiguity in Huxley's use and evaluation of physiology can be seen operating in most of his work during the entirety of his writing career. But the ambiguity can be seen most clearly and dramatically in the conflict between flesh and spirit which underlies his most successful work, Point Counter Point. In a sense, the tension between the Huxley who urges a higher evaluation of physical life and the Huxley who, at the same time, implies a Manichean renunciation of the material world is a tension between two men of opposing temperaments who both strongly influenced Huxley—Swift and D. H. Lawrence. To understand his attitude toward his physiological satire we must understand his attitude toward these two men and the ideas which they represent.

Huxley's essay on Swift (which appeared, significantly, the same year as Point Counter Point) is one of the most illuminating of his commentaries. It offers us 

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2 For detailed studies of the structure and pattern of this book, see Henderson, op. cit., pp. 49-72; and F. Baldanza, "Point Counter Point: Aldous Huxley on the Human Fugue," South Atlantic Quarterly, LVIII (Spring 1959), 248-57. These studies adequately describe the formal characteristics of the book, its pseudo-musical arrangement and its technique of shifting emphasis. I do not, therefore, feel the necessity of repeating this descriptive process here. What is needed is a description of the ambiguous evaluations of physical life which arise from the book, not another structural analysis.
the uncommon spectacle of one physiological satirist attacking another one. He seems in the essay to condemn Swift for using precisely the same satiric technique that Huxley had been using and was continuing to use. Swift's greatest shortcoming, Huxley begins, is his inability to tolerate the body and its animal functions.

Yes, how he hated [the word bowels]! And not the word only—the things too, the harmless, necessary tripes—he loathed and detested them with an intensity of hatred such as few men have ever been capable of. It was unbearable to him that men should go through life with guts and sweetbreads, with livers and lights, spleens and kidneys. That human beings should have to get rid of waste products of metabolism and digestion was for Swift a source of excruciating suffering. And if the Yahoos were all his personal enemies, that was chiefly because they smelled of sweat and excrement, because they had genital organs and dugs, groins and hairy armpits; their moral shortcomings were of secondary importance. Swift's poems about women are more ferocious even than his prose about the Yahoos; his resentment was incredibly bitter. Read (with a bottle of smelling-salts handy, if you happen to be delicately stomached) "The Lady's Dressing-Room," "Cassinus and Peter," "A Beautiful Young Nymph Going to Bed."³

After accusing Swift of masochistically wallowing in "the squelchy imagination of bowels" and their attendant horrors, Huxley astonishingly compares him to Shelley, who was equally horrified by the facts of reality, but who reacted not by "rubbing his nose" in them, but by escaping

³Do What You Will, pp. 99-100.
from them into an aseptic Platonic world of metaphysical absolutes. Metaphysical absolutes, needless to say, have no bowels, and that is why Shelley was so fond of them. Notice that Huxley does not give Swift credit for heroically coming to terms with the brutish aspects of the human race. Huxley insists that Swift refused to accept reality and, in his schizoid way, refused at the same time to ignore it. Vulgarity is acceptable in literature under some conditions, but Swift's were apparently not the right conditions. Rabelais, on the other hand, illustrates, we are told, the proper mode of literary obscenity.

How instructive, in this context, is the comparison with Rabelais! Both men were scatological writers. Mass for mass, there is probably more dung and offal piled up in Rabelais's work than in Swift's. But how pleasant is the dung through which Gargantua wades, how almost delectable the offal! The muck is transfigured by love; for Rabelais loved the bowels which Swift so malignantly hated. His was the true amor fati! he accepted reality in its entirety, accepted with gratitude and delight this amazingly improbable world where flowers spring from manure, and reverent Fathers of the Church . . . meditate on the divine mysteries while seated on the privy; where the singers of the most mystically spiritual love, such as Dante, Petrarch, and Cavalcanti, have wives and rows of children, and where the violences of animal passion can give birth to sentiments of the most exquisite tenderness and refinement. In this most beautiful, ridiculous, and tragic world Swift has no part; he is shut out from it by hatred, by his childish resentment against reality for not being entirely different
from what, in fact, it is. That the lovely Celia should obey the calls of nature like any cow or camel, is for Swift a real disaster. The wise and scientific Rabelaisian, on the other hand, would be distressed if she did not obey them, would prescribe a visit to Carlsbad or Montecatini.  

Swift, in other words, was to be pitied for his inability to accept the given facts of his own being. I am not sure how much the essay tells us about Swift, but it is certain that it tells us a great deal about Huxley. As we note in many of his other essays from the same period, the problem of flesh acceptance operates in other areas, in other times and places. Wordsworth is handled in these terms, and so are Pascal, St. Francis, Calvin, Kant, and Spinoza. All of them—and almost everyone else as well—fail as human beings because their inborn Manichean consciousness prevents them from participating joyfully and wholeheartedly in "the beautiful and humorous, the rather absurd but sacred, but sublime and marvellous world of carnal passion and tenderness." Huxley sees only a few great men who have, unlike the majority in all ages,  


5 For an interesting psychoanalytic discussion of Swift using Huxley's essay as a point of departure, see Norman O. Brown, "The Excremental Vision," in Life against Death (New York, 1959), pp. 179-201.
succeeded in accepting physiological reality sanely. Among them are Chaucer, Rabelais, Blake, and D. H. Lawrence.

If we accept at their face value Huxley's comments on Swift and the other all too numerous flesh-haters and flesh-deniers, we are left with a strikingly enigmatic intellectual situation. We have seen, quite clearly I think, that Huxley's scientifically pessimistic dualism was at the core of his own concept of the world. Mind, as far as he was concerned, had issued from the monkey's womb, and was still irretrievably umbilical to earth. This dualism can be called, in Huxley's own terms, his "personal major premise." And, as his characters say on many occasions, the first and most important law of living is to be true to one's personal major premise. One should, like Sebastian Barnack in *Time Must Have a Stop*, inscribe the motto *Amor Fati* indelibly upon one's consciousness. Huxley, on the other hand, appears to have been untrue to his personal major premise; at least he was not always consciously and willingly true to it. As the essay on Swift indicates, he was anxious to escape from his basic dualistic pessimism, not by breaking the mind's umbilical to the monkey's womb, as he claimed Shelley had vainly tried to do, but by attempting to change his evaluation of the monkey at the
other end of the evolutionary cord. He was trying, in other words, to retrain himself to view the physical, animal world as he thought it should sanely be viewed—as a world of equal beauty and significance.

That the ideas and attitudes of D. H. Lawrence are responsible at least in part for Huxley's effort to change his inbred concept of physical life is obvious. Huxley and Lawrence were close friends during the last five years of Lawrence's life. His many letters to Huxley and his wife Maria show his deep attachment to them, and Huxley's introduction to Lawrence's collected letters shows a similar attachment to Lawrence. Huxley sums up his judgment of Lawrence in an entry in his diary under the date December 27, 1927: "Lunched and spent the p.m. with the Lawrences. D. H. L. in admirable form, talking wonderfully. He is one of the few people I feel real respect and admiration for. Of most other eminent people I have met I feel that at any rate I belong to the same species as they do. But this man has something different and superior in kind, not degree."  

6 On the relationship between these two writers, see Henry Alexander, "Lawrence & Huxley," Queen's Quarterly, XLII (January 1935), 96-108.

The relationship between the two men is particularly strange, since they seem, at least at first glance, to be so totally dissimilar in ideas, attitudes, and personality. Huxley was the aloof and fastidious ironist, the fashionably disillusioned aesthete for whom the sordid imperfections of the human body were a source of inexhaustible hilarity. Lawrence, on the other side of the coin, was the intense and passionate prophet of the Dark Gods in nature. Lawrence first struck Huxley as a phenomenon of the greatest magnitude, as a geologic cataclysm on legs. When they met for the first time in 1915 Lawrence immediately invited Huxley to join his utopia in Florida. They intended to live apart from the horrors of western civilization on a plantation near Ft. Myers owned by the composer Delius.8 Even though Huxley knew how impossibly impractical Lawrence's Florida utopia was—or perhaps because he knew it—he consented at once to join the party. "Before tea was over," Huxley reports, "he asked me if I would join the colony, and though I was an intellectually cautious young man, not at all inclined to enthusiasms, though Lawrence had startled and

8For the complete details of this projected utopia, and of Huxley's part in it, see Richard Aldington, Portrait of a Genius, But... (New York, 1950), pp. 203-05.
embarrassed me with sincerities of a kind to which my up-
bringing had not accustomed me, I answered yes." He knew,
or at least fervently hoped, that the scheme would fall
through—which, of course, it did.

Cities of God have always crumbled; and Law-
rence's city—his village, rather, for he hated
cities--his Village of the Dark God would doubt-
less have disintegrated like all the rest. It
was better that it should have remained, as it was
always to remain, a project and a hope. I knew
this even as I said I would join the colony. But
there was something about Lawrence which made such
knowledge, when one was in his presence, curiously
irrelevant. He might propose impractical schemes,
he might say or write things that were demonstrably
incorrect or even, on occasion (as when he talked
about science), absurd. But to a very considerable
extent it didn't matter. What mattered was always
Lawrence himself, was the fire that burned within
him, that glowed with so strange and marvelous a
radiance in almost all he wrote.9

Lawrence made his magnetic personality felt in
Huxley's work, in one way or another, throughout most of
his writing career. We get the impression from the char-
acters in Crome Yellow, Antic Hay, and Those Barren Leaves
that the most pressing problem in living was the problem
of trying to live wholly, passionately, and naturally.
Denis Stone in Crome Yellow laments his inability to live
actively, like a Laurentian pagan. In Antic Hay Gumbril's
attempt to become "The Complete Man" by wearing a false
beard is a particularly comic parody of Lawrence's ideal

9The Olive Tree, p. 223.
of complete personal action. Lawrence's emphatic recommendation of the natural life, the life of the free noble savage who is uncorrupted and unvitiated by the grossness of civilization, becomes the source of a richly comic episode in *Those Barren Leaves*. Mary Thriplow, a sophisticated young novelist, who, like most of Huxley's young intellectuals, is intensely bored with her sophistication, expatiates on the glories of primitive life while walking through the Italian countryside. "'How extraordinarily nice and jolly he looks!'" she said, pointing to a country grocer squatting in front of his village store. "'So simple and happy and contented! . . . One envies them their lives. . . . These people have no doubts, or after-thoughts . . . or—what's worse than after-thoughts—simultaneous-thoughts. They know what they want and what's right; they feel just what they ought to feel by nature—like the heroes in the *Iliad*—and act accordingly. And the result is, I believe, that they're much better than we are, much gooder, we used to say when we were children; the word's more expressive. Yes, much gooder.'"

After another few paragraphs of this lyrical evocation of the simple life, Miss Thriplow finds herself suddenly horrified as she enters the store by its malodorous atmosphere. "It was dark within and filled with a violent
smell of goat's milk cheese, pickled tunny, tomato preserve and highly flavored sausage. 'Whew!' said Miss Thriplow, and pulling out a small handkerchief, she took refuge with the ghost of Parma violets. It was a pity that these simple lives in white aprons had to be passed amid such surroundings!" She barely survived the smell of the store, and her disillusionment with these noble savages was complete later when they came close to killing each other over a short weight. "They turned away; the sound of the dispute followed them down the street. Miss Thriplow did not know whether to be grateful to Mr. Cardan for saying nothing about her friend in the white apron. These simple folk . . . the little shovel for the sugar . . . so much better, so much gooder than we . . . . In the end she almost wished that he would say something about it. Mr. Cardan's silence seemed more ironic than any words."  

Though Lawrence's personality is treated satirically in *Two or Three Graces*, 10 though his ideas are parodied

10those *Barren Leaves*, pp. 162-64.

