ANTIC HAY: A STUDY IN POST-WAR DISILLUSIONMENT

The age demanded an image
Of its accelerated grimace,
Something for the modern stage,
Not, at any rate, an Attic grace.

EZRA POUND

ANTIC HAY: A STUDY IN POST-WAR DISILLUSIONMENT

By

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ABSTRACT

In Antic Hay, Aldous Huxley wanted, as he stated, to depict the "life and opinions" of the post-war generation. The considerable critical and popular response elicited by the newly published novel indicates that Huxley had indeed made a statement which, at the time, was of urgent importance to his contemporaries. Reader reaction varied from virulent condemnation to an uneasy acknowledgement of the author's talents to outright acceptance. Significantly, Antic Hay received its most enthusiastic reception from Huxley's immediate contemporaries -- the young members of the post-war generation for whom the novel had been written.

Whatever it was that attracted or repelled Antic Hay's original readers was a quality inherent in the fiction itself which embodied or reflected a transformation of sensibility taking place at the time. If some readers deplored the surface flippancy and the seemingly irresponsible brutality of the novel, others saw in these same features a fundamental seriousness. Huxley himself maintained that his intention in writing Antic Hay was entirely serious and explained any possible confusion as arising from the novel's incongruous blend of farce and tragedy, fantasy and realism. And, in fact, his conviction that farce could at once mask and yet effectively convey a sense of tragedy constitutes the basic

premise of Antic Hay.

Set in the London of the 1920's, Antic Hay partakes of the decade's mood of pessimism and abandoned hedonism. Always behind the reckless gaiety of cabaret scenes and night excursions, behind the mocking cynicism which animates the novel's dialogue, is a profound sense of disillusionment. This disillusionment has originated in the Great War which, concentrated in the figure of Myra Viveash, casts its shadow over the existence of all the novel's characters. The War's influence on the fictional world of Antic Hay is pervasive. Evoked through allusions and fragments of personal memory, it provides the appropriate cultural perspective from which to consider the novel's events. The cynical rejection of past values and beliefs springs from a consciousness of imminent cultural dissolution which has rendered impotent the capacity for positive vision. The hopelessness of such a plight is shown by the desperate attempt to escape a consciousness of spiritual impotence in a continual round of vain distractions. The result is only further disillusionment; the novel's final vision is one of utter pessimism.

In Antic Hay, Huxley pungently depicts and examines the plight of his contemporaries. But his detachment as a commentator is undermined by a curious susceptibility to the vitiating strain of sentimentalism and affectation characteristic of the novel's fictional world. The outward mask of cynicism which emphatically announces the disappointed

idealist within is as much a feature of his own attitude as that of his characters. It was Huxley's failure to fully transcend the prevailing mood of his age which must have made Antic Hay's evocation of the post-war ethos so compelling and relevent to its original readers. At the same time, this flawed perspective -- indispensible to Huxley's appeal in the 1920's -- has made Antic Hay somewhat of a "period piece", fascinating as an account of its age, but of limited significance as a work of art.

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INTRODUCTION

It is a commonplace that Aldous Huxley was a spokesman for his generation, that his works reflect the opinions and feelings of his contemporaries. "He is the most fascinating spokesman of a generation disillusioned by war and intellectual confusion everywhere," wrote Carl Van Doran in 1925.[1] Huxley himself implied as much when, in a letter to his father, he stated the premise of one of his novels:

> It is a book written by a member of what I may call the war-generation for others of his kind; and . . . it is intended to reflect . . . the life and opinions of an age which has seen the violent disruption of almost all the standards, conventions and values current in the previous epoch.[2]

The novel in question was Antic Hay and it was written in 1923 just one year after the publications of The Waste Land and Ulysses. Like the writers of those works, Huxley was concerned with depicting his age: the events recorded in Antic Hay take place in 1922 and are thus virtually contemporaneous with the composition of the novel. If Eliot had brilliantly evoked a prevailing sense of urban alienation and Joyce had recorded minutely and powerfully the events of a June day in Dublin, Huxley filled his novel with topical references to Lloyd George (p.92), Marie Stopes (p.55), Unamuno (p.16), Schoenburg (p.16), Picasso (p.116), the present condition of certain London districts like Paddington and

Pimlico, and, of course, the Great War. But while those works of Eliot and Joyce are considered to be landmarks of modern literature, Antic Hay, if read at all now, makes a relatively slight impression on today's reader. The topicality of the novel is partially to blame, as is, undoubtedly and indeed finally, Huxley's self-admitted failings as an artist. Yet the assertion, repeated time and again by critics and readers, that Huxley was a major spokesman of his age, urges a consideration of what made Antic Hay so pertinent to its original readers.

In the preface to his study Aldous Huxley: Satire and Structure, Jerome Meckier dismisses the viability of approaching Huxley on the basis of his initial popularity, claiming that

> It is of little benefit to base the case for him on his appeal to his original audience of the 1920's and 30's. To point out the immeasurable ways in which any Huxley novel is a virtual index to the ideas, trends, and fads of the years surrounding its composition might make fascinating reading but would inevitably reduce Huxley to literary history, perhaps even sociology.[3]

Meckier suggests that Huxley's main interest for us lies in the continuing relevence of his thought and convictions. Indeed, various aspects of his work dealing with science, mysticism, pacifism, as well as numerous other concerns, are certainly of interest to any modern reader. Thus, a large portion of Huxley criticism deals with these "relevent" aspects of his work while general surveys of

modern fiction mention Huxley, if at all, as a minor and more or less discredited novelist. Novels like Antic Hay have come to be regarded, even by Huxley's admirers, merely as early indications of the writer's later intellectual development or, alternatively, as the particular brand of light, satirical fiction that Huxley abandoned for more experimental novels like Point Counter Point and Eyeless in Gaza and the much later didactic fiction of Island. As a consequence of such preoccupations, the distinguishing character of Huxley's very early fiction has been largely overlooked.

Meckier's contention that a consideration of Huxley's original impact on his contemporaries would be of merely sociological interest assumes that the writer's appeal lay in an uncanny ability to portray accurately the age's "ideas, trends and fads". But as Huxley's statement to his father indicates, the basic premise of Antic Hay involved a serious concern with profound stirrings of cultural unease. The "life and opinions of an age" which he sought to depict would inevitably reflect the age's superficial characteristics, as indeed does the picture drawn by Eliot in The Waste Land. One reviewer of Antic Hay perceptively associated the two works:

> Mr. Huxley has the American poet's flair for topical wit of a distinctly metropolitan flavour. London of the theatres and electric billboards, the smart cabarets and dancing places, the parks and the dingy suburbs, is evoked with the skill of a sleight-of-hand performer. It is, perhaps, a little higher on the social scale than Mr. Eliot's city, with a little more money to spend.

But its point of view is much the same.[4]

Critics have drawn connections between Huxley's progression from his early cynicism to the mysticism of his later fiction and Eliot's similar movement from The Waste Land and "The Hollow Men" to the Four Quartets. But the vast differences of medium and range which separate the two writers suggest that what characteristics they have in common are due to the fact that they were writing at the same time and under similar conditions. What is important is that they dealt with a contemporary mood of disillusionment and uncertainty, although in different ways.

In this connection it is interesting to note an essay entitled "Accidie" which Huxley published in 1923. In it he discusses the changing concepts of accidie, first seen as one of the deadly sins, then as a disease, and finally as "an essentially lyrical emotion, fruitful in the inspiration of much of the most characteristic modern literature."[5] Huxley's use of the word "characteristic" here is significant, for it implies a particular status for the ennui of his age. And indeed, he goes on to argue that this most recent form of accidie is his generation's peculiar inheritance: among the contributing factors to this condition he includes the increasing urbanization of the nineteenth century, a resultant restlessness and need for new distractions "and finally, to crown this vast structure of failures and disillusionments, there came the War of 1914."[6] He concludes:

> Other epochs have witnessed disasters, have had to suffer disillusionment; but in no century have the disillusionments followed on one another's heels with such unintermitted rapidity as in the twentieth, for the good reason that in no century has change been so rapid and profound. The mal du siecle was an inevitable evil; indeed, we can claim with a certain pride that we have a right to our accidie. With us it is not a sin or a disease of the hypochondries; it is a state of mind which fate has forced upon us.[7]

If there is a hint of self-satisfaction in these lines, it is a note which was in tune with the prevailing attitude of the decade. It is such an age of "facile despairs, backyard Hamlets, cheap return tickets to the end of the night" that George Orwell criticizes in his well-known essay, "Inside the Whale".[8] Looking back on the 1920's in a rare mood of retrospection, Huxley himself states that what he calls "the popularization of meaninglessness" was a convenient way of excusing various forms of irresponsible behaviour.[9] But if the older Huxley had long since abandoned such an attitude -- writing to John Middleton Murray in 1946 he was anxious to dissociate himself from the fashionably cynical young writer of the 1920's[10] -- his assertion in 1923 that Antic Hay reflected the "opinions and life" of the post-war generation must nevertheless be taken at face value. Although Antic Hay partakes of the mood of facile despair deplored by Orwell, it is only within such a context that the novel can be properly understood. For Huxley's conviction, stated in "Accidie" and implied in the letter to his father, that ennui "is a state of mind which fate has forced upon us"

constitutes the fundamental attitude behind Antic Hay. It is with singular aptness that Cyril Connolly calls Huxley "the most typical of a generation, typical in his promise, his erudition, his cynicism and in his peculiar brand of prolific sterility".[11]

This study does not propose to make a case for Huxley as an artist. To attempt to place Huxley in the first rank of fiction writers is unrealistic as he himself would have asserted. To argue that he belongs to a tradition distinct from the mainstream of English literature -- that of Peacock and Mallock, for example -- is perhaps more helpful; but again the steep decline of Huxley's popularity in the 1920's to his relative obscurity today suggests that an understanding of this writer demands a consideration of his contemporaneity. As Raymond Mortimer wrote in 1923, "Mr. Huxley's decorations are nothing if not voguish. Ephemeral too? Well, it is we for whom they are destined and not our possible posterity."[13] It is the intention of this study, then, to examine Antic Hay with a view to appraising its cogency as an expression of its age.

In Chapter I the reception of Antic Hay by its original readers will be considered, as will be the interaction of the novel's comic and tragic elements: both these concerns will be discussed in regard to Huxley's stated intentions in writing Antic Hay. Essentially, this chapter will attempt to establish the proper context in which to view the novel.

Chapters II and III will examine in detail the picture of the post-war epoch presented in Antic Hay: the former will deal with the mood of disillusionment which informs the novel; the latter will discuss the hedonistic pursuits indulged in by the novel's characters as they react to this disillusionment. Chapter IV and the conclusion will serve the purpose of examining and evaluating Antic Hay's final statement of pessimism.

