

to boast about her lovers (« I have only had eleven » she conservatively maintains), and a secret love for her brother. In Holly purity coincides with amorality and queer behavior. We feel that despite all her apparent innocence and gaiety Holly is another desperate bird, adrift in the big city, who goes to Tiffany's, the famous New York restaurant, symbol of Holly's security, to recover from the blues and will not find peace until she has discovered the place where she belongs.

*Breakfast at Tiffany's* is a virtuoso piece of writing. The dialogue is richly comic ; the characters are droll, delightful or grotesque ; everything seems to be drawn out of scale. But the range of Truman Capote's new novel is very narrow ; it is suspected of being too skillful, as it is obviously written with an eye on the movie industry ; it will be a nice vehicle for Miss Audrey Hepburn indeed, though I am afraid it will have to be censored, somehow.

(Liège)

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ALDOUS HUXLEY'S COLLECTED ESSAYS

Huxley's *Collected Essays* (1) offer a synthesis of nearly forty years of uninterrupted literary activity. They are truly representative of his thought, for they illustrate all the ideas, opinions, theories developed in his many books of essays. The extraordinary diversity of his interests accounts for the fertility of his achievement. He has apparently explored all the problems that affect man : the arts, music, love, literature, nature, politics, science, religion, philosophy, history, travel... ; there seems to be no subject, however trite or seemingly insignificant, which he does not discuss, no aspect of life on which he has not cast an intelligent eye and which he doesn't investigate with his ruthless critical sense, no motive, no reaction of man of which he is not aware ; and he writes frankly and unreservedly about them, trying to fathom the nature of man and the part he plays in the universe. Also, the scope of his knowledge is amazingly wide. It has now become a commonplace to say that Huxley's mind is an encyclopedia, but his essays are seldom a mere display of information ; he is

(1) A. HUXLEY, *Collected Essays*, Chatto and Windus, London, 1960.

a master at using his knowledge as an opening to, or an illustration of, his speculations. It is essential to point out, for this explains the drift of his work, that the essay is the form which best suits his turn of mind. He is primarily a thinker, his novels reveal his lack of creative imagination and are largely a framework to a discussion of ideas. In the same way, the subject of his essays seems to be of secondary importance and are very often a mere starting point for various considerations which are irrelevant to it. A striking example of this is to be found in the travel diaries; in an essay called 'Guatemala City' (2) he discusses different topics including Marxism and Capitalism but we learn very little about Guatemala. We may wonder then what is the purpose of his analysis, and what is the outcome of it?

The *Collected Essays* are grouped according to subjects regardless of the selection they come from. Chronology is observed only within each group of essays but the reader is hardly aware of it because there are many groups, so that in the whole series, the shifts from one period to another are frequent. Moreover, the essays seem to have been selected on account of their diversity rather than because they represent the author's way of thinking at a given period of his career. At first sight, this hardly seems an objection. There is indeed a remarkable constancy in his work: the problems he tackles are extremely varied, but they are usually treated in the same way; he may have insisted on different aspects of life, but on the whole, his vision of humanity has remained the same. However, if his opinion about man has changed little, his attitude towards him has developed from mere observation and denunciation of his behaviour to positive interest in the individual and the harmonious development of his personality. Later, he became aware of the limitations of individualism and suggested an intelligent cooperation between individuals in order to achieve, through goodness and virtue, the unity of all human beings in the Ultimate Reality. These two stages in the development of his thought are discernible in the last essays of the book: « Pascal » (from *Do What You Will*), « Beliefs » (from *Ends and Means*) and « Knowledge and Understanding » (from *Adonis and the Alphabet*). In « Pascal », he warns us of the danger of being too consistent and true to one world-view only, for a human being is 'a series of distinct psychological states, a colony of diverse personalities' (3), and he concludes by saying that 'the harmony of life is a harmony built up of many elements' (3). In « Beliefs », he explains that

(2) *Beyond the Mexican Bay*, 1949.

(3) *Collected Essays*, Pascal, pp. 356 and 361.

'human beings are creatures who, in so far as they are animals and persons tend to regard themselves as independent existents, connected at most by purely biological ties, but who, in so far as they rise above animality and personality, are able to perceive that they are interrelated parts of physical and spiritual wholes incomparably greater than themselves' ... 'If we would realize our true relations with ultimate reality and our fellow beings, we must practise morality' ... (4). In « Knowledge and Understanding », he insists more particularly on detachment and self-knowledge as means to achieve total awareness, which makes the understanding of all reality possible. Unfortunately, except in these essays, the progress of his thought is hardly apparent. As in a jig-saw puzzle, the ideas must be fitted into a whole by the reader who knows his work well enough to do so. It is the more to be regretted as some readers and critics have a tendency to consider the *Collected Essays* as an indiscriminate piling up of comments and information. The review of the *T.L.S.*, significantly called 'All grist to Mr. Huxley's Mill', is extremely severe :

... The stones grind away indifferently — much as the plumbing regulator in certain continental trains may be moved, by English-speaking travellers, 'indifferently to the left or to the right'. Ideas seem to go in at one ear and out at the other. It is so, magnanimously, with the author ; and after a time it becomes so, distressingly, with the reader too (5).