11In this long story Huxley models the character of Kingham on Lawrence. It is not a complimentary portrait. Aldington credits Huxley with presenting here one of the most accurate pictures of Lawrence. But Aldington, as the title of his book suggests, is slightly biased against Lawrence.
in *Those Barren Leaves* and *Antic Hay*, it is clear that Huxley continued to be impressed and inspired by the Laurentian point of view. The problem of coming to terms with physical life, of learning to live not only with the brain but also with the body, the instincts and emotions, remained for Huxley the most pressing of the problems of living as well as of creating. As we have pointed out, he was beginning, in his essays between 1926 and 1932, to advocate Lawrence's concept of complete living. It was a concept, in slightly different terms, of Rabelaisian living, which attempted to revaluate physiological reality and to escape from the Manichean prejudices against the body. How successful he was in his attempt to effect this improbable merger of Lawrence and Rabelais will be seen when we consider the implications of *Point Counter Point*.

That book is his most fully developed commentary on the Laurentian mode of life. Though Lawrence's attitudes are couched very often in mystical terms, in terms, for example, of the "dark otherness" of nature, Huxley projects the attitudes in their essential terms of personal completeness. At that early date he did not emphasize the mysticism inherent in Lawrence's view of nature.
The epigraph to *Point Counter Point* from Fulke-Greville's "Chorus Sacerdotum" states the theme of the book—the theme upon which the book is a set of musical variations.

Oh wearisome condition of humanity!
Born under one law, to another bound;
Vainly begot, and yet forbidden vanity;
Created sick, commanded to be sound;
What meaneth nature by these diverse laws?
Passion and reason, self-division cause.

From Huxley's point of view Lawrence's teachings offer the possibility of an escape from Fulke-Greville's pessimistic conclusion that life is, in effect, inescapably self-divided—schizoid, in more modern terms. One has only to live with the totality of one's personality to become sane. To put it another way, sanity is a function of psychic unity, and psychic unity is possible only after becoming fully conscious of one's natural diversity. Accept reality, Lawrence seems to say, and conscious diversity will become psychic oneness.

The paradox will become clearer after we witness the conflict in *Point Counter Point* between Mark Rampion, the mouthpiece in the book for Lawrence, and Phillip Quarles, Huxley's self-portrait. Rampion urges Quarles to broaden his life by learning to live emotionally as well as cerebrally. He should become an "atavismus," an intelligent primitive, "big game with a soul." In a word,
he should become civilized. "Civilization is harmony and completeness. Reason, feeling, instinct, the life of the body. . . . Barbarism is being lop-sided. You can be a barbarian of the intellect as well as of the body. A barbarian of the soul and the feelings as well as of sensuality. Christianity made us barbarians of the soul and now science is making us barbarians of the intellect."  

Rampion goes on, changing the metaphor, to put it another way: the human race has been drastically unhealthy, diseased in fact, because of its refusal to develop all of its component parts equally. We have "Jesus's Disease," "Newton's Disease," "Ford's Disease." They are fatal, as history so vividly shows, to the sane life. "Between them, the three have pretty well killed us. Ripped the life out of our bodies and stuffed us with hatred." (p. 139)

Rampion recalls, in the midst of his sermon on sane living, the details of one of his allegorical paintings. The picture shows how the human race is slowly being vivisected by its refusal to develop the totality of its being.

Jesus, in the loincloth of the execution morning, and an over-alled surgeon were represented, scalpel in hand, one on either side of

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12 Point Counter Point (New York, 1928), p. 123. Subsequent references to this book in this chapter will appear in the text.
an operating table, on which, foreshortened, the soles of his feet presented to the spectator, lay crucified a half-dissected man. From the horrible wound in his belly escaped a coil of entrails which, falling to the earth, mingled with those of the gashed and bleeding woman lying in the fore-ground, to be transformed by an allegorical metamorphosis into a whole people of living snakes. In the background receded a landscape of hills, dotted with black collieries and chimneys. On one side of the picture, behind the figure of Jesus, two angels—the spiritual product of the vivisectors' mutilations—were trying to rise on their outspread wings. Vainly, for their feet were entangled in the coils of the serpents. For all their efforts, they could not leave the earth. (pp. 39-40)

Flesh, in a word, dominates spirit; and spirit cannot hope to escape the guts of which it is a product.

Next, Rampion's rhapsody of disgust with one-sidedness takes the form of a fantastic diatribe against Shelley. Shelley was Rampion's favorite victim; Shelley was one of the best examples of what happened when the body and the other inescapable facts of life were denied.

Think of that awful incapacity to call a spade a spade. He always had to pretend it was an angel's harp or a platonic imagination. Do you remember the ode "To a Skylark"? "Hail to thee, blithe spirit! Bird thou never wert!" . . . Just pretending, just lying to himself, as usual. The lark couldn't be allowed to be a mere bird, with blood and feathers and a nest and an appetite for caterpillars. Oh no. That wasn't nearly poetical enough, that was much too coarse. It had to be a disembodied spirit. Bloodless, boneless. A kind of ethereal flying slug. It was only to be expected. Shelley was a kind of flying slug himself; and, after all, nobody can
really write about anything except himself. If you're a slug, you must write about slugs, even though your subject is supposed to be a skylark. But I wish to God ... the bird had had as much sense as those sparrows in the book of Tobit and dropped a good large mess in his eye. It would have served him damned well right, for saying it wasn't a bird. Blithe spirit, indeed! Blithe spirit! (pp. 143-44)

Rampion's Laurentian doctrine has a profound effect on Phillip Quarles. He, like Huxley, is one of those extreme intellectual ironists who has developed his mind at the expense of his body and his emotions. His temperamental coldness, his inability to feel the most rudimentary emotions, causes him to consider himself deeply inadequate as a man and, even, as an artist. He comes close to estranging himself from his wife, because he simply cannot react spontaneously to her love. His books suffer, he thinks, because of his lack of instinctive sympathy with the feelings of his characters. He knows what his trouble is, he knows that Rampion is correct in his diagnosis, but he is still unable to act upon his knowledge. Intellectually, he favors anti-intellectualism, but his instincts—his "personal major premise"—continue to make him a cold, pyrrhonically indifferent ironist.

The terms of Quarles's thinking on the problem are crucially important. The passages from his notebooks reprinted in Point Counter Point provide us with the clearest
and most detailed account of how Huxley reacted to Lawrence's ideas.

Two things give me confidence in Rampion's opinions about the problems of living. The first is that he himself lives in a more satisfactory way than anyone I know. He lives more satisfactorily, because he lives more realistically than other people. Rampion, it seems to me, takes into account all the facts and then proceeds to make his way of living fit the facts, and doesn't try to compel the facts to fit in with a preconceived idea of the right way of living (like these imbecile Christians and intellectuals and moralists and efficient business men). The second thing which gives me confidence in his judgment is that so many of his opinions agree with mine, which apart from all questions of vanity, is a good sign, because we start from such distant points, from opposite poles in fact. Opinions on which two opponents agree have a fair chance of being right. The chief difference between us, alas, is that his opinions are lived, and mine, in the main only thought. Like him, I mistrust intellectualism, but intellectually, I disbelieve in the adequacy of any scientific or philosophical theory, any abstract moral principle, but on scientific, philosophical, and abstract-moral grounds. The problem for me is to transform a detached intellectual scepticism into a way of harmonious all-round living. (p. 278)

Being with Rampion rather depresses me; for he makes me see what a great gulf separates the knowledge of the obvious from the actual living of it. I perceive now that the real charm of the intellectual life is its easiness. It's the substitution of simple intellectual schemata for the complexities of reality; of still and formal death for the bewildering movements of life. It's incomparably easier to know a lot, say, about the history of art and to have profound ideas about metaphysics and sociology than to know personally and intuitively a lot about one's fellows and to have satisfactory
relations with one's friends and lovers, one's wife and children. . . . The intellectual life is child's play; which is why intellectuals tend to become children—and then imbeciles and finally, as the political and industrial history of the last few centuries clearly demonstrates, homicidal lunatics and wild beasts. The repressed functions don't die; they deteriorate, they fester, they revert to primitiveness. . . . Some drown their sorrows in alcohol, but still more drown them in books and artistic dilettantism; some try to forget themselves in fornication, dancing, movies, listening-in, others in lectures and scientific hobbies. The books and hobbies are better sorrow-drowners than drink and fornication; they leave no headache, none of that despairing post coitum triste feeling. Till quite recently, I took learning and philosophy and science—all the activities that are magnificently lumped under the title of "The Search for Truth"—very seriously. . . . The pursuit of Truth is just a polite name for the intellectual's favourite pastime of substituting simple and therefore false abstractions for the living complexities of reality. But seeking Truth is much easier than learning the art of integral living (in which, of course, Truth-Seeking will take its due and proportionate place along with the other amusements, like skittles and mountain climbing.) Which explains, though it doesn't justify, my continued and excessive indulgence in the vices of informative reading and abstract generalization. Shall I ever have the strength of mind to break myself of these indolent habits of intellectualism and devote my energies to the more serious and difficult task of living integral? And even if I did try to break these habits, shouldn't I find that heredity was at the bottom of them and that I was congenitally incapable of living wholly and harmoniously? (pp. 279-81)

"Physical, intuitive, instinctive, emotional life—
I am not even half a man," he concludes; and the same can be said for most other characters in the book.
One-sidedness afflicts them all, conditions them, molds their personalities. They are stick figures and hollow men—barbarians of the intellect and the soul; in a word, they are anti-Laurentian characters. There are, for example, Lucy Tantamount, who is perpetually bored and perpetually promiscuous; Lord Edward, who cannot function except in the laboratory; Lord Gattenden, who spends all of his time, as a wheelchair invalid, inventing mathematical proofs for the existence of God; Sidney Quarles, who always utters momentous platitudes, announces plans for definitive scholarly works, but can concentrate on nothing except crossword puzzles; and many others. One of the most interestingly and skillfully conceived of these characters is Maurice Spandrell. He, like the others, is definitely a hollow man, but he is just as definitely a real man. He is despicable, diabolical, and criminally neurotic—but still, frighteningly realistic. He is "like a gargoyle—a gargoyle in a pink boudoir. There was one on Notre Dame in just that attitude, leaning forward with his daemon's face between his claws. Only the gargoyle was a comic devil, so extravagantly diabolical that you couldn't take his devilishness very seriously. Spandrell was a real person, not a caricature; that was
why his face was so much more sinister and tragical. It was a gaunt face. Cheekbones and jaw showed in hard outline through the tight skin. . . . When he smiles . . . it's like an appendicitis scar with ironical corners."

(p. 113)

He is a diabolist and a mystic, a fornicator and a murderer. As diverse as these activities would seem to be, they are in reality functions of the same dominating idée fixe. Spandrell had identified his step-father, General Knoyle, with the obscene military men who had figured in one of those grossly pornographic novels circulated at his school. He had furtively read Miss Floggy's School for Girls and A Night in a Nunnery, with their yellowed photographs of fin de siècle orgies, and had been horrified later by his mother's marriage to a young officer who, he was sure, was precisely like those fantastically lascivious officers pictured in the books. During his adulthood Spandrell continued to view all human experience in pornographic terms. All love, all passion, all tenderness were for him only thinly disguised re-enactments of the goings-on at Miss Floggy's school. All human experience was, in short, sordid, repulsive and, in the final analysis, ridiculous. Even his murder of Everard
Webley had been absurd—just a rather pointless and unsanitary physiological operation. He committed the murder partly because he hated Webley's fascism, but mainly because he was bored and wanted a new experience. He thought it possible that he would see in his own act of gratuitous violence some meaning and significance. But, of course, he was disappointed. This *acte gratuit* was fundamentally as unimportant as all the others. Cleaning up after the murder, he struggled with Webley's unmanageable corpse and was struck by the hilarity of the situation. "He bent down and moved one of the thing's arms toward the side. It returned, when he let go, halfway to its former position. Like a puppet, Spandrell reflected, with elastic joints. Grotesque rather than terrible; not tragical, but only rather tiresome and even absurd. That was the essential horror—that it was all (even *this*) a kind of bad and tedious jape. 'We shall have to find some string', he said. 'Something to tie the limbs into place'. It was like amateur plumbing or mending the summer house oneself; just rather unpleasant and ludicrous." (p. 463)

Spandrell is the extreme case in the book, the extreme object lesson. His inability to live with all of his personality drives him finally to that insanely passionless violence—to rape, murder and, the final senseless
acte gratuit, suicide. With him it is all just a bad joke. Life is a cosmic joke and the universe is a result of some stupid god's lack of taste. But, and this seems to be Huxley's point in the book, it is not the gods who are to blame; it is the human race itself. Failure to live integrally with the emotions, the body, the spirit, and the mind results in chaos. Sanity is to be achieved by following D. H. Lawrence's way of integral living. Such, I think, is the conscious "message" of Point Counter Point. It is an eloquent tribute to the ideas of a friend.