CHAPTER I

> I can predict the consequences. Mr. Huxley will have shoals of imitators. His licence will provoke clever young men and clever young women to out-Aldous Aldous. We shall have herds of literary rats exploring every sewer. The craft of letters will be debased and degraded until literature becomes a synonym for bad smells and bad drains.
>
> The cloacre of vice will be dredged for fresh infamies. There will be a popular cult of blasphemy and a profitable school of nameless innuendo. There are few turpitudes which cannot be limned by the expert juggler with words. Literary subtlety can adumbrate moral cancers and leprosies that make even the pathologist shudder in his consulting-room. There is no limit to the resources of wordcraft when it is prostituted to the abysses of baseness.[1]

So wrote James Douglas in a review of the newly published Antic Hay in 1923. His was an extreme reaction, but in its virulence it illustrates the remarkable impact that Aldous Huxley had on the literary world of the 1920s. Although no other reviewer matched Douglas's intensity, the critical response to Antic Hay indicates that the book was of a controversial nature. Reviewers noted what they described as the novel's savagery, its blasphemy, its diabolical cleverness and brilliance. H. W. Boynton, in the Independent, described it as constituting a "'new' and immensely smart fiction".[2] Joseph Wood Krutch called Huxley the age's most accomplished exponent of "impudent modernity".[3]

The novelty of Antic Hay was immediately apparent, but the epithets which greeted it -- clever, smart, impudent --

suggest that the novel's innovations were viewed with ambivalence. A certain uneasiness is evident in even some of Huxley's more sympathetic critics which manifests itself in a tendency to regard the cleverness and the "brilliance" as products of adolescent precociousness. Referring to the flippant humour of Antic Hay, Gerald Gould wrote, "Mr. Huxley will have his little joke, and it must be one that, however inexplicably, every schoolboy shares".[4] But Boynton revealed the antagonism underlying his colleagues' uneasiness when he complained that Huxley "has the usual scunner of his generation against everything else, before or outside his generation".[5]

Yet while the literary Mahatmas of the weekly reviews may have distrusted Antic Hay's cleverness and irreverence, the book was greeted enthusiastically by Huxley's immediate contemporaries. From accounts given by people who when young had read Huxley avidly, it seems that Huxley's early works had a profoundly liberating influence on his generation. David Cecil, for example, remarks on how "in the formative period between thirteen and twenty he [Huxley] had, as it were, 'released' them, had freed their spirits from the conventions of the past and the inhibiting conditions of the present age."[6] The early short stories, the poetry -- for it was as a poet that Huxley first emerged -- and, most important, the light satirical novel, Crome Yellow (1921), had established Huxley as a figure of scandal in the literary

world; the mocking irreverence of these works set him up as the definitive model of smart, rebellious modernity. Antic Hay, however, while retaining the lethal frivolity which characterized Huxley's other early writings, seemed more provocative. Of his reaction to this novel in particular, Angus Wilson writes:

> The revolutionary forces that released me were all and more than all that I expected. It seemed a revelation of emancipation and intellectual richness. To be precociously sophisticated, then, was indeed 'very heaven'. For many years Antic Hay and Point Counter Point were my favourites. Smart, intellectual and artistic London was after all just outside my door. The inmates of the Kensington hotels where I lived might talk as they would, but in every bus and tube on which I travelled to and from school there were brilliant twisted Spandrells, blaspheming Colemans, or perhaps even "civilized" Mr. Mercaptan going home to Crebillon fils Sofa. A few years more and I, too, would be a Gumbril.[7]

Wilson recalls that, at the time (the 1920s), Crome Yellow and Those Barren Leaves (1925) were less exciting because their idyllic settings did not seem immediately relevant to his own life.[8] And indeed, set against the background of Antic Hay's seedy back-alleys and "fast" cabarets, Huxley's insolent flippancy must have acquired a more disquieting character. Although not so profound an expression of disillusionment as "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" or The Waste Land, the world-weary sophistication of Antic Hay expressed cogently the contemporary mood of dissatisfaction and restlessness.

In a letter written not long after the publication of Antic Hay, Huxley responded to his father's expressed dislike of the novel, "I can't say that I expected you would enjoy

the book. But on the other hand I expected my contemporaries would; and so far as I know by what people have written to me they have".[9] Huxley's contention that Antic Hay would undoubtedly appeal to his young contemporaries seems to suggest that the particular character of the novel which disturbed the elder Huxley was, in his son's view, representative of the younger generation's state of mind. He claimed that the book "has a certain novelty being a work in which all the ordinarily separated categories -- tragic, comic, fantastic, realistic -- are combined so to say chemically into a single entity, whose unfamiliar character makes it at first sight rather repulsive".[10] Huxley maintained that Antic Hay was fundamentally serious, and his comments here indicate that he was aware that his intentions could be misconstrued because of this "unfamiliar character". The comic-fantastic aspects of Antic Hay are salient and could invalidate, for some readers, the novel's claims to seriousness. In this connection, Mary Thriplow, a lady novelist depicted in Those Barren Leaves, voices a similar complaint:

> They always seem to misunderstand what one writes . . . They like my books because they're smart and unexpected and rather paradoxical and cynical and elegantly brutal. They don't see how serious it all is. They don't see the tragedy and tenderness underneath. You see . . . I'm trying something new -- a chemical compound of all categories. Lightness and tragedy and loveliness and wit and fantasy and realism and irony and sentimentality all combined.[11]

As well as practically quoting parts of Huxley's letter, Miss Thriplow indicates the ambivalence of attitude that a

book of Antic Hay's nature can evince. As a character named Cardan says to her, "if you must complicate the matter by writing tragedy in terms of farce you can only expect confusion."[12] But if the farcical surface renders equivocal the author's intent, the farce is none-the-less necessary. Antic Hay's is a special kind of seriousness, the result of a combination of disparate elements which together form "a single entity". This resultant combination of comic-fantastic and tragi-realistic elements is intended as an embodiment of a particular attitude reflected in the generation for whom Antic Hay was written.

This attitude might be compared to the stance of deliberate inconsequence characteristic of the Dandy. Huxley could not be fairly termed a Dandy-writer, as Max Beerbohm or Ronald Firbank could, although Cyril Connolly sees him as having gone through a period of dandyism in his very early writings. Connolly's definition of dandyism, however, stresses style and he in fact argues that Antic Hay, lacking the irony and lyricism of Crome Yellow and the early short stories, is not an example of Dandy literature.[13] But while style is central to a consideration of literary dandyism, it is a product of a fundamental attitude, namely, insolence and rebelliousness. Of more interest with regard to Huxley are Connolly's remarks concerning the Dandy's requisite affectation of frivolity: "It is one of the weaknesses of the Dandy's position that the seriousness on which it is based must at all costs be concealed".[14] Martin Green suggests a description of the

Dandy's position in this respect as "a turning of the back on the old forms of seriousness."[15] The farcical character of Antic Hay reflects such a stance. The impropriety and irreverence, the apparent immaturity and mere precociousness noted by many of the novel's reviewers, manifest an attitude seemingly inimical to serious concerns. An anonymous reviewer felt that "Mr. Huxley is at least having his revenge upon his forebear, the biologist, and his kinsman, Matthew Arnold, the apostle of law and order, 'sweetness and light', in art."[16] However, the special seriousness of Antic Hay is defined by the novel's incongruous surface flippancy against the high seriousness of an older generation. Its farcical aspects give the novel an "unfamiliar character" differing radically from conventional expressions of serious intent; but, as Huxley maintained, Antic Hay was intended to reflect -- "fantastically, of course, but none the less faithfully"[17] -- the essential plight of his generation.

How closely do Huxley's claims for Antic Hay relate to the novel itself? In his study The Vanishing Hero, Sean O'Faolain is troubled by what he feels to be a lack of sincerity on Huxley's part; he finds that rather than being accurate and faithful documentaries, the early novels are "fair caricatures" of an era.[18] Certainly caricature is a salient feature of Huxley's fiction in general. Antic Hay's characters have names like Gumbril, Boldero, Dr. Jolly, etc. The descriptions of these characters have an artificial, cartoon-

like quality: Mr. Porteous is "pillar-boxical" in his appearance and wears "musical comedy trousers" (p.31); Mr. Albermarle, the gallery director, is "a round, smooth little man with a head like an egg" (p.39); the elegant Bruin Opps is simply a top hat, a shirt front, a long grey face and a glittering monocle (p.58). Similarly, Myra Viveash and Rosie Shearwater are doll-like vamps. Certain descriptions, like that of Mr. Bojanus's natty appearance -- "such a sense of pure and abstract conic-ness in the sleekly rounded skirts" (p.32) -- and that of Mrs. Viveash and Bruin Opps standing among workman at a coffee stall -- "A tall tubed hat and a silk-faced overcoat, a cloak of flame-coloured satin and in bright, coppery hair a great Spanish comb of carved tortoise-shell" (p.57) -- evoke a peculiarly caricature-like sense of the novel's cultural milieu.

O'Faolain's remarks, however, imply that these surface distortions are reflected in the final world-view presented in the novels. This, essentially, is what disturbs Elizabeth Bowen who observes of Huxley's fiction that "in a great glare of intellectual hilarity his characters dangle rather too jerkily; they are morality characters with horrified puppet faces".[19] The deliberate exaggeration associated with caricature connotes a necessarily limited approach to reality: selected details of an object are magnified while others are ignored, thus creating an exaggerated impression which does not accurately reflect every-day reality. If, as O'Faolain

claims, Antic Hay's depiction of the post-war era is a caricature, is the seriousness of its intent impaired? In an essay on Ben Jonson, Huxley writes:

> Humours do not, of course, exist in actuality; they are true only as caricatures are true. There are times when we wonder whether a caricature is not, after all, truer than a photograph; there are others when it seems a stupid lie.[20]

Huxley does not specify under what conditions the truthfulness of caricature can be determined, but the implication is that veracity is a question of context and point of view. Thus, even a deliberate distortion of reality can carry a truth of its own.

A frequent criticism made of Huxley's characterization is that it often appears to be needlessly insensitive and cruel. "The author gives the impression that he hates and despises his characters. He is without pity in the exposure of their weaknesses and their turpitudes," writes Arnold Bennett.[21] Indeed, Huxley often magnifies his characters' deviations to the point where they become monstrous travesties. His apparent brutality in this respect suggests a capriciousness inimical to serious moral concerns. Such an attitude seems to extend to the general character of his writing. For example, he described one of his early short stories as "so heartless and cruel that you wd.probably scream if you read it. The concentrated venom of it is quite delicious".[22] Hence the charges of irresponsible brutality. Huxley, however, does deal with these charges in his essay

on Ben Jonson. Rejecting the "orgies of quaint pathos and sentimental comedy" to which he believes people have become accustomed, he favours the brutal comedy of Jonson's plays:

> There is a certain hardness and brutality about them all -- due, of course, ultimately to the fact that the characters are not human, but rather marionettes of wood and metal that collide and belabour one another, like the ferocious puppets of the Punch and Judy show, without feeling the painfulness of the proceedings.[25]

He qualifies these remarks by adding that Jonson's heartlessness is not the light, cynical heartlessness of later Restoration comedy, but something more ponderous: "It reminds us of one of those enormous,painful jokes which fate sometimes plays on humanity."[24] Comic exaggeration in such a context, then, has a certain weightiness. Through their very incongruity the elements of farce and caricature pungently delineate the underlying tragedy of a situation.

The farce of Antic Hay operates along the lines of one of these huge "painful jokes"; serious implications exist beneath the novel's comic surface. In an early poem, entitled "The Ideal Found Wanting", Huxley depicts a weary music-hall performer who, "sick of clowning and owlglass tricks", longs to break through his prison of stage-props and fake scenery to reality, "Dark blue and calm as music". Instead, he finds that "the laugh's turned on me!/I kicked at card-board, gaped at red limelight,/you laughed and cheered my latest knockabout".[25] It is not fortuitous that Huxley should choose to express the modern themes of

disillusionment and nihilistic despair in terms of clownish knockabout. In Harlequin's Stick, Charlie's Cane, Dave Madden suggests that these concerns are dealt with similarly in the drama of Beckett and the films of Godard.[26] And Martin Green points out that images such as the circus-ring and show-booth occur frequently in literature and art of the 1890s and early twentieth century, and come to exemplify the modern sensibility.[27] Green mentions in particular the profound influence of the commedia dell'arte:

> The commedia figures had become prominent in the art of the 1890's in both England and France. They had always been in the music halls, where for instance Dan Leno's clowning was much admired by dandy-aesthetes like Max Beerbohm. They became a popular success in the early movies in the work of Charlie Chaplin, Buster Keaton, Laurel and Hardy, and the Marx Brothers. They inspired modern poetry . . . through Jules Laforge and T.S. Eliot. And in the 1920's they entered fiction.[28]

The painful consciousness evident as the clown pits himself against the cruel machinery of farce aptly describes the peculiar ethos of Antic Hay. The comic distortion of the novel's surface and the apparent insensitivity of the characterization operate in a context of farce and knockabout. And significantly there are frequent references to stages and entertainments throughout the novel. The most notable, of course, is the "lovely bloody farce" (p.180), as Coleman calls it, presented at the cabaret. It is during an entr'acte that Gumbril recalls the entertainments of his childhood:

> Ah! but it was a long time since he had been to a Christmas pantomime. Not since Dan Leno's days . . . the pantomime went on and on, glory after glory, under the shining

> arch of the stage. Hours and hours; and the grown-ups always wanted to go away before the harlequinade (p.174).