Yet, in spite of the choice and the order in which the essays are presented, the attentive reader will be able to perceive that they are more than mere discussions of facts and ideas, that a genuine interest in human activities underlies them, and that behind the 'intelligent talk', there is a deeply thought and probably lived philosophy of life, however limited it may be. Huxley does not always deal with man in contemporary life. He describes and explains the work and the attitude of men ranging from the Middle Ages to the twentieth century. He observes people living at different times in different places and comes to the conclusion that human nature does not change whatever its environment : his essay on Maine de Biran tends to prove that Man usually behaves in much the same way whatever kind of society he lives in, for society hardly influences him as an individual. His main activities and experiences like meals, love, sex, sickness, death are strictly personal ; they are non-historical, non-social and even non-spatial and non-temporal. People like Pepys, Petrarch and Dante lived at different periods

(4) *Ibidem*, Beliefs, p. 376.

(5) *Times Literary Supplement*, Dec. 30, 1960.

in different places, but their behaviour as individuals was much the same : it was no better than that of ordinary human beings and at odds with the character of their writings. Even cultural activities are not always conditioned by history. Some epochs are particularly lucky : they give rise to Periclean Athens, Renaissance Italy or Elizabethan England, but as a rule the achievement of the exceptionally gifted man (for great things are achieved only by individuals, apparently without the help or influence of society) is as remarkable in one age as in another ; for instance, « an exhibition of Art in the Dark Ages would be as fine (within the limits imposed by the social conditions of the time) and as aesthetically significant as an exhibition of the art of any other period » (6). But don't the social conditions just make all the difference ? Huxley writes that « human nature does not change » ; conventions and traditions, prejudices and religious beliefs, moral systems and codes, varying according to geographical and historical circumstances, make men seem different but they only « mold into different forms the unchanging material of human instincts, passion and desire » (7). So, there are fashions in love as there are conventions and forms in art, but the psychological and physiological material of love remains the same, exactly as the fundamentals of passion, of intellect and imagination remain unaltered. In fact, primitive people are simply civilized people with the lid off (the lid of manners, conventions, traditions of thought and feeling), so that one can observe Negroes in the West Indies or the people in Mayfair or even a pair of Siamese cats (for they can teach very fruitful lessons about human nature), and come to the same conclusions.

This insistence on the sameness of human nature is rather depressing, especially as the picture of man suggested by the essays is not very flattering. Huxley values the individual and dislikes the crowd, but he repeatedly judges man not as a unique creature but as a member of a group who behave like a herd. That is probably why the picture of man he draws is so unfavourable. In the variety of matters treated in the *Collected Essays*, the demonstration of man's stupidity appears less systematic than in *Along the Road* or *Beyond the Mexican Bay*, in which he frequently generalizes. Comparing the American Indians to people in other parts of the world, he concludes that differences are superficial, that the motives of action and the origin of events are everywhere alike since man is intrinsically identical everywhere, that is, driven by the same foolish passions. The selections reproduced from that book in

(6) *Collected Essays*, p. 230.

(7) *Op. cit.*, p. 70.

the *Collected Essays* are mainly descriptive, but there are many instances to corroborate his opinion that man is stupid, ignorant, superstitious, and inconsistent, that he is often a dupe or urged by self-interest and hate; he is capable of greatness, but in the individual, the bad cancels out the good, and in societies, the bad predominates, since all the bad features are brought to a paroxysm in a group or a crowd. It is not merely the primitive or uneducated people that are stupid or ignorant, though they are bad enough. Huxley's attitude to these appears clearly from the following passages. The first one refers to American Indians: « Frankly, try how I may, I cannot very much like primitive people. They make me feel uncomfortable. *La bêtise n'est pas mon fort* » (8). The second one (written sixteen years later, which shows that Huxley's attitude had not changed very much) describes the historical background of Goya's work:

... and all the time, like the drone of a bagpipe accompanying the louder noises of what is officially called history, the enormous stupidity of the average men and women, the chronic squalor of their superstitions, and the bestiality of their occasional violences and orgies (9).