Now we come to the most strikingly ironic aspect of this situation: the friend did not like the eloquent tribute. He hated it, in fact. Lawrence's letter to Huxley about it is obviously restrained—none of his letters to Huxley exhibit that violence of invective for which he was famous—but we can sense in it that he was genuinely appalled by the book. His letter is worth careful consideration.

I have read Point Counter Point with a heart sinking through my boot-soles and a rising admiration. I do think you've shown the truth, perhaps the last truth, about you and your generation, with really fine courage. It seems to me it would take ten times the courage to write P. Counter P., than it took to write Lady C.: And if the public knew what it was reading, it would
throw a hundred stones at you, to one at me. I do think that art has to reveal the palpitating moment or the state of man as it is. And I think you do that, terribly. But what a moment! and what a state! if you can only palpitate to murder, suicide, and rape, in their various degrees —and you state plainly that it is so— care, however are we going to live through the days? Preparing still another murder, suicide, and rape? But it becomes of a phantasmal boredom and produces ultimately inertia, inertia, inertia and final atrophy of the feelings. Till, I suppose, comes a final super-war, and murder, suicide, rape sweeps away the vast bulk of mankind. It is as you say—intellectual appreciation does not amount to so much, it's what you thrill to. And if murder, suicide, rape is what you thrill to, and nothing else, then it's your destiny—you can't change it mentally. You live by what you thrill to, and there's the end to it. Still for all that it's a perverse courage which makes the man accept the slow suicide of inertia and sterility: the perverseness of a perverse child. —It's amazing how men are like that. Richard Aldington is exactly the same inside, murder, suicide, rape—with a desire to be raped very strong—same thing really—just like you—only he doesn't face it, and gilds his perverseness. It makes me feel ill, I've had more hemorrhage here and been in bed this week. Sporca miseria. If I don't find some solid spot to climb out of, in this bog, I'm done. I can't stand murder, suicide, rape—especially rape: and especially being raped. Why do men only thrill to a woman who'll rape them and s— on their face? All I want to do to your Lucy is smack her across the mouth, your Rampion is the most boring character in the book—a gas-bag. Your attempt at intellectual sympathy!—It's all rather disgusting, and I feel like a badger that has its hole on Wimbledon Common and trying not to be caught. Well, care, I feel like saying good-bye to you—but one will have to go on saying good-bye for years.  

Lawrence, then, despised the book enough to think of breaking his friendship with Huxley. He despised it, what's more, even though Huxley had made a sincere effort to dramatize Lawrence's ideas in the most effective way. His reaction raises a problem which is important, not only to an understanding of Lawrence's personality (which, after all, is not the issue here), but also to an understanding of Point Counter Point. If we approach an acceptable explanation of his reaction, we will approach an explanation of the book's satiric complexity. Why, then, did Lawrence dislike the book which advocated his own ideas?

I can suggest three possible answers. It might be true, first of all, that Lawrence was reacting to the dispondency caused by his illness, that the pessimism of Point Counter Point was deepened by his own painful—and eventually fatal—disease. A second possible answer is supplied by Richard Aldington in his biography of Lawrence. Lawrence, Aldington claims, hated the fact that his own novel, *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, had been condemned and withdrawn, while Huxley's had been chosen as a Book of the Month in America and had received widespread critical acclaim. Lawrence, in a word, might have been jealous.
According to Aldington, Lawrence's first comment after reading *Point Counter Point* was, "Mark my words, within a year that Huxley will be in the lunatic asylum."\(^{14}\)

These two suggested answers are certainly parts of the reason why Lawrence reacted as he did to his own philosophy as expressed by Huxley. But these suggestions are not, it seems clear, complete answers. True, Lawrence was given to emotional scenes and fits of rage; but he was also a highly sensitive and intelligent reader. The third possible reason for his reaction—and in my view the most important one—is that Lawrence sensed in the book the presence of contrary elements, elements which subtly but effectively negated his image of himself in it. He must have sensed, to be specific, the constant presence in *Point Counter Point* of that very Manichean prejudice which the author had intended consciously to renounce. He sensed, in a word, the ambiguities of flesh.

To test this hypothesis—and at the same time to clarify it—we must look more closely at Huxley's satiric technique in the book. Physiological imagery, as we have seen, is Huxley's chief satiric weapon. It is an effective weapon because of its connotative lowness. Further, \(^{14}\)Aldington, p. 396.
we have seen that Huxley was trying to change his evaluation of physiological reality. If he had succeeded in this revaluation—this connotative upgrading of the flesh—it stands to reason that he would not have been able to employ the same Manichean satiric weapon. It stands to reason; but the fact is that in Point Counter Point, perhaps more than in any of his other books, dualistic pessimism operates as the key to his satiric technique. Thus, the ambiguity of the book arises: we are told that flesh is "good," but told in a way which uses the "badness" of flesh as a stylistic device.

Consider the following characteristic passages. Lord Edward Tantamount, early in the book, is shown contemplating suicide. His contemplation, however, brings him to the conclusion, via Claude Bernard's concept of the "universal concert of things," that his life is a fragment of the universe and that, as such, it cannot be destroyed. It is scientifically impossible to subtract from the total life of the universe. If he killed himself he would only change the chemical structure of his mind and body. Death is a rearrangement, not a loss. It follows inevitably—and satirically—that everything is chemistry and structural pattern. "Bits of animals and
plants become human beings. What was one day a sheep's hind leg and leaves of spinach was the next part of the hand that wrote, the brain that conceived the slow movement of the Jupiter Symphony. And another day had come when thirty-six years of pleasures, pains, hungers, loves, thoughts, music, together with infinite unrealized potentialities of melody and harmony, had manured an unknown corner of a Viennese cemetery, to be transformed into grass and dandelions, which in their turn had been transformed into sheep, whose hind legs had in their turn been transformed into other musicians. (p. 34) After coming to that apocalyptic insight Lord Edward contemplated legs of mutton and spinach with awe-struck reverence.

The important element here is of course the satiric strategy of such a passage. The reduction of Mozart's image results from the insertion of new facts into the Mozartian Gestalt. The ambiguity of the passage arises from the fact that we are free to interpret the satiric strategy in a different way. We can interpret it, that is, as a satire of Lord Edward, not Mozart. By reducing Mozart to flesh, Lord Edward exhibited his own pedantic foolishness. But the ambiguity cannot, it seems, be easily resolved. We cannot be sure that one of these satiric
possibilities is the correct one. We can only be sure that both polarities, Lord Edward's pedantry and the common concept of Mozart's genius, are satirized. We must note, however, that the author who intended the passage to satirize Lord Edward for his one-sidedness was working consciously in the Laurentian mode. On the other hand, the author who conceived and wrote the argument reducing genius to chemistry and soul to legs of mutton was working—consciously or unconsciously; it doesn't matter which—in the Manichean, the anti-Laurentian mode.

Another characteristic passage occurs several pages later. Lord Edward, deep in his work, slowly becomes aware of a Bach suite being played in another part of his house. He is an admirer of Bach, and the gradual recognition of the distant music awakens in him a sense of spiritual exaltation. But, in Huxley's characteristic manner, the sense of spiritual exaltation is depicted in chemical and physiological terms. This time it is Lord Edward, not Mozart, whose inspiration is reduced to flesh. "Pongileoni's blowing and the scraping of the anonymous fiddlers had shaken the air in the great hall, had set the glass of the windows looking onto it vibrating; and this in turn had shaken the air in Lord Edward's apartment
on the further side. The shaking air rattled Lord Edward's membrana tympani; the interlocked malleus, incus and stirrup bones were set in motion so as to agitate the membrane of the oval window and raise an infinitesimal storm in the fluid of the labyrinth. The hairy endings shuddered like weeds in a rough sea; a vast number of obscure miracles were performed in the brain, and Lord Edward ecstatically whispered 'Bach!' . . . A dog with the smell of rabbits in his nostrils could hardly have shown a more indecent eagerness." (p. 38)

In relation to Lawrence's philosophy, such passages can be taken, as we have pointed out, in either of two ways. The passage can be understood as satiric of Lord Edward or, more generally, as satiric of the entire human species. If it is a specific attack on Lord Edward, the passage is in line with the Laurentian ideal; Lord Edward is the type of man for which Lawrence holds the greatest contempt—the "barbarian of the intellect," the one-sided, atrophied man who has quelled his feelings, instincts, and emotions. Lawrence, then, could be expected to applaud the reduction of Lord Edward to the subhuman level. The dehumanization is also in accord, interestingly enough, with Pascal's dictum which Huxley
quoted on several occasions: "L'homme est ni ange ni bête, et le malheur veut que qui veut faire l'ange fait la bête." In other words, the man who aspires to be super-human always turns out to be sub-human. And so it was with Lord Edward. This is perhaps the only point on which Lawrence and Pascal could agree.  

But we must also look at the other side of the satiric ambiguity. The rhetorical reduction of Lord Edward to flesh—to chemistry and hairy endings—seems also to reduce the entirety of humanity. A great scientist becomes a ravenous dog, and Bach's B-Minor Suite becomes, by a curious process of satiric synaesthesia, the smell of rabbits in his nostrils. We must ask now whether Lawrence would have approved this kind of complete reduction and analysis of human beings and human culture. It is probable that he would not have approved; the passage seems to imply the scientific absurdity of Lawrence's vision of Dark Gods and numen in the physical body. True, Huxley leaves room in the brain for some "obscure miracles," but the context of the passage makes it plain that these miracles have to do with electrodynamic impulses from cerebellum to hypothalamus. The "vast number of obscure miracles" might be in line with Lawrence's physical ideal,  

but one doubts if he would have appreciated seeing the Dark Gods and numen charted as crooked lines on an electro-encephalogram. When the body is viewed in these strictly chemical, electrical, and structural terms, the Dark Gods of instinct and passion life disappear. Thus, the ambiguity of the passage—and of the entire book—is as follows: Huxley's satiric technique, his anatomical vision, serves the Laurentian concept by reducing anti-Laurentian characters like Lord Edward to sub-humanity; but at the same time the technique tends to make the Laurentian concept absurd and untenable. It undermines Lawrence's ideals because it renders the body devoid of its alleged "numinous" significance. It would seem, in other words, that the Laurentian Dark God is not a suitable satiric agent. Therefore, if the body is to be used as a satiric agent, the body must first be shown to be only a body—not a Dark God or some other symbol in Lawrence's iconography.

Apparently, physiological satire is unavoidably anti-Laurentian. The anatomical vision and the Laurentian vision are mutually exclusive—like analysis and synthesis. And it is perhaps needless to say that the anatomical vision continues to operate satirically throughout Point
Counter Point. The theme of the book is not only that, in Fulke-Greville's terms, "Passion and reason, self-division cause," and not only that, in Lawrence's terms, harmony and completeness can re-unify the divided personality; the point is also that the personality is irredeemably divided by the disparity between mind and body. One can, like Lawrence, imagine that one's blood offers the deepest wisdom, but Huxley could not avoid the factual knowledge that the so-called wise blood is in reality stupidly and unsentiently chemical.