But the puppet-shows of childish memory are a far cry from the more sinister farce in which Gumbril and his friends play. There is a pronounced sense of theatrical gesture in the novel which suggests the capers of puppets and mannikins; Huxley's characters are incessantly gesticulating or making exaggerated expressions. Playing the clown in Chapter XIV, Gumbril hoots with laughter, limping and leaning heavily on his cane (p.161). Coleman laughs a "ferocious artificial laugh" (p.51) and indulges in theatrical displays of diabolism. Mr. Mercaptan sings Offenbach and longs for "another comic Napoleon" (p.56).

Confronted with Gumbril's clowning, Myra Viveash describes a plot remarkably similar to that of a commedia scenario: "The fickle lady, the jealous lover, the stab, the colpo di rivottella, the mere Anglo-saxon black eye -- all judged by the house-surgeon at the Misericordia curable in five days" (p.162). The brutal slapstick of such intrigues finds its way into the spirited exchanges among the novel's characters. Thus, in the restaurant scene of Chapter IV, Lypiatt makes grandiose gestures while Mr. Mercaptan counters with witty repartee and laughs "his own applause" (p.46). Much later Mrs. Viveash remarks on how interesting these two are when they are put together, "like bear and mastiff" (p.233). Indeed, in Chapter XVIII they actually come to blows in Mr.Mercaptan's boudoir; a similar incident occurs in Chapter

XIX when Mr. Boldero visits Lypiatt and soon finds himself being kicked down a flight of stairs. During the restaurant scene, Coleman, like Harlequin with his stick, constantly prods Mr. Mercaptan in the stomach with a cane. Coleman's relations with his mistress, Zoe, seem to be based entirely on violence as she incessantly bites, hits and stabs him. All these characters, like the wood and steel marionettes described by Huxley in his study of Jonson, "collide and belabour each other like the ferocious puppets of the Punch and Judy show". As a character named Spandrell exclaims in Point Counter Point (1927), "What a farce! What knockabout! What an incomparable idiocy!"[29] And controlling this violent interaction of inimical attitudes and temperaments is Huxley who seems to hate his characters as much as they hate each other, for it is he who has condemned them to their interminable and futile capers.

However, like Ben Jonson's brutal comedy, the farce and exaggeration of Antic Hay have grave implications for the world it depicts. Of the seemingly incongruous elements of the commedia, Green writes:

> The elegance and artificiality and unseriousness of the commedia figures, their power to excite lyric velleities of melancholy, gaiety, and nostalgia even while including the most brutal sadism, madness, and murder in their action -- these traits set them in opposition to all moralistic 'realism'.[30]

This is similar to Huxley's description of Antic Hay in which the usually separated categories of tragedy, comedy, fantasy

and realism are combined into a single entity which may, as Huxley told his father, appear strange and repulsive at first sight. But there exists a seriousness beneath the farce and caricature, although it is not the conventional seriousness of "moralistic 'realism'" as Green puts it. While the promise of the novel's epigraph is fulfilled -- "My men like satyrs grazing on the lawns/Shall with their goat-feet dance the Antic Hay" --, the brutal knockabout is not gratuitous. Considered in a particular context and from a certain point of view, it underlines a pathetic aspect in these characters' situation.

As she muses over her personal relationships, Myra Viveash reflects:

> There are music-halls as well as confidential boudoirs; people are admitted to the tea-party and the tête-à-tête, others, on a stage invisible, poor things! to themselves, do their little song-and-dance, roll out their characteristic patter and having provided you with your entertainment are dismissed with their due share of applause (p.79).

There is a lack of free will implicit in the capers of mannikins and puppets which evokes a grotesque pathos. Imprisoned on the stage at the ends of their strings, they must go through their routines, act out the scenario provided. Thus, when Gumbril is coerced by Mrs. Viveash to lunch with her, instead of going to Emily in the country, he becomes a clown: "He was taking no responsibility for himself. It was the clown's doing and the clown, poor creature, was non compos, not entirely there, and couldn't be called to account for his actions" (pp. 161-162). But although Gumbril has assumed the role of

a clown, he is nevertheless shown to be aware of the seriousness of his actions, and is, beneath his absurd appearance, pathetic. For, as Lypiatt says in his suicide note to Myra:

> Every man is ludicrous if you look at him from outside, without taking into account what's going on in his heart and mind. You could turn Hamlet into an epigrammatic farce with an inimitable scene when he takes his adored mother in adultery. You could make the wittiest Guy de Maupassant short story out of the life of Christ, by contrasting the mad rabbi's pretensions with his abject fate. It's a question of the point of view (p.214).

What constitutes mean burlesque in one situation, then, can have "tragical appositeness" (p.212) in another. Myra Viveash's life, in the eyes of unsympathetic gossips, is a "farce of the Boulevards", Lypiatt says, using a phrase which could aptly describe the context of Antic Hay. The satyr-like antics of the novel's characters are grotesquely laughable, for "the man who slips on a banana skin and fractures his skull describes against the sky, as he falls, the most richly comical arabesque" (p.214). But, as Lypiatt tells Myra, "for me . . . you seem to move all the time through some unnameable and incomprehensible tragedy" (p.214). Huxley's own contention, that Antic Hay reflected -- "fantastically, of course, but none the less faithfully" -- the plight of his own generation, suggests that the incomprehensible tragedy which underlies the farce of Myra's life in fact informs the desperate farce of the novel.

That Huxley's contemporaries would have responded to Antic Hay's serious implications, in the way Huxley believed

they would, seems likely. Despite the fact that the novel's characters seem insensitive and wooden, they are acutely conscious of the tragic absurdity of their existence; like Spandrell in Point Counter Point, they know it is all "a kind of bad and tedious jape".[31] Gumbril knows when he is playing the clown, even Lypiatt comes to realize that he is a poseur. And when Myra views the Farce in Chapter XVI, she recognizes herself and her friends on the stage, just as Huxley's contemporaries must have seen themselves in the travesties of Antic Hay. Puzzling in this respect is John Atkins' statement that

> Because these [early] novels were set in a world where familiar and traditional values had been shattered, it was commonly assumed that their characters were keenly aware of their own insecurity. But this is a good example of reading into fiction something that is not even implicit. The insecurity existed in the society of the time but made little impact on the novels themselves. There was no hint of it in Crome Yellow, none in Those Barren Leaves and only a slight intrusion in Antic Hay.[32]

To deny the importance of this mood of insecurity, as it exists in Antic Hay, is to ignore the vivid backdrop against which the novel is set. The Great War still looms over Antic Hay 's pages: the attitudes, the comments and expressions of Huxley's characters, as they react to this circumstance, gain a resonance from the proximity of their fictional world to that surrounding the novel's composition. For, viewed out of its post-war milieu, Antic Hay could be considered a mere pastiche of Peacock, its characters flat, embodied concepts activated in a context of sentimental comedy and slapstick. But beneath the Peacockian dialectic there are deeper, more

portentous stirrings of cultural unease, a consciousness of which must surely have been behind Huxley's claim that Antic Hay was a serious book. It is due to this insistent undertone, which will be discussed in detail in the following chapter, that Antic Hay's puppet-like characters, in their horrified reactions to a pointless, knockabout universe, reflect what the generation of the 1920's believed to be their own plight.

CHAPTER II

"Look down, Conquistador!
There on the valley's broad green floor,
There lies the lake; the jewelled cities gleam;
Chalco and Tlacopan
Await the coming Man.
Look down on Mexico, Conquistador,
Land of your golden dream" (p.44).

The above poem, "The Conquistador", is loudly and tremulously recited by Casimir Lypiatt in Chapter IV. The exhortation of its refrain -- "Look down, Conquistador " -- expresses, in ringing, declamatory tones, the will to impose order and significance on nature, "the valley's broad green floor". In his capacity as a conquistador, the "coming Man" obviously represents the questing romantic artist. However, delivered with an emotion "that never seemed to vary with the varying subject matter of his poems" (p.44) and couched in conspicuously poetical language -- "the jewelled cities gleam" -- this composition reflects the negative side of romanticism. Lypiatt's poem seems too insistent, its inspiration hollow and contrived.

But more important than the poem itself is the response which it elicits. Lypiatt "would go on declaiming till his auditors were overwhelmed with such a confusion of embarrassment and shame, that the blood rushed to their cheeks and they dared not meet one another's eyes" (p.44). The winces of the restaurant patrons are not just the result of Lypiatt's

ineptitude as a poet. Apart from being merely bad, "The Conquistador" seems glaringly out of place: in its transcendent vagueness this poem represents a buoyant optimism which it cannot justify or validate and which, in the age depicted by Antic Hay, cannot be countenanced. The poem's final line -- "Land of your golden dream" -- is immediately jumped on by Theodore Gumbril who objects, "Not 'dream' . . . you can't possibly say 'dream' you know". Asked why not, he replies, "Oh, because one simply can't . . . Not in this year of grace, nineteen twenty-two" (p.45). To Lypiatt's exasperated "But why?", Mr. Mercoptan declares, "Because its altogether too late in the day" (p.45), adding in the next paragraph, "Times have changed" (p.45). Despite these explanations, however, Lypiatt still insists, "But why is it too late?". Mr. Mercaptan can only reply vaguely, "Dreams in nineteen twenty-two . . ." and shrug his shoulders (p.45).

The objections of Gumbril and Mercaptan to "The Conquistador" indicate these characters' notions of what is no longer acceptable or meaningful -- what belongs to the past -- and, by implication, a consciousness of living in a time which is one, notably, of transition. The strength of their convictions in this respect is made emphatically clear by Gumbril's "cheerful stubborness" in persisting "that the word 'dreams' is inadmissable" (p.48). Indeed, Gumbril is able to point out that this term's only significance now lies in its Freudian connotations while Mr. Mercaptan can eruditely place

it in "the age of Rostand" (p.48). But exactly why "dream" is inadmissable in 1922 is not so clearly evident.

A tentative explanation exists in Mr. Mercaptan's remark that "it's a matter of literary tact" (p.48). Superficially this comment refers to the blatantly romantic nature of Lypiatt's poetry. However, the notion of "literary tact" carries more profound implications of tone and context. Considered in this light, the references to Freud and Rostand take on historical and cultural significance. In an age in which dreams signify sublimated sexual impulses, the lyrical associations attached to "dream" by a previous era must inevitably be seen ironically. Thus, the very premise of "The Conquistador", intrinsic poetic merit aside, is rendered invalid by the context in which the poem has been set: the preoccupation with an Absolute implicitly understood to exist -- "the infinite nothing" T.E. Hulme calls it[1] -- is vitiated for the more sceptical modern sensibility, by its breadth of vision. Hence the wry commentary which accompanies Lypiatt's recitation:

> The Conquistador, Lypiatt had made it clear, was the Artist, and the Vale of Mexico on which he looked down, the towered cities of Tlacopan and Chalco, of Tenochtitlan and Iztapalapan, symbolized -- well, it was difficult to say precisely what. The universe, perhaps? (p.44).