However, the educated are just as irresponsible in their own field: psychologists choose the easiest line, the history of medical fashions is grotesque, doctors choose to ignore effective cures, and the way lunatics have been treated for centuries seems to prove how stupid the sane are. Science is not much help for it « produces improved means to unimproved ends » (p. 368).

It is, however, in his attitude towards religion and politics that man shows himself most irrational and nonsensical. His selfish and blind submission, his bigoted superstition prevent him from grasping the true import of religion. If it is true that religion has helped to spread a humanitarian ideal, it has also spread « idiocy, intolerance and servile abjection » and has become an institution of which man is the consenting and undiscerning victim. It does not help man to lead a better life; on the contrary, « conceptualized beliefs, including even the belief in a God of love and righteousness, divide them (men) and, as the dismal record of religious history bears witness, set them for centuries on end at each other's throats » (10). Philosophical systems are popular because they are simple, not because they help men to understand the Ultimate Reality, for they have hitherto been « crude, bald, preposterously straightforward » and « men have rushed into the systems prepared

(8) *Beyond the Mexican Bay*, Guatemala City, p. 124.

(9) *Collected Essays, Themes and Variations*, p. 160.

(10) *Ibidem*, p. 380.

for them by philosophers and founders of religion, as they would rush from a dark jungle into the haven of a well-lit, commodious house » (11). As to politics, how could people deal efficiently with them, since they are *congenitally* (12) incapable of taking an intelligent interest in any but short-range, small-scale problems (13) ? They are responsible for their own misery ; for instance, a dictatorial government is a source of evil but the success of dictators is due to the stupidity of the people who admire them. They are unable to govern themselves. Huxley believes that « at best a tolerably humane, partially free and fairly just society unvariably carries within itself the seeds of its own decadence » (14). He is convinced that large-scale organizations are extremely difficult if not impossible to run, and recommends decentralization. He is very sceptical about the possible achievements of large groups, for people in large numbers tend to lose their personality and capacity for goodness and are reduced to « sub-human emotionalism, panic animality or a state of intoxicated sub-humanity » (15). He likes to refer to the crimes and insanity of large-scale human societies, but hardly mentions large-scale human achievements. Large groups of human beings are obviously distasteful to him. They are not to be trusted either with leisure or with knowledge (16). The impression prevails that they belong to another species (from which the reader may defensively exclude himself) and that everything they do is, of necessity, second-rate. So about popular arts :

Perhaps, the wisest thing to do is to abandon them to their inevitable vulgarity and ineptitude and to concentrate all available resources on the training of a minority that shall be capable of appreciating the higher activities of the spirit. Il faut cultiver notre oasis (17).

He doesn't despair utterly of the human race, but to him quantity and quality are irreconcilable. Whenever he praises man, it is as an individual and then he is presented as an exception, often he is a genius. Huxley refers frequently to the congenital stupidity of the majority (18) ; he obviously believes in the existence of an elite, people who were either born geniuses or else are educable because exceptionally gifted, and who are to be wholly credited with their accomplishments as individuals

(11) *Ibidem*, p. 5.

(12) My italics.

(13) *Collected Essays*, p. 260.

(14) *Collected Essays*, p. 277.

(15) *Ibidem*, p. 257.

(16) « Knowledge has had its disastrous effects on the minor men, on the rank and file... »

(17) *Beyond the Mexican Bay*, p. 279.

(18) *Collected Essays*, p. 46, p. 260, p. 276.

regardless of the period or the circumstances in which they live. He sounds like a convinced supporter of Plato's Republic, which moreover Mr. Scogan advocates in *Crome Yellow* (19).

Huxley is interested in people and their doings but obviously, he does not sympathize with them and can never feel he is one of them. Yet, in spite of his seemingly deep aversion for man, we are at first inclined to take what he writes for granted and to agree with him. Why does the reader so easily agree with an author who so mercilessly exposes him? One reason is undoubtedly the intelligence, the lucidity, the all-embracing knowledge which pervade Huxley's writings. Also, the judicious choice of arguments, the fluency and the ease make it all sound so true! The essays are seldom purely abstract speculations; they are abundantly and convincingly illustrated. When, for instance, he criticizes Wordsworth's single-minded attitude towards nature, he does so on the ground of his own experience of nature in various parts of the world. His sense of the extreme variety and richness of life is unmistakable. It is on account of that diversity that he rejects classicism, for concentration and over-simplification of life make it impossible to reproduce the complexity of reality (20).