In Point Counter Point, we must conclude, we have one of those intrinsically ambiguous works which preach one thing and practice its opposite, which state one doctrine directly and imply another in their style. There are notable examples of this kind of "content-style" ambiguity in literature. De Sade's Juliette, for example, preaches the desirability of doing evil, but in the process of preaching it endeavors to prove that evil does not exist. And, lest someone assume that I am condemning Point Counter Point by placing it in a category with Juliette, we can probably also include in the category numerous thoroughly respectable works—great works, in fact. The most noteworthy example is, if Blake's criticism is valid, Paradise Lost. Though Milton is officially
on the side of the angels, his characterization of the heroic Satan suggests that he is of the devil's party—but unofficially, unconsciously. This assertion about Milton's unofficial diabolical sympathy has of course aroused much anger and many arguments. I do not intend to debate the issue here. The important fact is that, in the minds of a considerable number of sensitive readers of literature, "content-style" ambiguity does exist in many works, and that the tension between the diverse meanings arising from the ambiguity can be a major cause of the work's artistic effect.

Huxley, then, was officially on the side of Lawrence, but he was unconsciously on the side of the anti-Laurentian, Manichean frame of mind. Perhaps the most incisive commentary on this type of ambiguity is to be found in Kenneth Burke's *Attitudes toward History*. "A writer may profess allegiance to a certain cause, but you find on going over his work that the enemies of this cause are portrayed with greater vividness than its advocates. Here is his 'truth' about his professions of belief. . . . We reveal, beneath an author's 'official front,' the level at which a lie is impossible. If a man's virtuous characters are dull, and his wicked
characters are done vigorously, his art has voted for the wicked ones, regardless of his 'official front.' If a man talks of glory but employs the imagery of desolation, his true subject is desolation. If, to put it another way, a man writes about Lawrence's ideal of passionate and palpitating life but uses the imagery of the dissecting table, his subject is the dissecting table—or, at least, the dissecting table is one of the ambiguities of his artistic structure. Lawrence, then, had good reason to feel that Point Counter Point was against him. It proved that Huxley was not really one of his converts, that Huxley had, in essence, remained true to his personal major premise.

FOUR: FLESH AND SPIRIT

In the late thirties it became apparent to everyone that Huxley had ceased to be merely a cynical satirist and had become an advocate of a way of life generally known as "mysticism." It seems necessary, therefore, for this study to explore some of the implications of Huxley's later views. Mysticism, it would seem, is intimately related to the rhetoric of physiological satire. Our purpose in this chapter will be to discover what changes, if any, mysticism effected in Huxley's satiric technique. Also, the question of the complex interrelations of flesh and spirit which must arise in a discussion of "physico-mystical" satire will lead us to a fuller understanding of the basic phenomenon which I have called semantic gravity.

"Mysticism" is one of those semantically impossible terms which seem to have a different meaning each time it is used. The essence of mysticism, according to William James, is ineffability;¹ and ineffable is perhaps

the only accurate way to describe Huxley's later, mystical doctrines. It is one of the major ironies of life that an individual's private intuition about the nature of things, his sudden emergence into psychic clarity, should seem to others totally incomprehensible. One man's light is another man's darkness. Even Huxley with all of his talents for precise, careful, and vivid writing has failed to make his new insights clear. And, perhaps needless to say, he is acutely aware of his inability to communicate to the world in general the intimate knowledge of reality which he feels he has gained. For the most part, it is a problem of language: "The only vocabulary at our disposal," says Mr. Propter in *After Many a Summer*, "is a vocabulary primarily intended for thinking strictly human thoughts about strictly human concerns. But the things we want to talk about are non-human realities and non-human ways of thinking." Mysticism is incommunicable because there are no terms suitable for communicating it. What we need is a vocabulary of the soul.

And, lacking such a vocabulary, Huxley's commentaries on the mystical approach to understanding have been at best vague and nebulously inexact. Despite the impossibility of doing a thorough job of describing Huxley's

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[^2]: *After Many a Summer*, p. 178.
mysticism, a cursory and fragmentary treatment does seem necessary at this point in our study of his physiological satire. Our chief concern, of course, is with the role of physical imagery in Huxley's satiric technique. At first glance it would seem that his conversion to mysticism would naturally have profoundly altered the texture of his prose, would have prompted him to dwell on the spirit instead of the body. But, as any of his later books will immediately show, his mysticism did not force physical imagery out of his style. In the new context of mysticism, flesh imagery continues to operate as a dominant stylistic device.

There were changes of course. Huxley's books published after 1936 clearly exhibit the effects of mysticism. But the new spiritualism coexisted with the old Huxleyan preoccupation with the flesh and its satiric implications. His discussions of mysticism are often discussions of the physiological conditions necessary for the attaining of grace, the Dharma Body, the Divine Ground and the like. Such physical concerns as Yoga breathing exercises, vegetarianism, fasting, hallucinatory drugs, and coitus reservatus occupy a prominent position in the later works. The problem before us now is how and to what
extent the texture of Huxley's satiric style is altered by his conversion to mysticism. What happens to the anatomical vision, in other words, when it suddenly finds itself in a spiritual context?

Huxley's developing attitude toward mysticism is reflected in his novels. Mystics, like practically all other kinds of people, receive elaborately contemptuous treatment in the early works. His early dominating philosophical position, Pyrrhonism, is the element which marked him as a cynic. His Pyrrhonic belief in the impossibility of answering the fundamental questions of philosophy prompted him to make sport of all attempts to answer them. Lawrence's doctrine of wholeness and harmony, which Huxley had first seriously expressed in *Point Counter Point*, was his first step in the direction of a positive prescription for the crimes and follies he had so unrelentingly put on display. Eight years later, in *Eyeless in Gaza*, he took the second step toward serious involvement with the problems of existence: he announced to the world that he had embraced mysticism.3

In the early novels, however, when the idea of becoming a mystic would have seemed hilarious to him, Huxley showed himself aware of mysticism and some of its attributes. There is a trio of assorted spiritualists in his first novel, *Crome Yellow*, who are altogether as absurd as any of his other characters; and Burlap in *Point Counter Point* is an effective caricature of the professional spiritualist. In addition to these ludicrous "soulful ones" in the early novels, there is one fully developed treatment of the serious mystic in *Those Barren Leaves* which makes it obvious that Huxley at that early date (1925) thought seriously of the advantages and disadvantages of the mystical approach to life.

Christianity might have made us, in Mark Rampion's phrase, "barbarians of the soul"; but the retreat of Huxley's contemporaries from Christianity did not do away with this particular kind of one-sidedness. Mystics, mediums, occultists, and theosophists continued to thrive. And, in the early novels, Huxley gives these characters the full satiric treatment. Mr. Barbecue-Smith in *Crome Yellow* writes inspirational books on "The Conduct of Life." His latest effort, an overwhelming commercial success, is entitled *Pipelines to the Infinite*. "I prelude my trances,"
says Barbecue-Smith, "by turning over the pages of any Dictionary of Quotations . . . that comes to hand. That sets the key, so to speak; that insures that the universe shall come flowing in, not in a continuous rush, but in aphorismic drops." 4 One must, he feels, always put oneself in touch with the macrocosm. In the same book, Mrs. Wimbush spends most of her time "being spiritual." Astrology is her hobby, and she uses her astral computations to help her win at the race track. She places wagers on football too, because this is obviously much more of a challenge to her astrological skill. After all, casting the horoscope of a horse is simple; but the process of balancing the horoscopes of two opposing elevens is a very difficult one. "A match between the Spurs and the Villa entailed a conflict in the heavens so vast and so complicated that it was not to be wondered at if she sometimes made a mistake about the outcome." 5 Also in the same book we find the young painter Ivor Lombard, who is gaily and flippantly mystical. He produces non-representational paintings with titles such as "Portrait of an Angel," "Astral Beings at Play," "A Party of Souls on

4Crome Yellow, p. 62.

5Ibid., p. 19.
Their Way to a Higher Sphere," and so on. So entranced is Mary Bracegirdle's young mind by Ivor's spirituality that she does not hesitate for long in yielding to his advances.

Though the absurd mystics are plentiful in *Crome Yellow*, they do not recur again so frequently. It is significant to note that none of these people is a sincere mystic. Mr. Barbecue-Smith is spiritual because he can make a good living at it; Mrs. Wimbush is spiritual because it keeps her from becoming bored; and Ivor can use his soulfulness to good advantage in his numerous amorous adventures. Huxley's implication is that most modern spiritualism is a pose and, as such, is open to the most devastating ridicule. We can assume, I think, that his less frequent and more sympathetic treatment of mystics in his subsequent works indicates his growing understanding of mysticism.

After *Crome Yellow* there are only a few other characterizations of the fashionable mystic in Huxley's works. Mrs. Gamble in *Time Must Have a Stop* is a reincarnation of Mrs. Wimbush. In her advanced senility her seances are her only pastime; and her spurious mysticism serves as a dramatic antithesis to the profound mystical
Insights of Bruno Rontini. Burlap in *Point Counter Point* is the only other fully developed fashionable mystic in these novels. He is a more devastatingly complete presentation of Barbecue-Smith. Burlap writes articles on "St. Francis and the Modern Psyche," splashes in the bath with his mistress, worries about his gramophone stocks, and is ready at all times to give uplifting advice about keeping one's spirit pure. This treatment is so complete that there was hardly any point in carrying it forward into other books, even if Huxley had not become a mystic himself. 6

A real understanding of this type of insipid spiritualism in the early novels can keep us from the false conclusion that Huxley jumped suddenly in 1935 from a contempt for mysticism to a whole-hearted infatuation with it. For this is obviously untrue. The idea of a spiritual approach to ultimate reality becomes central in *Those Barren Leaves* in 1925. Calamy is disgusted with his life of cleverness and art and pleasures. "I must get at the truth," he says. By contemplation one might eventually be able to "burrow one's way right through the mystery and really get at something.

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6 Burlap, by the way, is a vicious caricature of John Middleton Murry. See Henderson, *op. cit.*, p. 47.
Down and down, through the obscurity. . . . Slowly, painfully, like Milton's devil, pushing his way through Chaos; in the end, one might emerge into the light, to see the universe, sphere within sphere, hanging from the floor of heaven. But it would be a slow, laborious process; one would need time, one would need freedom. Above everything freedom."

Calamy goes out into the mountains to meditate upon the universe. But Cardan and Chelifer cannot miss the chance to make fun of this modern anchorite. They engage him in arguments, pitting all the evidence of modern materialism against Calamy's sincere mysticism. When Calamy speaks of the unreality of matter and of the Berkeleyan thesis of mentalism, Chelifer comments in the typical mode of Huxley's satiric voice: if the body is an illusion it is a great pity that the illusion is so constantly afflicted with indigestion, flat feet, and hemorrhoids. To Chelifer, in short, Calamy's mystical approach is ludicrous; and in Cardan's more decorous opinion, "no amount of sitting under bo-trees really makes it possible for anyone to wriggle out of human limitations and get behind phenomena." Practical, common-sense arguments come at Calamy from both sides, but he still insists

7 Those Barren Leaves, p. 343.
that he must finish his exile. He will spend his time
alone, meditating—"looking at his navel," laughs Cardan
—abstaining from human and animal pleasures (especially
sex), and in various other ways attempting to release
pure mind from its lamentable bondage to the flesh.

The idea for Calamy's retreat is expressed in
Huxley's *Along the Road* (1925). He writes, as he contem­
plates the monastery of Montesenario, about his conception
of the spiritual life. "Here at the heart of solitude
... a man might begin to understand something about
that part of his being which does not reveal itself in
the quotidian commerce of life; which the social contacts
do not draw forth, spark-like, from the sleeping flint
that is the untried spirit; that part of him of whose
very existence he is only made aware in the solitude
and the silence."\(^8\) Though Huxley could sympathize with
Calamy for his sincerity in his quest, he could not, at
that early date, follow him into the meditative retreat.
Reason and scientific empiricism were too firmly entrenched
in his mind for him to put his faith in so chimerical an
occupation. For this reason *Those Barren Leaves*, though

\(^8\) *Along the Road* (New York, 1925), p. 85.
a sincere treatment of mysticism, appears only as a pre-
figuring of things to come, not as a transition in it-
self.