"Wonder must cease to be wonder":[2] besides indicating that the terminology of romanticism is inimical to the modern age, Hulme's statement implies that the kind of transcendent vision behind a word like "wonder" -- or "dream" for that

matter -- is likewise unacceptable. Even Lypiatt seems to be aware of this as he insists, "Oh, I call them dreams . . . I don't mind being thought a fool and old-fashioned" (p.46). To him the rejection of the idealism advocated in "The Conquistador" indicates "spiritual poverty . . . weakness and pettiness and impotence" (p.46). He maintains that nothing decent or solid can be achieved if "you don't even believe in decency or solidity" (p.48). Although his own attempts in this direction are admittedly ill-conceived, he has accurately described the view-point of his contemporaries. For, the objections raised to the use of "dream" have their source in a sceptical mistrust of the idealism suggested by that term. Much later in the novel, during a confrontation with Lypiatt, Mr. Mercaptan will complain:

> I merely suggested . . . that you protest too much. You defeat your own ends; you lose emphasis by trying to be over-emphatic. All this folie de grandeur, all this hankering after terribilta. . . . it's led so many people astray. And, in any case, you can't really expect me to find it very sympathetic (p.198).

If the hankering for "size and vehemence and spiritual significance" (p.39) sounds ridiculous in Lypiatt's mouth, it is reduced to absolute absurdity in the preciously comic tones of Mr. Mercaptan.

Indeed, the favorite theme of Mr. Mercaptan's precious middle articles is "the pettiness, the simian limitations, the insignificance and the absurd pretentiousness of Homo soi-disant Sapiens" (p.45). This character models himself after the exquisite civilities of eighteenth-century France,

but his awareness of man's "simian limitations" is the legacy of Darwin. Similarly, during an exchange with Shearwater towards the end of Chapter IV, Mr. Mercaptan, "anxious to deny his own life" (p.54), cites scientific theories which would ultimately reduce existence to the level of mechanism. The scope and transcendent significance of figures like Beethoven and Blake have no place in such a scheme: "They stay in the hall . . . I don't let them into the boudoir" (p.48). Thus, when, in regard to Lypiatt's idealism, Mercaptan says "you can't <u>really</u> expect <u>me</u> to find it very sympathetic", he is undercutting himself as well as Lypiatt; for if the latter's vigorous beliefs are absurd it is because Mr. Mercaptan sees them as being so. Admittedly Lypiatt's lack of talent is partly responsible, but Mercaptan flatly states that Lypiatt's failure to convince is "hardly avoidable, indeed, in work of this kind" (p.199), thus implying that the very idealism which has inspired such work is suspect. And further, the satisfaction taken by Mr. Mercaptan in his cynicism indicates that he is aware of his inability to believe in "decency or solidity". To an extent, then, his irony is consciously aimed at himself, an attitude pungently demonstrated in Gumbril's insistence that he glories "in the name of earwig" (p.47). Mr. Mercaptan is anxious to dissociate himself from such a term, but his own reductions of human aspiration to the level of petty insignificance imply as much.

What do these characters' opinions indicate with respect to their conception of the modern age? In The Social Context of Modern English Literature, Malcom Bradbury observes that:

> Through many of the accounts of itself that, in thought and art, the modern age has given, there has run a strong sense of the uniqueness of modern times. Indeed often in these accounts there is, whether explicitly or implicitly, a basic assumption that our age is not simply an age of change or transition, but, much more ultimately, an age of crisis (p.14).

That Gumbril and Mercaptan should insist that the ageless theme of man's imaginative conquest of his world, enunciated in "The Conquistador", is no longer valid in 1922 certainly argues a "strong sense of the uniqueness of modern times". The age of Rostand has passed and along with it the significance of words like "dream" and "wonder". The new age is the epoch of the iconoclasts, Freud, Darwin and Marx. Old concepts and terms of reference are mercilessly interrogated and rejected. Hence Gumbril's tailor, Mr. Bojanus, predicts imminent revolution -- "It'll be Shibboleth all over again" (p.33) -- and Gumbril Sr.'s model of St.Paul's cathedral falls from a table and lies "on the floor in disastrous ruin as though shattered by some appalling cataclysm". The old architect's subsequent remark that "I'm afraid that dome will never be quite the same again" (p.29) carries overtones of irrevocable and radical transformation. It is within this context of cultural ferment that man has been defined by his "simian limitations", that the romantic associations of "dream" have been undercut by Freud's starker, more reductive concepts.

And behind the scepticism and the debunking is Gumbril Jr.'s exclamation, "After you've accepted the war, swallowed the Russian famine . . . Dreams!" (p.46). This statement at once evinces the cynicism of the age and the traumatic historical consciousness out of which this cynicism has arisen. The dizzying heights from which Lypiatt's Conquistador looks down upon "Land of your golden dream" are no longer attainable as a result of history's perfidy.

Of the destruction wreaked by the Great War, the speaker of Hugh Selwyn Mauberly cries:

> Daring as never before, wastage as never before --
> Young blood and high blood
> Fair cheeks, and fine bodies
>
> Frankness as never before,
> Disillusion as never told in the old days.[3]

Antic Hay provides brief glimpses of the war's effects in the form of "legless soldiers grinding barrel organs" (p.68) and brass bands of unemployed ex-soldiers playing mournfully on street corners (p.133). In Chapter V, Gumbril relates to Shearwater his eye-opening encounters with the bureaucratic dehumanization of the war. But the theme of post-war disillusionment in Antic Hay finds its most vivid expression in the figure of Myra Viveash. This character is, as Peter Bowering aptly puts it, "the spirit of the age",[4] and she embodies mordantly the legacy of disillusionment inherited by the post-war generation.

The land of the golden dream which Lypiatt's Conquistador triumphantly surveys has been replaced for Myra Viveash

by "steppes after steppes of ennui, horizon after horizon, for ever the same" (p.157). The desolate waste into which she steps in Chapter XIV is in outward appearance a pleasant summer day, but:

> She remembered suddenly one shining day like this in the summer of 1917, when she had walked along this same street, slowly, like this, on the sunny side, with Tony Lamb. All that day, that night, it had been one long good-bye. He was going back the next morning. Less than a week later he was dead (p.157).

In The Great War and Modern Memory, Paul Fussell notes that the summer preceding the outbreak of war "has assumed the status of a permanent symbol for anything innocently but irrevocably lost", that it embodies "the change from felicity to despair, from pastoral to anti-pastoral".[5] For Myra Viveash that day in 1917 has assumed such a significance. As this character says to Gumbril concerning Lamb's death, "He was killed in 1917, just about this time of the year. It seems a long time ago, don't you think?" (p.164). This statement indicates a shift of perspective which has transformed summer, usually signifying youth and innocence, to a symbol of death, a foreboding of the change "from pastoral to anti-pastoral". This transformation of attitude serves to define the deeper significance of Antic Hay's outwardly idyllic spring setting. The "warm and airy and brilliant" climate that Evelyn Waugh has seen as establishing a light, pastoral tone in the novel[6] in fact constitutes an ironic allusion to that fateful summer of 1917. In this context, "Land of your golden dream" can carry only bitter associations.

Musing over the fate of the dead Tony Lamb, Myra Viveash reflects, "Tony they had killed, shot him through the head. Even the bright eyes had rotted, like any other carrion" (p.166). The loss of her lover informs the whole being of this character and is behind the agonized smile with which she faces the world. Of the traumatic significance that the war-dead had in post-war fiction in general, Martin Green writes:

> There was a concentration of feeling about and upon these handsome young men in uniform who so often don't know quite what they are doing or what is happening to them, whose soul is in their pink cheeks and ready smile and puzzled stubborn frown.[7]

In Antic Hay the dismay and bitterness which has arisen from a sense of betrayal -- of having been duped -- is centred around the uncomprehending naïveté of Tony Lamb. This character's surname carries suggestions of innocence and sacrifice. And in Myra Viveash's mind, at least, with his "clear blue eyes and the fair, bright hair" (p.164) Tony Lamb was led to the slaughter. The lamb-like innocence associated with this figure has engendered an intense bitterness with regard to his ultimate fate: the moral dicta, promulgated in the years preceding 1914 and under which Tony and most young men of his generation fought, can now be viewed only with scepticism. Hence Pound's ironic treatment of the Horatian line in Hugh Selwyn Mauberly:"Died some, pro patria,/non 'dulce' non 'et decor'"[8]. Similarly the phrase describing a hymn in Antic Hay's

opening pages -- "Simple it was, uplifting and manly" (p.11) -- belongs to a pre-war age; in its present context it is defiantly ironic and reflects what Cyril Connolly calls the "disbelief in action and in the putting of moral slogans into action engendered by the Great War".[9]

Significantly, the thoughtless complacency behind such slogans finds its incarnation in an anonymous "martial gentleman" (p.158) who appears briefly in Chapter XIV. Pigeon-breasted and "twirling between his finger and thumb the ends of a white military moustache", this personage over-hears Myra Viveash's murmured avowal of lost innocence, "never again" (p.158). His "rich, port-winey, cigary voice" (p.158) echoes the timbres of nineteenth-century certitudes; his reaction to Myra's plight demonstrates an incomprehension which seems almost culpable in its smugness:

> Poor thing, he thought, poor young thing. Talking to herself. Must be off her head. Or perhaps she took things. That was more likely. Most of them did nowadays. Vicious young women. Lesbians, drug fiends, nymphomaniacs, dipsos -- thoroughly vicious. He arrived at his club in an excellent temper (p.158).

In the context of Myra's sorrowful reveries this old patriarch's fleeting appearance strikes a note of bitterness with regard to the irresponsible sacrifice of young men like Tony Lamb. The intended pathos of this episode is surely derived from what G. S. Fraser characterizes as notions "about 'youth' and 'the old men who led us into the war'";[10] Sean O'Faolain speaks, in such a connection, of the post-war generation's elegy for

"The Good Time Our Fathers Lost Us".[11] Similar resentment must lie behind the unflattering depiction of the loquacious old man, encountered on a train in Chapter XVII, who bears a striking resemblance to Emperor Francis Joseph. In his tirade against what he sees as the country's decline, this character protests that he is not interested in causes (pp.191-192): but from the view-point of Myra Viveash's generation, he and his contemporaries have been responsible for their present plight.

"Disillusion as never told in the old days": Pound's line evokes the bitter experience separating the pre- and post-war worlds in the modern consciousness. Waugh recalls that when he read Antic Hay at the age of twenty, he found Mrs. Viveash "appallingly mature".[12] Indeed, for this character it was "ten centuries ago" (p.175) that Tony Lamb was killed. Her name -- roughly, living ash -- epitomizes the emptiness of her existence since the war. Mrs. Viveash's sole commerce with the world now is carried out from "that death bed on which her restless spirit for ever and wearily exerted itself" (p.66). And behind the weariness of spirit is the consciousness of irrevocably lost innocence. The refrain, "Never such innocence again," that Fussell sees as summing up the bitter knowledge gained through the war[13] finds its way into Myra Viveash's mourning for her dead lover:

> Never again, never again: there had been a time when she could make herself cry, simply by saying those two words once or twice, under her breath. Never again, never again.

> She repeated them, softly now. But she felt no tears behind her eyes. Grief doesn't kill, love doesn't kill; but time kills everything, kills desire, kills sorrow, kills in the end the mind that feels them; wrinkles and softens the body while it still lives, rots it like a medlar, kills it too at last. Never again, never again. Instead of crying, she laughed, laughed aloud (pp.157-158).

The bitterness which has dried up Mrs. Viveash's eyes, which has killed her desire and sorrow, has created a rift between her and the past. Thus, in Chapter XXI she sardonically refers Gumbril to a portrait of herself:

> "Look at me," she pointed at herself, "and me again". She waved her hands towards the sizzling brilliance of the portrait. "Before and after. Like the advertisements, you know. Every picture tells a story" (p.225).