As I have already indicated, Huxley's attitude to man is not essentially negative. He is a moralist, and if he criticizes, he also suggests remedies for man's troubles. Unfortunately, the remedy often sounds utopian, not because what he advises is so hard to attain, but rather because it is inconsistent with his description of men and their institutions. He demands a change in individual behaviour which alone is likely to transform society. This is of course consistent with his regard for the individual and his distrust of the group. The rule of life he recommends is based on mysticism followed by action. Granting that this doctrine can be an efficient cure to many evils, how many people are inclined to mysticism? However deeply impressed one is after reading *The Perennial Philosophy*, one is struck by its utopian character. There is no need to be a pessimist like Huxley to imagine that very few people indeed, self-dedicated individuals as he himself calls them, would be willing to put it into practice. What is to become of the rest of humanity then? They are probably to live as reasonably as their capacity allows in decentralized and self-governed groups, or when it is possible, governed by the men who have learned how to act in contemplation. There is no reference to any practicable philosophy except that of good sense.

What is indeed most convincing in the essays is his appeal to common sense and measure, his pursuit of balance and harmony.

(19) *Crome Yellow*, Penguin Edition, pp. 129-130.

(20) *Collected Essays*, p. 109.

Huxley loathes excess of any kind and his advice is always a dictate of reason and a compromise. In an essay on Wordsworth he insists that life must be lived as much with the body and the instincts as with the intellect <sup>(21)</sup>, and he deplures the fact than men often prefer the verdict of their intellect to that of their immediate intuitions. He thinks that too much liberty is as life-destroying as too much restraint. Religion needs both the spiritual and the magical ; the suppression at one time or another of either element has had dreadful consequences. He shows how his philosophy of contemplation and action has been practised with success by the Benedictines. If compromise becomes a way of life, it must also characterize art. So, good literature can't be the expression of what goes on in the mind only, it should also explore the relations between body and mind, while painting should be a mixture of both abstract and representative art.

Yet, in spite of his efforts to strike a middle course and to achieve a work that renders life in all its aspects, we may wonder whether he meets his own criterion of excellence. In the introduction, he writes that the best essays are those inspired by thought and feeling. There is no doubt about the remarkable intelligence and lucidity of the thought. But what about the feeling ? It is often deprecatory and seldom of the kind we most appreciate. Now and again, the judicious denunciation of abuses and the wisdom of his advice incline us to mistake him for a lover of humanity. However, his exhortations to common sense are not so much the effect of a strong feeling for humanity and its welfare as the appeal of a reasonable man who cannot stand to watch humanity heading for disaster and who gives warnings and advice. When the reader surrenders, it is to the argument rather than to the warmth of his brotherly love. We are under the impression that his very common sense and search for compromise forbid him to be a pure rationalist and induce him to commend feeling. Since he does so with the help of reason, the effect is sometimes paradoxical.

That he seriously tried to achieve harmony and to compensate for the overruling power of his intellect is perhaps best exemplified by his endeavour to keep close to life. For instance, he objects to the abstract criticism of music and insists on the necessity to get from the 'listening' what music means to convey. In painting and literature, his main purpose is to bring out the relationship between the work of art and real life. His admiration for D.H. Lawrence and his work is another indication of his openness to all the constituents of life. Huxley

(21) *Collected Essays*, p. 7.



sensed the artist in Lawrence and admired him for what he was and for wanting to remain himself. He understood what was essential in Lawrence, the nature of his genius, and though he lacked the power of Lawrence's vision, he had the subtlety to acknowledge it in him. He seems tolerant and understanding towards attitudes and ways of life other than his own provided it is real life and no substitute for it nor theorizing about it. He criticizes Pascal for trying to kill life in himself and in others.

Huxley's obvious aim is to convey the sense of the true reality of life in its manifoldness and he does so within what he calls a three-poled frame of reference : the pole of the personal and the autobiographical, the pole of the objective, the factual, the concrete-particular, and the pole of the abstract-universal. Having derived the particular data from his personal experience, he then infers the general truths. His conclusions often sound prophetic ; of the political developments he predicted thirty years ago, some have actually taken place. Yet, oddly enough, though he observes man in his environment, he does not convey his awareness of contemporary life. It is true that he deploras certain tendencies in politics, but on the whole his view of society is outside time. He is often referred to as a representative of the twenties, but as he appears in the essays at least, he cannot fit in any particular decade. He has no connection with the younger writers of the thirties : he was not involved in their ideological contentions for, at the time, his new concern for society found expression in pacifism. He stands aside, sharing neither the enthusiasms nor the disillusionments of the intellectuals of his time, but lives through the turmoil, true to his own standards and finding his own way to mysticism through self-knowledge and detachment. That is perhaps why in spite of the integrity, the brilliance and the judiciousness of the essays, we just don't feel the touch of humanity we expected in a work that is mainly concerned with man.

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