The transition comes in the middle thirties and
is expressed dramatically in *Eyeless in Gaza*. In this
novel Huxley attempts to grapple with the problems stated
in his early books: the tyranny of flesh, the sterility
of science, the uselessness of aestheticism, and the
pointlessness of all life. By then it was becoming ap­
parent that the world was perhaps not meaningless after
all. Anthony Beavis, at the age of forty-two, decides
to change his life, to abandon the Pyrrhonism which had
guided his early years. He reflects upon the problem
as follows:

He himself . . . had chosen to regard the
whole process as either pointless or a practical
joke. Yes, *chosen*. For it had been an act of
will. If it were all nonsense or a joke, then
he was at liberty to read his books and exer­
cise his talent for sarcastic comment; there
was no reason why he shouldn't sleep with any
presentable woman who was ready to sleep with
him. If it weren't nonsense, if there were some
significance, then he could no longer live irres­
ponsibly. There were duties towards himself and
others and the nature of things. Duties with
whose fulfillment the sleeping and the indis­
criminate reading and the habit of detached
irony would interfere. He had chosen to think
it nonsense, and nonsense it had been for more
than twenty years—nonsense, in spite of occa­
sional uncomfortable intimations that there
might be a point, and that the point was precisely in what he had chosen to regard as the pointlessness, the practical joke.

After schooling himself in Yoga, Buddhism, and the writings of European mystics such as Boehme and Eckhart, and after undergoing physical and mental discipline under the tutelage of the vegetarian pacifist Miller (a portrait of Huxley's mentor Gerald Heard), Anthony becomes a partially regenerate man, a humanitarian neo-Buddhist.

As Anthony's meditation suggests, Huxley's mysticism is motivated by the teleological question. Mysticism, it seems, is the only kind of thought and experience capable of providing him with an answer to man's purpose in the universe. Contrary to popular intellectualist opinion, and contrary as well to the early Huxleyan attitude, life does have a meaning, a meaning, however, which cannot be expressed in human terms. One must perceive this meaning in relation to the Divine Ground; and this relationship can be established only through meditation, discipline, mortification of the flesh, and visionary experience. An intense study of the Eastern mystics, supported by the findings of psychical research and parapsychology, seems to have confirmed and deepened his belief in the efficacy of the spiritual approach to philosophy.

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Eyeless in Gaza, pp. 469-70.
Though the total complexity of Huxley's mysticism cannot be adequately expressed in human terms, the aspects of his mysticism which can be clarified in language are of particular importance to our problem of the implications arising from physiological satire. In most of his later writings we are given to understand that spiritual fulfillment and the Divine Ground can be obtained only through certain physical exercises and disciplines. Before one can alter the state of one's soul, one must alter the state of one's body. In *Eyeless in Gaza* Anthony Beavis embarks on a course of spiritual exercises in how to sit, stand, breathe, and walk. He becomes a vegetarian and subjects himself to daily colonic irrigations. The eventual result is a mystic intuition of the Divine Ground of all being. In several of Huxley's later books we discover that the lower intestines are of paramount importance to the state of one's spirit—more so, in fact, than any other parts of the body. In *After Many a Summer* Dr. Obispo and the Fifth Earl of Hauberk conclude that immortality can be obtained by altering the sterol chemistry of the lower digestive system. The fact that this chemical alteration also causes the immortal
one to lose his humanity and to become an ape emphasizes the point that physiology determines spiritual and intellectual levels. "Matter over mind" is also the implication of certain passages in The Devils of Loudun. In this book we discover that the seventeenth-century nuns possessed by devils were "cured" by means of public enemas forcibly administered. In many cases this treatment discouraged enough of the devils to be called a success.

Huxley's two books on vision-inducing drugs, The Doors of Perception ¹⁰ and Heaven and Hell, ¹¹ imply a similar concept of the interrelated soul and body. When he discovered that certain almost harmless drugs, like mescalin and lysergic acid, created a state similar to the mystic's trance, he became interested in them, experimented with them, and recorded his experiences. Heaven and Hell gives what amounts to a recipe for mystical visions. The drugs appear to reduce the oxygen content of the blood, thus eventually reducing the conscious efficiency of the brain. And, since the brain has among its functions that of being a filtering organism which rejects sensations, perceptions and thoughts irrelevant to survival or practical interest, the decrease in

efficiency frees the mind from its quotidian affairs and allows it to receive intuitions of ultimate reality.

(So, at least, goes the most widely accepted theory of visionary drugs.) These drugs, however, are significant not only because they provide us with the means to spiritual experiences, but also because they suggest explanations for the widespread mystical experiences of the past. It has been found that a drug almost identical to mescaline can be synthesized, under the proper physiological conditions, in the endocrine systems of children and adults. The spontaneous synthesis of the vision-inducing drug within the body can be the result of fatigue, strenuous exercise, malnutrition, or skin infections. After fasting has produced malnutrition and anemia, after flagellation has covered large areas of the body with infected sores, after the infection has released large quantities of histamine and adrenalin into the blood stream, and, finally, after periods of chanting, singing, and rhythmic incantations have reduced the supply of oxygen to the brain, the drug might occur in the endocrine system and cause the saint to see visions of eternity, the Godhead, and the Divine Ground. The implications arising from a study of mescaline suggest scientific sanctions for the
traditional mortification of the flesh, and at the same time they suggest that mortification of the flesh is no longer necessary.

If, as these dualistic aspects of Huxley's mysticism imply, his later ideas prompted him to think of physiological functions as preconditions for spiritual states, it would seem that his use of physiological imagery for satiric purposes would have changed. To a certain extent the problem facing us here (and, what's more, also facing Huxley) is basically the same problem discussed in the previous chapter. Huxley's habitual frame of mind during the early period of his writing career—his personal major premise—informed his satiric utterances and motivated his use of dualistic irony. Physiology was the weapon he found most effective in his satiric assaults. But, as we have seen, his interest in Lawrence's philosophy of the body, and his conscious acquiescence to it, created an ambivalence in his work. Flesh imagery was a way of devaluing an object at the same time that flesh imagery was beginning to rise in value.

If Lawrence's reverence for the body was the first system of thought which prompted Huxley to make the effort to reevaluate physiological reality, the mysticism
he came to believe in and practice in the thirties prompted a second attempt at revaluation. We have seen how the anatomical vision continued to operate satirically in *Point Counter Point*, even though the Laurentian ideas seemed to preclude such a satiric technique. The first attempt at revaluation, then, was not wholly successful—not complete, in other words. Now the question is: did the second revaluation—the mystical re-orientation—come any closer to effecting a reversal of Huxley's early satiric vision of physiological reality?

The answer is yes—and no. Huxley's books after 1935 do seem to use the physiological technique, but they use it more sparingly and in a slightly different way. *Eyeless in Gaza* is an excellent example. Our immediate response upon reading the book is a feeling that a profound change has occurred in Huxley's attitude toward the world and toward his art. In place of his earlier satiric scenes we find long, detailed interior monologues, savagely sordid episodes, and extensive meditations on the mystical way to teleological conclusions. In place of his earlier technique of contrapuntally mixing his spatial scenes, we find a contrapuntal mixture of temporal scenes. The satiric physiological
imagery has modulated into a different key; instead of a belch at a concert we see school boys humiliating another school boy caught masturbating in his truss; instead of the inspiration for pneumatic trousers in church there is the dog exploding on nude lovers. Physiological imagery, in a word, has become the source, not only of lightly comic satire, but also of a more heavily, more cruelly violent satire.

It would appear that, along with mysticism, Huxley adopted an altered view of physiological reality, a more intimate view of the essential pain and horror of flesh. In his fiction before 1935 we are not made vividly aware of physical pain in his characters. True, there are various suicides, murders, diseases, and mortifications of the flesh in his earlier books; but those earlier physical horrors are not dwelled upon at great length. In *Those Barren Leaves*, for example, a girl dies miserably from food poisoning, but we are spared, for the most part, a close description of her agony. Murder and death and disease figure prominently in *Point Counter Point*, but here again we are either spared the close description or the description is couched in abstract terms. The death of Webley, for example, is seen as a species of chemical
rearrangement; the emphasis is not on the pain he might have felt—actually, he did not know what hit him—but on the mechanics of cellular decomposition and rigor mortis. The death, in the same book, of Philip Quarles's child is indeed a vivid and painful passage. Specific references to certain symptoms—blindness, headaches, screaming—emphasize the brute reality of pain and physiological destruction. This, however, is apparently the only scene in Huxley's earlier books which makes a careful attempt to represent the reality of physical pain. The Savage's self-flagellations in Brave New World, like his suicide, are abstract events—painless because lacking in specific detail.

But the specific details of pain appear in the later books. They are at times too obvious. In Eyeless in Gaza the disease and degradation of Mary Amberley are described with minute detail, and Mark Staithes's gangrene leg forms the basis of several very specific chapters. We are invited to view such things as raw flesh, yellow and purple bruises, blood-soaked sheets, pus, the

12 According to Lawrence, Huxley's decision to have the child die met with strong resistance from Maria Huxley. Lawrence writes to Ottoline Morrell that Point Counter Point nearly ruined the marriage. See the Collected Letters, p. 772.
grating of the saw during the amputation. In *Time Must Have a Stop* we follow every physiological disruption as Eustace Barnack falls dead with a heart attack, every outrage as Jim Poulshot is bayonetted in the face, the stomach, and the genitals. In *Ape and Essence*, likewise, we have a close view of tortures and a great variety of physical horrors. *The Genius and the Goddess* is the least violent of Huxley's late works, but it ends with an accident which demolishes its central character. Katy Maartens is killed in a highway crash, "destroyed . . . with every refinement of physical outrage—an eye put out by a splinter of glass, the nose and lips and chin almost obliterated, rubbed out on the bloody macadam of the road. And there was a crushed right hand and a broken shinbone showing through the stocking."

We can see from these few references that Huxley's later use of physiological detail is at times decidedly different from his earlier use of it. In many passages the comedy of flesh has turned into the terror of the flesh. That this change in his use of physiological imagery coincided with his conversion to mysticism is probably not an accident. Though I am not prepared to state

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13 *The Genius and the Goddess*, p. 147.
definitely that a deeper awareness of the pain and horror of flesh motivated his deeper interest in the non-physical aspects of experience, it is perhaps true that the deeper awareness was an important contributing cause. Whatever the true causal circumstances were, we do know that a significant change occurred in his concepts of physical life—two significant changes, to be accurate: first, the deepening of his awareness of physical pain and, second, his more intimate concern with the role of physiological phenomena in determining spiritual and intellectual levels. These changes, since they altered his attitude toward physiology and, thus, toward the basic stylistic principle in his art, caused a change in the satiric texture of his books.

But it was not a complete change. The technique of injecting a low physiological value into a high cluster of values continued, at times, to recall his old satiric passages. The anatomical vision continued into the mystical period, but it operated in a different context, and for that reason was, and at the same time was not, the same technique. A passage from *Eyeless in Gaza* will clarify this phenomenon. Mark Staithes, when asked at a social gathering why he, an extreme despiser of women,
earns his living as a perfume manufacturer, answers that making scent is the best way he knows to express his lack of gallantry.

Leaning forward, he took Mary's hand, raised it as though he were about to kiss it, but, instead, only sniffed at the skin—then let it fall again. "For example," he said, "there's civet in the stuff you've scented yourself with."

"Well, why not?"