As she complains, "Nothing's the same now. I feel it never will be," to which Gumbril adds, "Never more" (p.164). His statement, a few lines later, -- "The past is abolished" (p.164) -- is true in that pristine innocence has been lost forever; but the consciousness of that loss, the resentful bitterness which has accompanied the disillusionment, is still very much part of these characters' sensibilities. In the face of their plight, Emily's situation stands out in sharp relief, as the mock case-history imagined by Gumbril demonstrates: "Miss Emily X, born in 1901, was found to be in a state of perfect innocence and ignorance at the time of the Armistice, 11th November 1918" (p.142). Ostensibly, Gumbril is speaking of Emily's virginal state. But his allusion to the Armistice is as pointed a reference to the War's bitter legacy as the mention of the year 1922 in connection with "The Conquistador".

Certainly neither Myra Viveash nor any of her contemporaries had retained their innocence by the time of the Armistice.

The significance of the chasm separating these characters from pre-war innocence involves a radical devaluation of the past conventions and beliefs. Mrs. Viveash's murmured "never again, never again" expresses a sense of irreparable damage which Gumbril Sr. has unconsciously noted as he views his shattered model of St. Paul's. As a character named Lucy Tantamount says in Point Counter Point, "I came out of the chrysalis during the War, when the bottom had been knocked out of everything. I don't see how our grandchildren could possibly knock it out more thoroughly than it was knocked out then".[14] In a previously cited statement to his father, Huxley identified the war's "violent disruption of almost all the standards, conventions and values current in the previous epoch" as the basic premise of Antic Hay.[15] Thus, the novel's opening pages find Theodore Gumbril scornfully dismissing the portentous boomings of Mr. Pelvey in the midst of English Gothic "all blue and jaundiced and bloody with nineteenth-century glass" (p.7) and indulging in frivolous musings in the face of "a Crucifix in the grand manner of eighteen hundred and sixty" (p.10). "Standing in front of a spread brass eagle" the Reverend Pelvey can speak of God's existence "with an enviable certainty" (p.7). Ensconced in the trappings of nineteenth century complacency, he evinces the smugness of the "martial gentleman" of Chapter XIV. And Gumbril, wondering if this old pedagogue, "foghorning away

from behind the imperial bird", could possibly have an answer, concludes, "That was hardly believable. Particularly if one knew Mr. Pelvey personally. And Gumbril did" (p.8). Closely identified with outdated structures of thought, Pelvey's "One Lord" carries little conviction. For, although Gumbril anxiously speculates on the correlation of personal goodness with an absolute:

> The Reverend Pelvey had nothing to reply. He was reading with a holy gusto of "houses full of all good things, which thou filledst not, and wells digged, which thou diggedst not, vineyards and olive trees, which thou plandest not" (p.8).

In the light of Tony Lamb's fate and that of countless others -- "After you've accepted the war, swallowed the Russian famine . . . Dreams!" -- Pelvey's promises of everlasting life seem as hollow as Lypiatt's vision in "The Conquistador".

And even as he denounces Reverend Pelvey and all that this personage represents, at the end of Chapter I Gumbril pictures himself under a new dispensation "and there, at the end of a long vista, there was Myra Viveash" (p.15). Gumbril's invocation of this figure is not fortuitous. With her deathly elegance and langorously cynical manner Myra Viveash manifests the morbid appeal of the age to those unable to escape its fatal attraction. In Point Counter Point, Lucy Tantamount, a literary descendant of Myra's, fascinates Walter Bidlake despite the fact that another character says of her, "What a putrefaction! . . . The consummate flower of this charming civilization of ours!" indeed, "The words were true and an

excruciation; but he loved her all the more because of the torment and because of the odious truth."[16] With her dead white skin, scarlet mouth and "shiny, metal-black hair",[17] Lucy is a rather sinister speciman of modern womanhood; she typifies a new kind of creature who, as she herself points out, has emerged from the chrysalis of the war. When Antic Hay's action takes place the Great War has been over for five years. But the mood of pessimism born of the war generates, in the person of Myra Viveash, a negative ambiance which pulls at the seams of the novel's fictional world. For, most of Antic Hay's male characters are, or have been at one time, involved with this lady. (Hence George Woodcock characterizes Myra Viveash as a "Circe" figure[18] and Peter Bowering sees her as a "femme fatale".[19]) The pull which she exerts is derived from the weary languor of a voice "always on the point of expiring, as though each word were the last, utterly faintly and breakingly from a death-bed -- the last, with all the profound and nameless significance of the ultimate word" (p.58). Drawn by this figure the novel's characters show themselves to be hopelessly susceptible to the crippling pessimism which she embodies.

Directly opposed to the disintegrative influence of Myra Viveash is the dome of proportion. This symbol occurs throughout the novel in different connections, but it invariably denotes harmony and completeness. In the most literal sense, it is identified with St. Paul's cathedral whose great dome reigns over Gumbril Sr.'s model of the ideal city:

> Spire out of dome; octagon on octagon diminishing upwards; cylinder on cylinder; round lanterns, lanterns of many sides; towers with airy pinnacles; clusters of pillars linked by incurving cornices, and above them, four more clusters and above once more; square towers pierced with pointed windows; spires uplifted on flying buttresses; spires bulbous at the base -- the multitude of them beckons, familiar and friendly, on the sky. From the other shore, or sliding along the quiet river, you see them all, you can tell over their names, and the great dome swells up in the midst over-topping them all.
> The dome of St. Paul's (p.138).

Significantly, Gumbril Jr. views this Utopian concept in Chapter II, after his symbolic entry, in Chapter I, into a new life presided over by his vision of Myra Viveash. Thenceforth the conflict between the optimistic statement of human potential embodied by the ideal city and the pronouncements of imminent dissolution which emanate "faintly but penetratingly" (p.59) from Myra Viveash's perpetual death bed constitutes Antic Hay's most effective treatment of the post-war generation's dilemma.

Gumbril Sr.'s model edifices are intended to demonstrate "the prodigious grandeur and abjection of the human race" (p.39), to provide an ideal scale with which to measure human aspiration. For, as Lypiatt points out in one of his harangues, the scale at present is small, the conception trivial and the scope limited (p.40). Similarly, the Monster of the Farce, a simplified allegorical representation of modern man, longs for cities "built by men for men to live in" (p.175), cities in which the human spirit can properly flourish. Unfortunately, the actual domes and spires of his city are "wrapped in a cloud of stink that hides the sun" (p.175). The London of

the novel's characters is likewise a place of squalor and confusion. In contrast to the intelligible order of Gumbril Sr.'s ideal city, the gloomy Piranesian arches of Lypiatt's neighbourhood suggest a colossal pointlessness which, as Huxley writes in his essay on Piranesi's prison sketches, gives the impression of going on "indefinitely and is co-extensive with the universe".[20] Indeed such an influence is fast encroaching on Gumbril Sr.'s own neighbourhood:

> The houses, which a few years ago had all been occupied by respectable families, were now split up into squalid little maisonnettes, and from the neighbouring slums, which along with most other unpleasant things the bourgeois families had been able to ignore, invading bands of children came to sport on the once-sacred pavements (p.18).

In the midst of this neighbourhood's decay, the ideal city remains an obscure and private conception. As Gumbril Sr. tells his son, "Nobody's seen it yet . . . It's only just finished -- after months and years. It'll cause a stir when they see it -- when I let them see it, if ever I do, that is" (p.134). The closest the old architect comes to realizing his ideals concretely is in the design of cottages for workmen. And here, although he does his best to give these structures decent proportions, "it's really a negative process.", for, as he says, "you can only begin to protest positively and actively when you abandon the petty human scale and build for giants -- when you build for the spirit and the imagination of man, not for his little body" (p.30). Although in the past such visions have remained largely

private, realized occasionally by figures like Alberti, Brunelleschi, Michelangelo, Wren and Palladio, at present even the idealism behind these conceptions is threatened. In the mouth of his son, Gumbril Sr.'s ideals have become mere conversational gambits -- "Alberti was much the better architect, I assure you" (p.48) -- in much the same way that in Eliot's poem, "the women come and go/Talking of Michelangelo".[21]

But with a characteristic ambivalence, Gumbril Jr. can still speculate on the viability of such ideals in his own life. As early as Chapter I, he has attempted to perceive whether feelings of individual well-being can be reconciled with any sort of fixed, external order:

> The problem was very troublesome indeed. God as a sense of warmth about the heart, God as exultation, God as tears in the eyes, God as a rush of power or thought -- that was all right. But God as truth, God as 2+2=4 -- that wasn't so clearly all right. Was there any chance of their being the same? Were there bridges to join the two worlds? (p.7).

A few paragraphs later, he ponders over his mother's goodness which, although not dogmatic, was diligent: "You felt the active radiance of her goodness when you were near her . . . And that feeling, was that less real and less valid than two plus two?" (p.8). Gumbril is unable to resolve this question. Spoken by Mr. Pelvey, the words of the Lord's Prayer carry a different significance than they did in Gumbril's childhood:

Her dresses, when he had leaned his forehead against her

> knee to say those words -- those words, good Lord! that Mr. Pelvey was oboeing out of existence -- were always black in the evenings, and of silk, and smelt of orris root (p.11).

Inextricably bound to personal associations, goodness and love here are extremely subjective emotions, valid as individual feelings of warmth and exultation, but not as a mathematically verifiable concept of Truth.

An approach towards some notion of an absolute, however, is made much later in the novel. In his misery the Monster realizes that "perhaps the only street improvement schemes that ever really improve the streets are schemes in the minds of those who live in them: schemes of love mostly" (p.175); escaping his wretched surroundings to a subjective world of harmony and order, he cries, "With love I recreate the world from within" (p.181). Such a world evolves from the brief love affair of Emily and Gumbril which occupies Chapters XII and XIII. Thus, when this couple meets in the park, the balanced proportions of the ideal city are manifest in their natural surroundings:

> The pale, high, clot-polled trees of the English spring; the dark, symmetrical pine trees, islanded here and there on the lawns, each with its own separate profile against the sky and its own shadows impenetrably dark or freckled with moving lights on the grass at its feet (p.146).

Sitting here with Emily, Gumbril experiences "an inward quiet, like this outward quiet of grass and trees" (p.147). The form taken by this "inward quiet" is that of a growing, expanding crystal which orders the disparate fragments of quotidian existence into a harmonious, proportional whole. At the concert,

in the following chapter, the crystal dome of proportion which Emily and Gumbril have built up between themselves, assumes a more comprehensive form in the Mozart G Minor Quintet. This composition constitutes the positive protest, for which Gumbril Sr. longs, of man's spirit and imagination, his "grandeur and abjection". The harmonies and counter-melodies reflect the proportioned whole embodied by the ideal city:

> The instruments come together and part again. Long silver threads hang aerially over a murmur of waters; in the midst of muffled sobbing a cry. The fountains blow their architecture of slender pillars, and from basin to basin the waters fall; from basin to basin, and every fall makes somehow possible a higher leaping of the jet and at the last fall the mounting column springs up into the sunlight, and from water the music has modulated up into a rainbow. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God; they shall make God visible, too, to other eyes (p.151).

This vision immediately anticipates Gumbril's and Emily's single night together, "a night that was an eternal parenthesis among the other nights and days" (p.186).

The ideal outcome of this relationship would involve an entire summer spent in a cottage in Sussex. The promise of an ordered harmonious life offered by such a prospect has been hinted at much earlier by references in the novel to the spring setting. Walking along London's streets under a clear blue sky and amid fresh budding trees, Gumbril has reflected that it is a time "to be in love" (p.36). Similarly, in Chapter IX, he has remarked that such "warm, bright May days were wonderful days for being in love on" (p.96). But, as

we have noted, in the immediate post-war context of Antic Hay, summer can have grim associations. The day of Gumbril's projected departure for Sussex is one which, for Myra Viveash, carries memories of a similar day in the summer of 1917.

Encountering Gumbril on the steps of the London Library, Myra insists that he lunch with her. Her demand, "the more impressive for being spoken in that expiring voice of one who says in articulo the final and supremely important things" (p.166) is more persuasive than a mental picture of a cottage in the country. Gumbril misses his train to Sussex and sends a telegram of apology to Emily, thus denouncing the dream offered by her: indeed reduces it to absurdity with "clownish rapture" (p.163) at lunch with Myra Viveash. For in the presence of Myra's infectious cynicism, Emily's innocence -- "Who is she? What sordid pick-up?" (p.159) -- and "a cottage altogether too cottagey" (p.160) seem as unthinkable as the word "dream" in 1922. As the bitterness surrounding Tony Lamb's death has tainted this summer day, so it vitiates the ideal vision represented by Emily. Gumbril plunges into the downward spiral of dissolution which occupies the last quarter of the novel, any subsequent attempt to recover Emily doomed to failure. His prospect, like that of Myra Viveash, is now "an interminable desert of sand, with not a palm in sight, not so much as a comforting mirage" (p.187). As these two characters drive by the park during the Last Ride Gumbril reflects that it is wasted on them: "One should be happily in love

to enjoy a summer night under the trees"(p.234).

In Chapter XXI Gumbril will tell Myra that she has wrecked his existence; having lost Emily because of her, he is now "left in the vacuum". Myra will simply reply that "we're all the vacuum . . . You'll still have plenty of company you know" (p.226). Unlike Emily, who was still a virgin at the date of the Armistice, Gumbril has not managed to retain his innocence. He, like Mrs Viveash, has inherited the war's legacy of pessimism; his destiny, like hers, is not to live in an idyllic, pastoral world. For, as Myra pronounces, luring him away from Emily, "Providence has decreed it. You can't say no to Providence" (p.154). Emily echoes this notion with a similar reference to "Providence" in her final letter to Gumbril (p.189). Hence Gumbril's earlier attempts to achieve wholeness as the Complete Man have also been doomed to failure. He mistakenly believes that in assuming such a guise, "the original sin in him had been self corrected" (p.100), but in reality he has been unable to escape his heredity. Although the great beard which he dons complements the "stately order of the nose; and the ratiocinative attic of the forehead" (p.94), the image reflected in his mirror is a sham; beneath the Gargantuan mask is his mild and melancholy, characteristically modern, Prufrockian self.

The definitive statement of Gumbril's impotence will occur in Chapter XV after the denunciation of Emily and every-

thing that she represents. Gumbril and Myra Viveash enter a drawing room where the latter is immediately oppressed by portraits of herself which hang on the walls:

> "And how bored I am with this room and all these beastly pictures!" exclaimed Mrs. Viveash as she entered. She took off her hat and, standing in front of the mirror above the mantelpiece, smoothed her coppery hair (p.165).

Surrounded by images of herself, bored and exasperated by them, Myra nevertheless stands before a mirror and gazes at her reflection. Unable to escape her bitter memories of Tony Lamb, she is isolated to the extent of admitting to Gumbril that she is incapable of liking anyone. Urged to try, she replies:

> "But I do try" . . . Her elbows propped on the mantelpiece, her chin resting on the clasped hands, she was looking fixedly at her own image in the glass. Pale eyes looked unwaveringly into pale eyes. The red mouth and its reflection exchanged their smiles of pain. She had tried; it revolted her now to think how often she had tried; she had tried to like someone, any one, as much as Tony. She had tried to recapture, to re-evoke, to revivify. And there had never been anything, really, but a disgust. "I haven't succeeded," she added after a pause (p.166).

Myra's bitterness and cynicism have destroyed her capacity for love and cut her off from human contact. Even more crippling than her emotional impotence, however, is the knowledge of this impotence evident as she exchanges "smiles of pain" with her reflected image.

It is with this knowledge of himself that Gumbril too gazes into the mirror with Myra. Having lost Emily who, as he says later, was "the only person I ever wanted to see in my life" (p.226), Gumbril is as conscious of his alienation as

Myra is of hers. This episode is the culminating expression of a certain morbid introspection which has been running through the entire novel and which finds its embodiment in Antic Hay's prevalent mirror images. Thus the revellers of the cabaret are reflected in mirrors as they circulate around the dance floor in their desperate attempts at gaiety (p.169). Gumbril, in his disguise as the Complete Man, is continually looking into a mirror for "one last look at the Complete Man, one final constatation that the Mild and Melancholy one was, for the time at least, no more" (p.95). In the same way, Rosie Shearwater sits at her dressing table applying make-up as she prepares to assume her role as "the grande dame", but "even after the last touch had been given, she still sat there looking at her image in the glass" (p.104). Appropriately, these two characters meet when they see each other in a store mirror:

> Their eyes met in the hospitable glass. Gumbril smiled. The corners of the stranger's wide mouth seemed faintly to move; like petals of the magnolia, her eyelids came slowly down over her slanting eyes. Gumbril turned from the reflection to the reality (p.99).

But the mirror into which they peer is a "spurious Heppelwhite", a "sham" (p.99); the two images which it reflects are similarly false. And neither Gumbril nor Rosie ever quite succeeds in turning from the reflection to the reality. Insecure and anxious behind their respective masks, they use each other as mirrors in which to convince themselves of the effectiveness of their assumed identities. As D. S. Savage aptly says

of all Huxley's characters, they are "immobilized in their habit of selfhood".[22] Inevitably, Gumbril cannot abandon himself completely to the enchantment of his night with Emily. Unable to forget himself he anxiously anticipates the end of their happiness (p.156). When Myra Viveash claims him in the following chapter, she is only, so to speak, recalling him to his "habit of selfhood": the constitutional pessimism which is his, and Myra's, inherit nce. Thus, at the end of Chapter XIV, as he and Myra gaze at their mirrored reflections, he wistfully remarks, "If only I had my beard!" (p.166).

Just as the Monster attempts to recreate the world with love in the Farce, so Myra Viveash had, at one time, believed in such a possibility: to her love "is all . . . everything, the universe. In love it's either all or nothing at all" (p.229). With Tony Lamb's death in the war, her world has become a wasteland. The debilitating cynicism which thenceforth informs her "pale, unwavering glance" (p.59) has come to characterize the forces of universal dissolution which threaten the world depicted in Antic Hay. In one way, she is the vaccuum in which Gumbril has found himself. The social decay surrounding the Paddington residence in which the Ideal City is enshrined, the squalor of Lypiatt's neighbourhood with its Piranesian arches describe a pointlessness, and impending loss of order and coherence, which inevitably has its source in Myra's weary languor. Thus, after his first encounter with this figure, James Shearwater, the rational kidney specialist,

observes, "Not a case for ratiocination exactly is she?" (p.69). Much later, this same man, "his mind confused, full of new thoughts" (p.132), implores Gumbril to tell him "what she's really like" (p.131). But at the novel's end Shearwater is left pedaling a stationary bicycle through a nightmare world of chaos presided over by Myra Viveash:

> Formidably, calmly, her eyes regarded. The lids cut off an arc of those pale circles. When she smiled, it was a cruxifixion. The coils of her hair were copper serpents. Her small gestures loosened enormous fragments of the universe and at the faint dying sound of her voice they had fallen in ruins about him. His world was no longer safe, it had ceased to stand on its foundations. Mrs. Viveash walked among his ruins and did not even notice them (pp.250-251).

However, if Shearwater does manage to build a world around his vision of Myra, it will be a subjective world, as limited and vulnerable as that postulated by the Monster. The absolute concepts of harmony and completeness embodied in the ideal city are inimical to the historical forces which have shaped Myra Viveash's very existence. Hence the divergent interpretations offered by "three portraits of herself by three and entirely incongruous painters" (p.165). Such too is the dilemma evident in Casimir Lypiatt's ill-conceived attempts to define Myra:

> It was a stormy vision of her, it was Myra seen, so to speak, through a tornado. He had distorted her in the portrait, had made her longer and thinner than she really was, had turned her arms into sleek tubes and put a bright, metallic finish on the curve of her cheek. The figure in the portrait seemed to be leaning backwards a little from the surface of the canvas, leaning sideways too, with the twist of an ivory statuette carved out of the curving tip of a great husk. Only somehow in Lypiatt's portraits the curve seemed to lack grace, it was without point, it had no sense (p.76).

When Lypiatt says to Myra, "could I have painted that portrait if I hadn't loved you, if you weren't killing me?" (p.78), he has provided a trenchant delineation of the dilemma presented in this figure. The "tornado" through which he has perceived her is indicative of the same mental confusion which has disrupted Shearwater's comfortable rationality and which constitutes the novel's final vision of universal dissolution. In the tubular sleekness and bright metallic finish, Lypiatt has captured the essential element of modernity which characterizes Myra Viveash. More important, however, he has failed to make any sense of it: his portrait, like the nightmare landscape through which Shearwater rides at the novel's end, is confused and pointless. As he tells Myra:

> The critics would think it was a problem picture . . . And so it would be, by God, so it would be. You <u>are</u> a problem. You're the Sphinx. I wish I were OEdipus and could kill you (p.75).

Lypiatt's ascription of the problem to the painting's subject is only partially accurate. Despite his identification of himself with the Conquistador of his poem -- the triumphant imposer of order on the universe -- Lypiatt, like Gumbril Jr., is helplessly caught up in the confusion and uncertainty of the age. His inability to achieve a coherent vision of Myra derives from the same source as Gumbril's failure to sustain a relationship with Emily. In his suicide note to Myra, Lypiatt writes, "my low genius did not know how to draw love from you, nor beauty from the materials of which art is made" (p.214). Hence "Portrait of the Woman who has never been in Love" is also

"Portrait of the Artist's Heart Disease" (p.75). Gumbril has confronted this fact in a drawing room mirror, Shearwater in the observation window of an experimenting chamber. Incapable of the broad prospect commanded by the Conquistador, these characters merely see reflections of their arid souls. Because of the implausibility of its realization, the golden vision presented in Lypiatt's poem only exacerbates a consciousness of spiritual impotence.

An anonymous reviewer remarked that Antic Hay was apt to leave the impression that it was "a somewhat belated 'cry for madder music and for stronger wine'".[23] In fact, there is a pronounced strain of saturnalia in the novel, the importance of which to Huxley's depiction of the post-war period cannot be discounted. Antic Hay's title in itself is an indication that some form of revelry will play a significant role in the novel. The anomymous reviewer's use of the qualifying, "belated", in connection with such concerns, however, suggests that the "fast", pleasure-seeking world depicted in Antic Hay must be viewed within the context of pessimism discussed in the present chapter. It is with such a consideration in mind that the following chapter will examine the hedonistic excesses indulged in by the novel's characters as they confront the futility of their existence. For, as Huxley writes in his essay on Baudelaire, "Hedonism is the natural companion of pessimism".[24]

CHAPTER III

The hedonistic motif in Antic Hay is insistent and pervasive. At the most superficial level it gives the novel a certain lightness and gaiety. Huxley's early reviewers repeatedly used terms like "bright" and "brilliant" to describe the quality of his writing. And it is no coincidence that we meet a character in Chapter XV of Antic Hay, amid the jazz and the dancing couples of a cabaret, who is "writing such a book . . . such a brilliant, brilliant, flashing book" (p.170). C. P. Snow sees in this brief image the particular kind of brightness which, as he claims, has obscured and impeded Huxley's fiction.[1] Indeed the "smile of false teeth" to which he compares this brilliance sums up cogently the quality of Antic Hay's brightness. Nevertheless this surface brightness points towards deeper, more serious concerns.