"Oh, no reason at all," said Staithes, "no reason at all, if you happen to have a taste for the excrement of polecats. . . . In Abyssinia . . . they have civet farms. Twice a week, you take a stick and go and poke the cats until they're thoroughly angry and frightened. That's when they secrete their stuff. Like children wetting their knickers when they're afraid. Then you catch them with a pair of tongs, so that they can't bite, and scrape out the contents of the little pouch attached to their genital organs. You do it with an egg spoon and the stuff's a kind of yellow grease, rather like ear-wax. Stinks like hell when it's undiluted. We get it in London packed in buffalo horns. Huge cornucopias full of dark brown stinking ear-wax. At a hundred and seventeen shillings the ounce, what's more. That's one of the reasons why your scent costs you so much. The poor can't afford to smear themselves with cat's mess. They have to be content with plain iso-eugenol and phenyl acetic aldehyde."

We can see that this passage employs the satiric technique we have associated with Huxley's earlier, pre-mystical books. A perceptual image is distorted and devalued by the insertion of images with lower values. But here, as in the earlier passages, we are faced with

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a satiric ambiguity. There is the question here as to who or what is the victim of the satire. The target seems to be the image, the entire Gestalt, of refined female eroticism; but, on second thought, the character of the speaker, Staithes, seems to be the target. Both, in such satiric passages, receive the force of the devaluation. It is difficult or impossible to decide which is the victim, and as a result we often have an unresolvable tension. But in Eyeless in Gaza we find certain clues, certain implied judgments about Staithes's character which prompt us to take his comments as self-satire. Physiological imagery follows Staithes throughout the book. It is his identifying leitmotiv. His actions and the expressions on his face are consistently described in scientifically physiological terms. He does not smile, he "demonstrates the anatomy of a smile," he vigorously contracts the "sphincters" at the corners of his eyes and mouth. Many of his speeches are grossly scatological —his description of his family, for example: they are "turds to the core. . . . So they can't think anything but turdish thoughts. And above all, they can't conceive of anyone else thinking differently. Turd calls to turd; and, when it's answered by non-turd, it's utterly at a
Staithes, then, is the physiological satirist in the book. For the most part, Huxley's anatomical vision operates only through this one character. Few of the others in the book speak this way, and Huxley, as narrator, seldom employs the technique on his own. He employs it through the mask of Staithes. We can see now that the satire, though still ambiguous and unresolved, is to an extent more clearly directed backward against the speaker. Huxley, in other words, has taken steps to make the reader understand that the physiological satirist satirizes himself.

Similar passages occur in After Many a Summer and Time Must Have a Stop. In the former, Jeremy Fordage is the sophisticated cynic who employs the physiological technique; and, like Staithes, he is clearly an object of satire himself. In the latter it is Eustace Barnack who becomes the victim of his own satiric monologues. In all of these books we are still faced with satiric ambiguity, with dual-directed satire; but the passages are managed so as to emphasize the point that the satirist has satirized, not only his victim, but also himself. This is Tendenz Witz, in Freud's convenient term, with

\[^{15}\text{Ibid.}, \ p. \ 239.\]
a vicious boomerang quality, with a tendency in two directions at the same time. To a certain extent, then, Huxley in his later books continues to use his old technique, but in using it he takes steps to dissociate himself from it. By emphasizing the reverse tendency of this technique he has found a way to retain an old method while renouncing its implications.

The implications of the anatomical vision which he is anxious to renounce are, apparently, the implications that physiological phenomena are necessarily ignoble, obscene, and hilarious. Mysticism—or at least his type of mysticism—required a different evaluation of flesh. True spiritualism can be attained, not by ignoring or hating the body, but by learning to use it more sensibly. At any rate, it became clear to him that physiology is something more than a source of satiric comedy; and for that reason his use of flesh imagery for satiric purposes had to undergo the changes I have discussed.

But now we must come to the crux of the problem. Human consciousness being what it is—human consciousness, in other words, being generally a Manichean consciousness—is it possible to write seriously about the physiological
phenomena underlying and conditioning spiritual and religious life without seeming derisive or satiric? If what I have called semantic gravity is a generally accurate description of our reactions to reductions of spirit to flesh, it would seem that all utterances combining these two aspects of experience will be unavoidably satiric. Take, for example, the passage in Eyeless in Gaza in which Miller lectures Anthony Beavis on the virtues of mystical vegetarianism and posture control—practices, incidentally, which Huxley took seriously at that time. Soon after the two men meet, and soon after Anthony demonstrates his cynical wit, Miller rightly infers that the other suffers from chronic constipation. "How can you expect to think in anything but a negative way, when you've got chronic intestinal poisoning? Had it from birth, I guess. Inherited it. And at the same time stooping, as you do. . . . Pressing down on the vertebrae like a ton of bricks. One can almost hear the poor things grinding together. And when the spine's in that state, what happens to the rest of the machine? It's frightful to think of." Miller goes on to prescribe the vegetarian diet necessary to save Anthony's body and regenerate his soul. In this

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16 Ibid., p. 422.
last process diet is probably more important than prayer, for prayer is for the most part only magnified egoism, only a ludicrous apotheosis of this piddling, twopenny-halfpenny personality . . . with all its wretched little virtues and vices, all its silly cravings and silly pretensions. But, if you're not careful, prayer just confirms you in the bad habit of being personal. I tell you, I've observed it clinically, and it seems to have much the same effect on people as butcher's meat. Prayer makes you more yourself, more separate. Just as rump-steak does. Look at the correlation between religion and diet. Christians eat meat, drink alcohol, smoke tobacco; and Christianity exalts personality, insists on the value of petitionary prayer, teaches that God feels anger and approves the persecution of heretics. It's the same with the Jews and the Moslems. Kosher and an indignant Jehovah. Mutton and beef—and personal survival among the houris, avenging Allah and holy wars. Now look at the Buddhists. Vegetables and water. And what's their philosophy? They don't exalt personality; they try to transcend it. They don't imagine that God can be angry. . . . What worlds away from Jehovah and God the Father and everlasting, individual souls! The fact is, of course, that we think as we eat. I eat like a Buddhist, because I find it keeps me well and happy; and the result is that I think like a Buddhist. "17

Thinking like a true Huxleyan satirist, Miller goes on to proclaim that frozen meat is the greatest enemy of religion today.

In the past only members of the upper classes were thoroughly sceptical, despairing, negative. Why? Among other reasons, because they were the only people who could afford to eat too much meat.

17Ibid., p. 423.
Now there's cheap Canterbury lamb and Argentine chilled beef. Even the poor can afford to poison themselves into complete scepticism and despair. And only the most violent stimuli will rouse them to purposive activity, and, what's worse, the only activity they'll undertake is diabolic. They can only be stimulated by hysterical appeals to persecute Jews, or murder socialists, or go to war. You personally happen to be too intelligent to be a fascist or a nationalist; but again, it's a matter of theory, not of life. Believe me, Anthony Beavis, your intestines are ripe for fascism and nationalism. They're making you long to be shaken out of the horrible negativity to which they've condemned you—to be shaken by violence into violence.  

Christianity and rump steak, God and guts—the result, whatever the intention, is satire, even though we have good evidence that Huxley took seriously the religions which are satirized. He was seriously a mystic and sincerely a religious man. Miller, the medico-religious philosophus gloriesus who speaks the preceding lines, is a portrait of Gerald Heard, Huxley's close friend and mentor in vegetarian mysticism. Also, Miller appears in other sections of Eyeless in Gaza as a kind of saint; he is wise, heroic, deeply aware of spiritual reality. In short, he is one of those fictional men who, like Fielding's Squire Allworthy, prove unsatisfactory

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18 Ibid., p. 425.

19 For a discussion of Huxley's relationship with Heard, see W. Y. Tindall, "The Trouble with Aldous Huxley," American Scholar XI (April 1942), 452-64.
because too boringly admirable. We have every reason to believe, therefore, that Miller's theory of vegetarianism is personally important for Huxley. It is important, but at the same time it is absurd. The theory is absurd because it is couched in terms which run counter to the beliefs of readers who do not customarily think of spiritual and somatic reality as interrelated. To put it another way, it runs counter to Western culture's habitual compartmentalization of flesh and spirit. And, because the effect of the passage results from an incongruity of two elements of contrasting value, the higher element tends to gravitate toward the lower element, and the result is satire.

Semantic gravity, then, apparently can operate even when the author does not wish to deride his subject. If his subject is the role of physiological phenomena (a low value) in religious life (a high value), his writing will have satiric overtones or implications. Huxley is acutely aware of this problem. In *The Genius and the Goddess* he writes of Ruth Maartens's development into adolescence, a period in life characterized by extremes of physiological and emotional change. Ruth's pubescence is a time of painful self-doubt, menstruation, Swinburne,
spirituality, Oscar Wilde, constipation, and violent, hopeless love. "How impossibly crude our language is!"
Huxley writes, in a digression from his description of Ruth's personality.

If you don't mention the physiological correlates of emotion, you're being false to the given facts. But if you do mention them, it sounds as though you were trying to be gross and cynical. Whether it's passion or the desire of the moth for the star, whether it's tenderness or adoration or romantic yearning—love is always accompanied by events in the nerve endings, the skin, the mucous membranes, the glandular and erectile tissues. Those who don't say so are liars. Those who do are labeled as pornographers. It's the fault, of course, of our philosophy of life; and our philosophy of life is the inevitable by-product of a language that separates in idea what in actual fact is always inseparable. It separates and at the same time it evaluates. One of the abstractions is "good," and the other is "bad." Judge not that ye be not judged. But the nature of language is such that we can't help judging. What we need is another set of words. Words that can express the natural togetherness of things. Muco-spiritual, for example, or dermatotocharity. Or why not mastonoetic? Why not viscerosophy? But translated, of course, out of the indecent obscurity of a learned language into something you could use in everyday speech or even in lyrical poetry. How hard it is, without those still nonexistent words, to discuss so simple and obvious a case as Ruth's!

"Impossibly crude" our language most assuredly is; and that means, of course, that the people who use it are just as impossibly crude in their thinking about their own

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20 The Genius and the Goddess, pp. 57-58.
experiences. Centuries of mistaken ideas, groundless judgments, and habitual lies have encrusted the language—all languages, in fact—and the result is that many efforts to be honest about human experience appear eitheriric or derisive. Huxley's problem seems to be that he must be a satirist to avoid being a liar—to avoid being untrue to his personal major premise. And because that is his problem, he is at present (1961) at work on a utopian fantasy about a society in which truth will be more acceptable than untruth. In response to a letter in which I discussed these problems, Huxley has written: "Curiously enough I have been thinking about this problem in the context of a Utopian phantasy on which I am now working—a positive Utopia where real efforts are made to help people to realize their desirable potentialities. Would it be possible, in such a Utopia, to evade the law of semantic gravity and speak of the physical aspects of our spiritual life without satire or disparagement? Would it be possible, for example, to develop a science of neuro-theology, of chemo-mysticism, etc., in which the two aspects of religious experience should be dealt with on the same level, with no pejorative overtones to the passages dealing with physiology?
In our society this would be impossible, I think.²¹ Whether it is possible even to imagine such a society we will discover when Huxley's next book appears.

III

Meantime, however, we are left with the phenomenon of semantic gravity and with the complex psychological factors underlying it. In the following few pages I propose to offer some speculations on these psychological complexities in an effort, first, to understand the mechanism of semantic gravity and, second, to understand more fully its operation in Huxley's satiric work. It should be admitted at the beginning, of course, that the theoretical conclusions to follow are in fact theoretical. By strict scientific standards, the discussion will be inconclusive. It will be worthwhile, none the less, to make some suggestions about the forces underlying and conditioning our customary reactions to flesh-spirit irony.

What, then, is the force of semantic gravity? What is the nature of that mental mechanism which makes high values descend so frequently toward concomitant low

²¹Dated at Los Angeles, April 17, 1961.
values? Why, to put it another way, does the statement, "Art is the mental equivalent of cantharides," cause us to revise downward our opinion either of art or the speaker? It would seem, abstractly viewed under controlled conditions, that the statement could as easily cause us to think more highly of cantharides. Or take a more obvious example: When Darwinism seemed to imply a juxtaposition of man the image of God with man the image of baboons, we were prompted, in many cases, to lower our opinion of human beings. Few, if any, were immediately prompted to raise their opinion of baboons. The high value, as usual, descended toward the lower one. Similarly with Freudian psychology: Man the rational animal, when combined with man the anal-erotic animal, was reduced in value. If Christianity is symbolic sexuality, so much the worse for Christianity—not so much the better for sexuality.