Puzzling in this connection is a well-known appreciation of Antic Hay by Evelyn Waugh entitled, appropriately enough, "Youth at the Helm and Pleasure at the Prow: Antic Hay", in which Waugh seems entirely preoccupied with the novel's surface gaiety and perceives no fundamental seriousness. Waugh writes of the novel:

> A chain of brilliant young people linked and interlaced winds past the burnished front doors in pursuit of happiness. Happiness is growing wild for anyone to pick, only the perverse miss it. There has been the single unpredictable,

> inexplicable, unrepeatable calamity of "the Great War". It has left broken hearts -- Mrs. Viveash's among them -- but, the other characters are newly liberated from their comfortable refuges of Conscientious Objection, to run wild through the streets.[2]

Although Waugh concedes that memories of the War still linger in Antic Hay, he discounts its influence on the actions of the novel's characters: indeed implies that these characters' gaiety runs counter to the disillusioning effects of the War. He concludes by saying, "There is an insistent undertone, audible through the carnival music, saying all the time, not in Mrs. Viveash's 'expiring' voice, that happiness is a reality".[3] This comment seems curious in the light of the seriousness which underlies the bright comic surface of his own novels. Waugh's regard, as a young man, for Huxley's fiction might suggest that that peculiar brand of lethal frivolity characterizing his own work is attributable, at least in part, to the influence of the older writer.

There is, however, a certain aptness in Waugh's impression of Antic Hay. True, he gives us only part of the picture, but the spontaneous enjoyment of life that Waugh insists on in the novel is obtensibly there, and is most strikingly found in Huxley's depiction of Rosie Shearwater. As this character says to Theodore Gumbril in Chapter IV, "I think one ought to enjoy life. Don't you? I think it's one's first duty . . . We ought to enjoy every moment of it . . . Oh, passionately, adventurously, newly, excitingly, uniquely" (p.106). Certainly, as Gumbril has noted in his scrutiny of her "averted profile", some pages earlier, Rosie seems to fit the mold of the carefree,

modern hedonist delineated by Waugh:

> She seemed to be in the obvious movement, to like the sort of things one would expect people to like, she seemed to be as highly civilized, in Mr. Mercaptan's rather technical sense of the term, as free of all prejudices as the great exponent of civilization himself (p.103).

The phrase, "obvious movement", is telling, for Rosie Shearwater apparently manifests the philosophy of hedonism in its simplest, most immediate form. It certainly seems far removed from the incessant preoccupation with a grim future which characterizes the pessimist. Ideally, for the hedonist the future does not exist. Thus, Rosie, in her role as the Great Lady, professes not to know "what her caprice might be an hour hence" (p.109). This view-point is cogently expressed by Arthur Symons who speaks of "the appeal of everything in the world that is passing, and coloured, and to be enjoyed; everything that bids us take no thought for the morrow, and dissolve the will into slumber and give way luxuriously to the delightful present".[4] Theodore Gumbril also considers such a possibility:

> When the future and the past are abolished, when there is only the present instant, whether enchanted or unenchanted, that counts, when there are no causes or motives, no future consequences to be considered, how can there be responsibility . . . ? (p.162).

In Gumbril's musings, however, there is a noticeable element of rationalization. He is clearly trying to convince himself of the absoluteness of the present instant and the irrelevence of future considerations. In fact, his more or less willful dismissal of past causes and future consequences

suggests a consciously nihilistic outlook. Certainly his subtle undercutting of the all important intensity of the present, as Rosie and Symons see it, with the qualification, "whether enchanted or unenchanted", hints at pessimism. A similar anxiety must be implicit in Rosie's refusal to look ahead; beneath the apparent capriciousness there is an agonized anticipation:

> Oh, how her heart was beating, how hard it was to be the fashionable lady, calmly satisfying her caprices. How difficult it was to be accustomed to this sort of thing. What was going to happen next? (p.109).

Indeed, throughout this encounter both she and Gumbril are tense and anxious. As the Complete Man, Gumbril "entrenched himself behind his formidable silence and waited, waited, at first, sitting in his chair, then, when this total inactivity became unbearable, striding about the room" (p.106). Similarly, "She waited. They both waited" (p.107). Rosie believes that one ought to enjoy life, that it is one's first duty, for this is the role of the "conscientious hedonist" (p.106). Yet, internal strain is evident beneath the irresponsibility.

Although to Gumbril Rosie seems to live according to her caprice, "by a strange contradiction she seemed to find her life narrow and uninteresting" (p.103). The contradiction is only apparent. Rosie's attempts to lose herself in the present moment constitute an escape from the tedium of her life. Throughout the novel she is assailed by memories of frustrated attempts to

elicit affection from her husband and of incidents from her repressed youth. Her disenchantment with such a life and its future prospects have precipitated her immersion in a hedonistic style of living. And although Rosie is the most naive character in Antic Hay, her plight is essentially the plight of the novel's other characters who, through the sillusionment discussed in Chapter II of this study, have placed themselves in a singularly distressing position. Having rejected the past and postulated no alternative for the future, they exist in a context of pointlessness. As Mrs. Viveash says to Theodore Gumbril, "We're all in the vacuum" (p.226). The nihilism of this statement is similarly present in an early Huxley poem, "The Birth of God":

> Night is a void around me; I lie alone;
> And water drips, like an idiot clicking his tongue,
> Senselessly, ceaselessly, endlessly drips
> Into the waiting silence, grown
> Emptier for this small inhuman sound.[5]

These lines evoke the stark background of emptiness against which the characters of Antic Hay see themselves. In their actions, as Myra Viveash observes of Casimir Lypiatt, they are like a man "who walks along a sinister road at night and sings to keep up his own spirits, to emphasize and magnify his own existence" (p.76). The uncertainty and anxiety inherent in such a plight is evident when Myra walks "as though she were treading a knife-edge between goodness only knew what invisible gulfs" (p.72). In Chapter XIV, this lady steps out one afternoon into a complete vacuum:

> It was absurd, it was appalling. The prospect of immeasurable boredom opened before her. Steppes after steppes of ennui, horizon beyond horizon, for ever the same. She looked again to the right and again to the left. Finally she decided to go to the left. Slowly, walking along her private knife-edge, between her personal abysses, she walked towards the left (p.157).

Such is the situation of all Antic Hay's characters. Apprehensively, like Myra Viveash, they make their way through a wilderness of days and hours. Sean O'Faolain points out that boredom is the usual fate of Huxley's characters,[6] and certainly Myra's anxiety as she looks at her watch in Chapter XIV suggests the horror with which she views such a prospect.

Significantly a marked preoccupation with time is evident throughout Antic Hay. Like the high-strung speaker in the neurosthenia episode of The Waste Land who asks:

> "What shall I do now? What shall I do?
> I shall rush out as I am, and walk the street
> With my hair down so. What shall we do tomorrow?
> What shall we ever do? [7]

the characters of Antic Hay are obsessed with the time of day and what they might be doing. After a tour of his father's model of the ideal city, Gumbril looks at his watch and announces the time (p.30), as he does a few pages later at the tailoring establishment of Mr. Bojanus (p.36). A similar preoccupation with the time cuts short his rendez-vous with Rosie Shearwater in Chapter IX. And a glance at his watch ends abruptly his idyll in the park with Emily: "'Good Lord!' he said, 'we must fly'. He jumped up 'Quick, quick! . . . We shall be late'" (pp.148-149). During lunch in Chapter XIV,

Myra Viveash announces that it is "almost time . . . to have tea" and adds, echoing perhaps J. Alfred Prufrock measuring out his life in coffee spoons, "One damned meal after another" (p.163). In the cabaret scene, after being told what time it is, she sighs, "Can't possibly go to bed . . . for another hour at least" (p.183). It is a similar anxiety which has prompted her, a few pages earlier, to express her dislike of long entr'actes (p.174).

Life has become, then, an interminably tedious succession of empty hours -- "works and days" as Prufrock allusively puts it[8] -- all to be filled somehow. Separated from the past, devoid of hope for the future, these characters balance precariously between gulfs of boredom. When Myra Viveash stands on a street curb dubiously glancing right and left, there is the sense that she is somehow exposed and vulnerable: she has the whole day ahead of her and, in the face of those inhospitable steppes, she is unprotected and alone. The prospect before her is very different from the idyllic view described by Emily in her letter to Gumbril (p.187). Myra Viveash has, in fact, rejected such a possibility:

> St.James's Square opened before her. Romantically under its trees the statue pranced. The trees gave her an idea: she might go down into the country for the afternoon, take a cab and drive out, out, goodness only knew where! To the top of a hill somewhere. Box Hill, Holmbury Hill, Ivinghoe Deacon -- any hill where one could sit and look out over plains. One might do worse than that with one's liberty.

"But not much worse," she reflects (p.158). Myra is saved from her "steppes of ennui" by the sight of Gumbril whom

she peremptorily commands to lunch with her. But to her Gumbril, like Lypiatt and Shearwater, is merely a source of amusement, a diversion to help fill the vacuum. As Mr. Bojanus remarks in his discourse on leisure time, "People don't know 'ow to entertain themselves now" (p.35). Thus, while on the subject of the younger generation (although she is only twenty-five herself), Myra complains, "Why don't they come and sing for their supper? . . . It's their business to amuse us" (p.171). Behind the querulousness, however, is the fear of imminent boredom. The meticulous precision with which Myra moves along her private knife-edge evinces the paralyzing uncertainty manifest in all the novel's characters as they face the future, whether it is an hour or years hence. Even the question of lunch evokes anxious speculations -- "But where, and with whom?" (p.157).

Boredom is inescapable and omnipresent. It informs the novel and the lives of the novel's characters. Paradoxically, it is the sole absolute in this world, the only certainty. It is within such a context of futility that Pound evokes:

> Immortal Ennui, that hath driven men
> To mightier deeds and actions than e'er Love
> With all his comfit kisses, brought to be,
> Thee only of gods out-tiring Time,
> That weariest man to glory before thy grace,
> Thee do we laud within thy greyest courts!
> O thou unprais'd one, attend our praise.[9]

A similar deity reigns over the proceedings of the cabaret scene in Chapter XV. To the dionysian strains of jazz, Theodore Gumbril, Myra Viveash and a roomful of other couples pay homage to "almighty and omnipresent Nil" as they revolve about the dance floor, seeming to perform "some ancient and profoundly significant rite" (p.169). But the emptiness, the "greyest courts" that exist behind man's actions in Pound's poem, are implicit in the mirth of Huxley's revellers. The response, murmured piously in answer to the jazz band's chant, "What's he to Hecuba?" is "Nothing at all" (p.168). The sole significance of their rite in such a context lies in its utter pointlessness. The god whom they worship has created the vacuum in which they live, the endless prospect of boredom extending before them:

> Nil, omnipresent nil, world-soul, spiritual informer of all matter. Nil in the shape of a black-breeched moon-basined Toreador. Nil, the man with the greyhound's nose. Nil as four blackamoors. Nil in the form of a divine tune. Nil, the faces, the faces one ought to know by sight, reflected in the mirrors of the hall. Nil this Gumbril whose arm is round one's waist, whose feet step in and out among one's own. Nothing at all (p.170).