Why is it this way? "Human nature" is a good answer, but it is also no answer at all. "Human nature" can only be defined as "the way people are," and that, even assuming that all human natures are essentially alike, would not solve our problem. It would only state the problem in another way. Also, there is some doubt as
to whether semantic gravity has always been as prevalent a phenomenon as it has been in the past few centuries. Though it can be seen as one of the psychological and rhetorical forces underlying the satiric works of Aristophanes, Juvenal, and Lucian, we are not certain that it operated prevalently in the middle ages. The worship of relics, for example, would seem to indicate that, at certain periods and with certain groups, it was possible to combine high and low values without effecting a devaluation. Later satirists, like Chaucer, Voltaire, Anatole France, and Norman Douglas, could derive a great deal of humor from the practice of worshipping moldy bones, spots of coagulated blood, and scraps of dessicated skin. And it is indeed a high kind of humor to point out how St. Theresa fell into a divine ecstasy while meditating on a relic thought to be the foreskin of Christ. I do not know whether there are still any chapels consecrated to this holy prepuce, but I would guess that, if any do remain, they no longer inspire as many devotees with the same kind of rapture. At any rate, it is probable that semantic gravity was less strong at certain times in the past. When, in The Dream Life of Balso Snell, Nathanael West speaks of St. Puce, a flea who had spent some time in the
armpit of Christ and had written *The Geography of Our Lord*, we can suspect that the passage would not have affected a tenth-century *homme moyen sensuel* as it affects a modern reader.

Semantic gravity, then, might not be an inevitable feature of "human nature." It is more likely one of those cultural factors—one "superorganic" accretion, in A. L. Kroeber's term. As a superorganic accretion on the basic human organism, semantic gravity might be discussed as a phenomenon arising from the symbolic structure of thought. Very interesting, in this context, is an article by H. M. Dargan on Swift's use of allegory for satiric purposes.footnote 22 Writing in 1916, before the key work on *homo animal symbolicum* by Cassirer appeared, Dargan reasoned from the discussions in Guglielmo Ferrero's *Les Lois Psychologiques de symbolisme* that Swift's satiric effects occurred as a result of an irrational merging of symbol with thing symbolized. A satiric symbol is an image which is on a lower plane of intrinsic value than the thing which it symbolizes. Thus, when the two merge psychologically into one, the thing symbolized has declined

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in value to the level of the symbol. In *A Tale of a Tub*, for example, a coat is made to stand for a religion; and because the coat has lower value than the religion it symbolizes, it acts as a satiric symbol through the usual merger of symbol and object. The coat, in other words, becomes not only a substitute for the religion; it also becomes the religion itself. Similarly in *Gulliver's Travels*: the images of various human institutions and human attributes are generally lower in value than the things they stand for. If, for example, the horses in *Book Four* symbolize mind and rationality, the merging of rationality and mind with horses results in a lowering of the higher values. Mind is more highly regarded, generally speaking, than horses, but it loses caste when it becomes one with its objective representative. Semantic gravity—or symbolic magnetism—has occurred.

Dargan's analysis is interesting and perceptive, and it is, as far as it goes, accurate. But the satiric effects caused by symbolic merging probably occur more frequently in Swift than in Huxley. Recall, for example, the passage suggesting that Christianity is a result of intestinal poisoning. If we say that God the Father is a by-product of too much rump steak, we are not projecting
rump steak as a symbolic substitute for the deity; we are making a causal assertion. And if the statement does not imply a symbolic relationship between its two terms, there can be no merging of symbol and object. In this passage the *lois psychologiques* of symbolism do not operate; in fact, they cannot operate, for the good reason that no symbolism is involved. Satire, nevertheless, is the result of the statement. The high value moves downward toward the low one.

Our conclusion must be that the behavior of symbols is not the operational key to semantic gravity. The relationship between the high and the low terms can be symbolic, but it can also be causal or, for that matter, the terms can have almost any type of logical or non-logical relationship. One term could characterize a previous role of the other, as in the ex-fish passage quoted earlier; or one term could designate a part of the whole; or the terms could have only an accidental spatial or temporal relationship, as in the passage describing roadside advertisements in *After Many a Summer*: "CLASSY EATS . . . JESUS SAVES . . . HAMBURGERS . . . FINE LIQUORS . . . JESUS IS COMING SOON . . . YOU TOO CAN HAVE ABIDING YOUTH"
Symbolic, causal, synecdochic, spatial—any relationship will do. The relationship of the high and low terms in a satiric utterance is apparently not crucially important. We must hold to the Gestalt description of the satiric process given above in Chapter Two. Semantic gravity occurs when low images are inserted into a cluster, a configuration, of high images. Previously excluded facts with pejorative overtones cause the Gestaltqualität of a perceptual image to decline in value. We may know these excluded facts, but for some psychic reason they do not generally appear in the pattern of our perception. We know, for example, that Swinburne contained several miles of intestines, but that knowledge, I suppose, seldom takes a position in the Swinburnean Gestalt. Obviously enough, the knowledge of such things very frequently fails to come into conscious acceptance or awareness. We perceive objects and conceive ideas according to certain patterns or highly selective configurations. Knowledge of facts does not guarantee that those facts will find themselves situated in our perceptual or conceptual configurations.

23 After Many a Summer, pp. 8-9.
The exclusiveness of our Gestalten of reality is therefore a deeply important factor conditioning the ways in which we view the world and evaluate its objects. Swift's notorious lines from "Cassinus and Peter" dramatically illustrate the matter:

Nor wonder how I lost my wits;
Oh, Caelia, Caelia, Caelia shits.

We can translate Swift's eloquent scatophobia into our present terms as follows: Cassinus, having formed an image of Caelia as a divine object—having, in other words, formed a Gestalt of her which excluded certain obvious facts about her physiological being—is deeply shocked and mortified when he is made to behold the evidence which forces his image of Caelia to include the previously suppressed facts. Huxley, as I have pointed out, has condemned Swift for his intolerance of these given facts of life, and so, in an essay published in 1929, has Lawrence. But the obvious point here is that

24 See Lawrence's Pansies (London, 1929), reprinted in Selected Literary Criticism, ed. A. Beal (London, 1955), p. 29; "There is a poem of Swift's which should make us pause. It is written to Celia, his Celia—and every verse ends with the mad, maddened refrain: 'But Celia, Celia, Celia shits!' Now that, stated so baldly, is so ridiculous it is almost funny. But when one remembers the gnashing insanity to which the great mind of Swift was reduced by that and similar thoughts, the joke dies away. Such thoughts poisoned him, like some terrible constipation. They poisoned his mind. And why, in heaven's name? The fact cannot have troubled him, since it applied to
Swift has dramatized in the poem a typical human habit, a customary **modus** of perception which forms, I think, the psychological basis of Huxley's satire. Cassinus in the poem came face to face with brute reality, and the brute reality distorted and devalued the high configuration of his ideal.

Our basic question returns: Why does the insertion of a low value, like Caelia's excretory function, into a high configuration, like Caelia as she exists in Cassinus's eyes, cause a downgrading of the high instead of an upgrading of the low? The answer is perhaps that the highness of a Gestalt's value is a result of the exclusion of the components with low value. Cassinus's idealization of Caelia occurred as a direct result of the forces in his mind which excluded certain facts from his consciousness. A total, or unselective, image of an object would include all known facts about it—high facts as well as low ones—and the value attached to the image himself and to all of us. It was not the fact that Celia shits which so deranged him, it was the thought. . . . Great wit as he was, he could not see how much worse it would be if Celia didn't shit. . . . His insolent and sickly squeamish mind just turned her into a thing of horror, because she was merely natural and went to the w.c. It is monstrous! One feels like going back over the years to poor Celia, to say to her: It's all right, don't you take any notice of that mental lunatic."
would be in accord with its total reality. But once the unfavorable aspects of the image are suppressed or filtered out, only the high ones would remain and the resulting image would be thereby raised in value. Semantic gravity, then, can be a by-product of stopping the process of suppression or exclusion upon which high values depend. Satire, one might say, is the technique of reversing the modus of exclusive perception, the technique of distorting reality by bringing previously excluded reality back into the picture.

The dependance of high values on the exclusion of low values brings us out of the realm of Gestalt psychology into the realm of psychoanalysis. Freud's theories of repression and sublimation offer a deeper explanation of this technique of distorting by semantic gravity. The theory of sublimation can be called the science of the relations between flesh and spirit. Basically, sublimation is a cultural, an anthropological concern.

25For the most part, the following ideas on sublimation and culture were suggested by Norman O. Brown's Life against Death (New York, 1959). Brown's primary message is, in effect, similar to Huxley's, even though Huxley has frequently expressed his contempt for psychoanalysis. By different routes both Brown and Huxley reach the conclusion that it is time we made a real effort to revalue physiological reality, to attain that "resurrection of the body" which is necessary for sanity and, ultimately, for survival.
The orthodox view of culture as absolutely distinct from physiological life is summed up in A. L. Kroeber's essay on "The Superorganic." Kroeber means exactly what his title implies—that culture is an accretion on the fundamental human organism and separate from it. Psychoanalysis, as everyone knows, will have none of this proposed anthropological distinction. Culture is held by Freud to be a result of repressed organic functions and drives. One might even say, what's more, that a refusal to accept the absolute dichotomy between flesh and spirit, between organic and superorganic, is the most important position psychoanalysis has taken, the position at which it must either stand or fall.

Assuming for the moment that this psychoanalytical position on the interrelatedness of mind and body is correct, we can state that our conscious image of the world is unavoidably inaccurate and incomplete. Unavoidably so; for culture is a result of that blindness to reality which Freud has called repression. Some aspects of perceived reality we repress, ignore, or reject; some aspects, also, do not occur to us at all—Swinburne's viscera, for example, or the fact that one is an ex-fish. Freud

offers a description of this habit of exclusive perception: "Neurosis does not deny the existence of reality, it merely tries to ignore it; psychosis denies it and tries to substitute something else for it. A reaction which combines features of both of these is the one we call normal or 'healthy'; it denies reality as little as neurosis, but then, like psychosis, is concerned with effecting a change in it." In a word, the ego perceives images auto-plastically. This means, in simple terms, that a dissatisfaction with some aspects of reality frequently motivates us, not to change the offending object itself, but to change our way of seeing it. Auto-plastic perception depends of course on repression, the ability to avoid seeing or thinking about the elements of experience which we unconsciously do not wish to see or think about. The fact of repression needs no more proof than the obviously true assertion that we are seldom if ever aware of the full complexity underlying and conditioning our motives, our ideas, and our evaluations of experience.

To shift the terminology somewhat, the fact of repression makes it unlikely that we will be able to

\[27\text{Collected Papers, ed. J. Riviere and J. Strachey (New York, 1924), II, 279-80.}\]
follow the good advice of the Delphic oracle; under ordinary conditions *Gnothi Seauton* is out of the question. The probability is that most minds conscientiously and strenuously avoid knowing themselves. Shifting the terms yet again, repression is another way of stating the formula for Aristotelian tragedy: *hubris* leads to, and at the same time is a result of, *atê*, or blindness, or repression. The tragic denouement arrives as a revelation of formerly repressed knowledge, as an enlarged capacity to accept reality. *Hubris*, we must note, is an overvaluation of self, an upgraded connotation which is a result of the self's willful ignorance of certain of its low valued components.\(^{28}\) Paradoxically, then, the cessation of repression which, under one set of terms or another, forms Socrates' key to wisdom and Freud's key to sanity, is at the same time both the denouement of tragedy and, I think, one of the operational conditions of satire.

If satire forces us, for the moment at least, to "see life steadily and whole," in so doing it reverses the work of repression which we are constantly performing. And when we suggest that a high evaluation of some object

is a result of the repression which keeps that object purged of its elements with low value, we are in simple terms describing the process of sublimation. We can add with Freud that sublimation is a psychic "displacement from below upward." In other words, a sublimated image is not simply an alembicated image; it is an image, an object of cultural or mythic admiration, whose very existence is a result of repression and the concomitant displacement to a higher level. If this description of sublimation is true to general human behavior, it is no wonder that the sudden insertion of a previously repressed fact into a high evaluated Gestalt causes the response I have called semantic gravity. Such a satiric re-insertion is an act of un-repression, an act of desublimation.

The theory that satire is a desublimation can be illustrated in its simplest form in a passage from Crome Yellow. Young Denis Stone has formed a high impression of the word "carminative." In his mind the word is associated with passion and spirit, with all that is most beautiful in human experience. Because of the lovely sound of the word, and because of its complex cluster of inspirational associations, Denis even centers an entire
poem upon it: "And Love Carminative as Wine!" For some inexplicable reason Denis never looked up the word; he was afraid of what he would discover when he looked it up. When he is finally forced to check on its meaning, his vague fears about it are verified. A carminative turns out to be an agent used to expell gas from the stomach and intestines. For Denis this enlightenment is a minor catastrophe. He realizes at last that he had first seen the word on a medicine bottle when he was a child. He realizes that he did not want to know what "carminative" meant—its sublimated value was too high to be so rudely distorted by brute reality. His conclusion is: "You shall know the truth; and the truth shall make you sick." It is a conclusion, by the way, with which most Platonists, satirists, and psychoanalysts would disagree on principle.

Sublimation is of course at times a far more complex phenomenon than this simple technique of auto-plastic perception. If we accept the entire corpus of psychoanalytical theory on sublimation, we are led to the conclusion that all culture and all highly valued or superorganic elements of experience are either displacements of organic functions or alembications of physiological motives. Psychoanalysis implies, for example, that
religious idealism is a result of repressed genital eroticism, that capitalism and certain forms of protestantism are displacements of infantile fascination with the anal function, that romantic love is a product of sexual repression and hysteria, that the rise of utopian politics is a result of new methods of toilet training, that art is thinly disguised anal-eroticism, and that worship is a transformation of incestuous homosexuality. In short, psychoanalysis implies the unity of what we usually consider the highest with what we usually consider lowest. And for that reason, psychoanalysis is satiric. Like the traditional claim of the satirist, the claim of the psychoanalyst is that the cessation of repression has therapeutic value. The technique of Freud's followers is to lead patients out of neurosis into the sanity which is a recognition of what they have always striven to avoid recognizing. The technique of the satirist, similarly, is to cause an awareness of the habitually repressed facts about the cultural objects which have been overvalued. Like the psychoanalytic therapist, the satirist usually believes that his work of re-establishing clear perception will have a beneficial effect. Satire has been held to be a moral force, an
agent to correct the follies and vices rampant in a sick society. Recall Huxley's personal credo in "Vulgarity in Literature": the truth shocks and mortifies the "stupid and morally reprehensible" individuals in society into an acceptance of reality. Satire is shock therapy for a neurotic society, and desublimation is the process by which society is shocked out of its illusions and brought closer to a workable modus vivendi of flesh and spirit.

It is interesting to reconsider Huxley's satiric utterances in the light of this theoretical conclusion on the desublimating function of satire. Recall again the vegetarian implication that Christianity is a result of intestinal poisoning. The implication might be scientifically untrue, and it is probably not an unconscious fantasy in the minds of Christians. In specific terms, then, the equation of Christianity and rump steak is probably false. The main point to be remembered, however, is that the terms of a satiric utterance need not be specifically true to produce the desublimation effect. To clarify this point, let us suggest some of the steps in a mental reaction to the satiric God-guts equation. If religious experience is a sublimation, a
displacement, of repressed physical experience, a statement which affirms the physical nature of religious experience will tend to undo the work of repression that brought the religious experience into being. Similarly, if we recognize, in some dimly unconscious fashion, that the statement combining religion and physiology is true, then we will be prompted to alter our evaluation of the terms involved. We do not have to recognize that God, specifically, is a result of constipation; we have only to recognize that God, generally, is a result of the total cluster of physiological facts which is suggested and brought into consciousness by the reference to constipation. In other words, any flesh-spirit equation, whether it is true or untrue, can cause desublimation.

We can now draw together the diverse threads of this discussion. Physiological satire operates according to the principle of semantic gravity; and semantic gravity is what takes place when an utterance tends to pull the props from under a high valued, alembicated image. When Huxley displayed the satiric wit which depends for its effect on the equation of spiritual and physiological images, he, like many other satirists, was striking at the foundations of culture. If Freud was correct when he
implied that culture is a function of repression, Huxley's satiric technique is to insist on that clarity of vision which will put an end to repression—and thus, mutatis mutandis, to culture itself.

IV

What shall we conclude, then, about the continuing role of the anatomical vision, the Manichean consciousness, and semantic gravity in Huxley's work? It is a complex problem, and the answers suggested so far in this study have been correspondingly complex. Huxley has used his dualistic pessimism as the operational key to his satiric, anti-cultural style; but he has also made two attempts to revaluate, to upgrade, physiological reality. Under the influence of Lawrence, he consciously adopted the life-worshipper's creed; similarly, under the influence of mysticism, Yoga, parapsychology, and the anatomical mysticism which can be called, in his own coinage, viscerosophy or neuro-theology, he made further efforts to exorcise the instinctive flesh-hatred which constitutes the major premise of his artistic personality. This upgrading of the flesh is what he has been consciously attempting, in one way or another, throughout his career.
But when we read his books we realize that, if he had been successful in "curing" himself of what one critic called his "pathological wallowing in physical disgust," he would have also "cured" his genius for satire. The anatomical vision is Huxley's style, his method of creating the world; without the anatomical vision (pathological or otherwise) he is, as W. Y. Tindall has rightly pointed out, dull. "Good cynics are as rare in English literature as the preachers are common." And when Huxley's books began in the thirties to contain long passages on mysticism or on other ways to political, economic, or personal salvation, it was clear that, in those passages at least, Huxley had escaped dualistic pessimism, had brought himself to a healthier and saner concept of human experience, and, in so going, had cut away the foundations of his art. In some cases, nothing is so fatal to the artist as sanity.

We have seen, however, that the anatomical vision, though differently managed and more sparingly employed, continues into his late works. As one reviewer of The Genius and the Goddess put it in 1955, "Nor does the

29Tindall, op. cit., p. 462.
narrator, who speaks with all the paradoxes and physiological imagery of Mr. Huxley's essays, seem to have persuaded himself out of the heresy of the Manichees for all his talk of the need to transcend the duality of body and soul. It is true; the heresy of the Manichees still underlies and conditions his best work. If it did not, his work would be stylistically inconsequential. In The Perennial Philosophy Huxley comments on the problem: a writer is "to some extent the victim of his own literary talents. Le style c'est l'homme. No doubt. But the converse is also partly true. L'homme c'est le style. Because we have a gift for writing in a certain way, we find ourselves, in some sort, becoming our way of writing. We mould ourselves in the likeness of our particular brand of eloquence." His talent, in short, is for a kind of art which depends for its intrinsic value and extrinsic effect on a mode of consciousness that he no longer finds acceptable. And if the disparity between his intellectual evaluation of flesh and his unconscious or instinctive devaluation of physiological reality causes the ambiguity in his work, we can


see that the resulting tension is the dramatic or agonistic basis of his satire.

This agonistic nature of Huxley's anatomical vision can be clarified in the terms of Kenneth Burke's distinction between "frames of rejection" and "frames of acceptance." Literary utterances fall into one or the other of these categories. A tragedy or epic, for example, springs from the frame of mind which accepts the conditions of culture and its evaluations of humanity. Satire, on the other hand, depends on a frame of rejection, a mental attitude which refuses to accept the dominant myths and ideals of society. A satiric frame of mind, says Burke, gives rise to utterances motivated by a desire to commit symbolic parricide, to demolish the gods held sacred by the satirist's father. (Samuel Butler, I suppose, is the most obvious example of the satirist whose rejection of local mythology is in essence a rejection of his father.) Parricide or not, the satiric utterance is clearly a deicide—an attack on the gods and icons upon which society has agreed to pattern its collective existence.

In these terms Huxley can be called a satiric personality, a man whose inbred frame of mind is a frame of rejection. It is the given fact, the mathematical constant,
in the equation of his artistic personality. As Burke would put it, his work linguistically "dances the attitude" of rejection. In an earlier section I commented on the difficulty of documenting a deterministic concept of literature. The facts necessary to prove conclusively that Huxley's early life predestined him to satire and the personal major premise of rejection are not conveniently available. But the consistency with which the frame of satiric rejection has continued to mold Huxley's style, even in the face of two acts of intellectual will against it, suggests at least the partial validity of a deterministic conclusion. To an extent, Heraclitus was right: "A man's character is his fate." It is also his style and his way of viewing the world and himself.

My conclusion is that Huxley is a satiric personality, a man whose mode of reacting to culture is rejection. His frame of rejection served him well in his writing; it conditioned his thought and gave form to his utterances. The difficulty arose when his intelligence began to penetrate beyond his basic pattern of thought to a different, a positive frame. Lawrence's doctrine of wholeness and harmony required for its expression a frame of acceptance, and so, later in his
career, did mysticism. But his artistic personality and his style had been formed under the rubric of rejection, and the result was that his affirmative statements lacked the color and the concreteness of his customary negative ones. Satirists, in a word, do not make good preachers. Thus, the frame of rejection which had taken the form of a preoccupation with the vileness, the absurdity, and the grotesqueness of the flesh underlying humanity's spiritual and intellectual pretensions continued to operate even after Huxley's intellect had perceived that the vileness and absurdity are pernicious delusions. The reason why he continued to write in the style of the anatomical vision is probably that it is the only style in which he writes well. It is the only style in which he can be honest, in which he can be honestly and brilliantly himself.
A CHRONOLOGICAL LIST OF THE WORKS OF ALDOUS HUXLEY

This check-list is intended as a rough sketch of Huxley's writing career, not as a comprehensive bibliography. It is not practical to cite his many articles in periodicals, scenarios, reprints, translations, and collections at this point. The following list, however, will give an indication of the range of Huxley's literary endeavors. For a complete bibliographical description of Huxley's works, see Claire John Eschelbach and Joyce Lee Shober, Aldous Huxley—A Bibliography, 1916-1959 (Berkeley, Calif., 1961).

The place of publication of these books is simultaneously New York and London, except where otherwise indicated.

Limbo. 1920.
Leda. 1920.
Crome Yellow. 1921.
Mortal Coils. 1922.
On the Margin: Notes and Essays. 1923.
Antic Hay. 1923.
Little Mexican and Other Stories. 1924.
Those Barren Leaves. 1925.
Along the Road: Notes and Essays of a Tourist. 1925.
Two or Three Graces and Other Stories. 1926.
Jesting Pilate: The Diary of a Journey. 1926.
Essays New and Old. 1926.
Proper Studies. 1927.
Point Counter Point. 1928.
Arabia Infelix and Other Poems. 1929.
Holy Face. 1929.
Do What You Will. 1929.
Brief Candles. 1930.
Vulgarity in Literature: Digressions from a Theme. 1930.
Music at Night. 1931.
The World of Light. 1931.
Brave New World. 1932.
Texts and Pretexts. 1932.
T. H. Huxley as a Literary Man. 1932.
Beyond the Mexique Bay. 1934.
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Time Must Have a Stop. 1944.

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Themes and Variations. 1950.

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Thorp, M. F. "Is Aldous Huxley Unhappy?" Sewanee Review, XXXVIII (July 1930), 269-77.


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