The idealistic basis of positive action which is ironically undercut in Pound's lines is similarly absent here. The anti-cosmology postulated in Myra Viveash's mind has rendered meaningless and insignificant the performance of any action directed towards the future. As Gumbril has rationalized earlier, there is no past or future, "no causes or motives, no future consequences to be considered". Believing in the

meaninglessness of positive action, that, as Myra says at the novel's close, "tomorrow will be as awful as to-day" (p.254), the characters of Antic Hay have vainly attempted to immerse themselves completely in the present instant. In doing so, however, they have only revealed their colossal pessimism. A candid admission of such an attitude is made by Francis Chelifer in Those Barren Leaves after his disappointment in love:

> It was then that I learned to live only in the moment -- to ignore causes, motives, antecedents, to refuse responsibility for what should follow. It was then that I learned, since the future was always bound to be a painful repetition of what happened before, never to look forward for comfort or justification, but to live now and here in the heart of human reality, in the very centre of the hot dark hive.[10]

Chelifer delineates, in a starker manner, what characters like Rosie Shearwater and Theodore Gumbril only approach admitting to themselves. But all these characters, in their wilful denial of "causes, motives, antecedents" are escaping only ostensibly from the tedium of what has happened before and, with depressing inevitability, will happen again. In his display of useless erudition in Chapter XX, Gumbril claims that although the continent man lives longer than the heroin-taker, his ninety-five years are lived only in time, whereas the twenty-four months of the addict are passed in eternity (p.227). Whatever truth may exist in this dubious statement is certainly not evident in Antic Hay as its characters constantly glance at their watches in the midst of their

revelry and wait apprehensively to see what the next moment will bring. Such an existence promises only endless anticipation as Gumbril discovers even during his night with Emily in which "he foresaw the end of his eternity. And after? Everything was uncertain and unsafe" (p.156). A complete immersion in the present moment, one of "those Mohametan ecstasies that last . . . six hundred ineffarrable years apiece" (p.168), is not possible for Huxley's characters: there is always something to remind them of the finiteness of the moment. The root of such transience, however, lies in the nature of the sensations sought by these characters.

Numerous critics have noted the aptness of Antic Hay's title. Peter Firchow[11] and Keith May[12], in their respective studies of Huxley, make some interesting points about how the grotesque steps of the Hay contribute to the structure of the novel. May, for example, suggests that Huxley "thought in terms of a dance whose actions and participants are, at least from the view of the spectator, comically distorted."[13] However, while it is essential to consider the Hay as a central metaphor working within the novel, it is equally important to be aware of the profound significance of such a metaphor in terms of the cultural milieu in which Antic Hay is set. The distortion of which May speaks goes beyond being comical: there is an undercurrent of morbidity implicit in the hedonistic pursuits of Huxley's characters which

suggests despair.

In Those Barren Leaves, lamenting the passing of his Victorian childhood, Francis Chelifer asks, "Where are the morris dancers, where the mixolydian strains ...?" But Chelifer knows that those morris dancers of childish memory have perished "under the German barrage"; the "mixolydian strains" to which they stepped have likewise died out.[14] Similarly, the dance suggested by Antic Hay's title is no rustic folk step. Antic Hay moves to the more urgent, frenetic rhythm of fox-trots and piercing jazz tunes. Its proceedings are characterized by an atmosphere like that described by the onlooker of "Frascati's" who peers over a balcony and cries:

> What negroid holiday makes free
> With such priapic revelry?
> What songs? What gongs? What nameless rites?
> What gods like wooden stalagmites?
> What steam of blood or kidney pie?
> What blasts of Bantu melody? [15]

In his study of the transition period (1880-1914), John A. Lester Jr. sees such revelry as constituting an ecstatic affirmation of life: "It began with the worship of the disturbing deities, the Gods of ecstasy, for whom wantonness and wine and all things in which energy passes into an ideal excess, were sacred".[16] But the excess had, in fact, insidious effects. Frank Kermode, in "Poet and Dancer before Diaghilev", provides a starker account of the phenomenon in which he cites

medical studies made on dancers like Jane Avril who suffered from the "grandes hysteriques", known medically as chorea, a disorder comparable to the medieval dancing mania. Kermode attributes the grotesque appeal of entertainers like Avril to the popular preoccupation at that time with "neurasthenia".[17] Hence Arthur Symons' fascination with the exacerbating appeal of the ballet: "It has a rather irritating effect on the nerves. The dances are rather bewildering, intricate and elaborate, and intensely alive with animal desire. It is really a riot in colour, amid an ever-moving crowd of revellers".[18]

The above comments, of course, concern dominant preoccupations of the 1890's, but the all-important quest for sensation which they describe plays a significant role in Huxley's evocation of the post-war period. The influence of the 1890's on Huxley's poetry is indisputable. Such an influence, however, can also be detected in the thematic concerns of Huxley's early prose works. In a curious little play entitled "Happy Families" (1920), for example, a character named Henrika dances in the midst of a palpitating hot-house setting. The stage-directions read:

> Little by little the rhythm of the dance takes possession of her till, with her half-closed eyes and langorous trance-like movement, she might figure as the visible living symbol of the waltz. ASTON and TOPSY lean back in their seats, marking time with a languid beating of the hand. CAIN sways and swoons and revolves in his own peculiar and inimitable version of the dance.[19]

Echoing Symons's protestations of rapt fascination with the movements of the ballet, Henrika cries out, "Oh, Belle, Belle, I could go on dancing like this for ever. I feel quite intoxicated with it".[20]

Antic Hay is less far removed from reality than the exotic hot-house setting depicted in "Happy Families". The fantastic waltz performed by Henrika is replaced by the more familiar dance-steps of a modern cabaret. Perhaps too, Antic Hay's characters are more frank in their dissipation than an aesthete of the 1890's would have been. But the desire to be swept up intoxicatingly in pure sensation is still central to their existence: indeed, has been elevated to the status of an imperative by the disillusioning influence of a major world war. Thus, in Chapter V, to escape the tedium of a long sleepless night, Myra Viveash has taken her escort, Bruin Opps, on an interminable taxi-ride for dinner at Hampton Court and then to a coffee stall to eat hard boiled eggs among workmen. Opps reflects that "Myra's caprices were becoming more and more impossible" (p.60). But even as the night draws to an end, Myra urges, "Must finish up with a little dancing" (p.66). The purpose of this character's tireless search for distractions becomes clearer in Chapter XV. As she fox-trots to the intoxicating strains of a jazz tune in a cabaret, Myra shuts her eyes, "trying to abandon herself, trying to float, trying to give Nil the slip" (p.169). Reflecting that her dead lover, Tony Lamb, is, like the jazz

tune's refrain, "nothing at all now, at all -- nil these five years" (p.170), she sees her present existence as reflecting this nothingness. Hence she is married to "Nil Viveash", the couples around her are "Nil", even her dance partner, Gumbril, is a "Nil" (p.170). It is from such a void that she attempts to escape by abandoning herself to the sensation of a jazz tune. In Point Counter Point, Lucy Tantamount tries to lose herself in a similar manner at the hands of Walter Bidlake:

> She shut her eyes. His caresses were like a drug, at once intoxicant and opiate. She had only to relax her will, the drug would possess her utterly. She would cease to be herself. She would become nothing, but a skin of fluttering pleasure enclosing a void, a warm abysmal darkness. [21]

It is with this aim of escaping the self that most of Antic Hay's other characters immerse themselves in sensations of various kinds. Rosie Shearwater submits to the caresses of the Complete Man in order to forget her tedious domestic existence. And in his guise as the Complete Man, Gumbril experiences an intense exileration; he finds the prospect of being a capitalist equally exciting as he sits in Mr. Boldero's office (p.120). In both these instances, Gumbril has succeeded in temporarily forgetting the mild and melancholy side of his nature which plagues him throughout the novel. Indeed as Mr. Boldero tells Gumbril, "The mere fact of newness is an intoxication" (p.124). In another connection,

Coleman goes into "an ecstasy of delight" (p.51) as he gleefully utters one of his frequent blasphemies; later, drinking the humiliated Rosie Shearwater's tears, he cries, "What an intoxication" (p.224). Even Casimir Lypiatt, despite his lofty ideals, is caught up in the intoxications of blind sensation. He longs "for the anodyne of physical pain to quench the pain of the soul" (p.81). Like the "Poet Manqué" in Huxley's poem who cries, "I'm not a poet: but never despair!/I'll madly live the poems I shall never write",[22] Lypiatt loses momentarily a crippling sense of failure in his grandiloquence:

> He felt a warmth running through him as he spoke, flushing his cheeks, pulsing hotly behind the eyes, as though he had drunk a draught of some heartening red wine. His own words elated him, and drunkenly gesticulating, he was as though drunken (p.39).

There are moments of genuine ecstasy in Antic Hay, but they exist as isolated instances, like the quiet places in the mind that Gumbril describes during his fleeting idyll with Emily. Their main function in the novel is to emphasize the specious nature of the far more numerous occurences of simple self-indulgence. Gumbril Sr. displays a model of the ideal city to his son and "the lights and shadows vacillated wildly through all the city of palaces and domes as he brandished the lamp in ecstasy above his head" (p.28). This character is also compared to the "passionate and gesticulating shepherds who stand at the base of Piranesi's ruins" (p.139).

Similarly, Emily is grave and serious, yet her hair curls with "a hilarious extravagance round her head" (p.140). But it is an extravagance which somehow rings true and is indicative of genuine feeling rather than the desperate passion that other characters try to stimulate in themselves. Thus, the little temple on a hillock where Gumbril Jr. and Emily meet (p.145) contrasts with the cabaret in Chapter XX and its pseudo-religious atmosphere. A similar opposition exists between Domenichino's "St. Jerome" and the garish pink walls on which it is hung in Rosie Shearwater's bedroom. Amid the "rosy reflections of nakedness and life", the religious celebrants in the Domenichino stand "absorbed in their grave, solemn ecstasy" (p.108). The cloying richness of Rosie's room, with the pictures of her little friends, all "deliciously nubile" and sweetly smiling, sums up the facile, synthetic nature of hedonism. The grandeur of religion which looks out darkly in Domenichino's picture upon these pink walls is utterly remote from such shallow noisiness. Similarly the music of Mozart, to which Gumbril and Emily listen in Chapter XIII, is "unaffected, clear and without clot or pretension"; it is not passionate, "only sensual and sentimental" (p.150). As Emily says:

> Some people think that it's only possible to be happy if one makes a noise . . . I find that it's too delicate and melancholy for noise. Being happy is rather melancholy -- like the most beautiful landscape, like those trees and the grass and the clouds and the sunshine to-day (p.153).

But Emily is one of the few innocents in Antic Hay. A jaded palate is more common in this world, as Myra Viveash's bored, languid glance will testify. She is bored with lobster (p.163) and vainly longs to "recapture the deliciousness of raspberry syrup" (p.237). Her question, "Will one ever recapture the old thrills?", is effectively answered by the fatigued tone in which it is uttered (p.164). Too frequent indulgence in sensual pleasures have numbed the faculties and made impossible any kind of simple appreciation and happiness. Hence, the sinister imperative uttered in an account of an earlier age's quests for sensation, Huysman's Au Rebours (1884), "I seek new perfumes, larger blossoms, pleasures still untasted".[23] In the same way, the characters of Antic Hay must seek "larger blossoms", more intense colours and tastes, in order to revive nerves brutalized by an excess of sensation. In Chapter XXI, Myra Viveash dabs her brow from time to time with eau-de-Cologne and takes sniffs of hartshorn to sustain herself while Gumbril, appropriately enough, makes speculations about the number of "permutations and combinations of caresses" possible in the conjugal relations of octopi (p.227). Rosie Shearwater enhances her appeal by wearing blazing pink underwear and vaporizing "synthetic lilies of the valley" over herself (p.195). Even more notable in this connection is the voluptuousness of the cabaret scene in Chapter XV. Here the saxophone is "sweet, sweet and piercing"

like an "angel's treacly dart . . . [in] the Holy Teresa's quivering and ecstasiated flank"; the cello is ripe and round and the violin like a thin draught of cool air from a "still damp squirt"; at one point, the saxophonist blows with "a redoubled sweetness, enriching the passage with a warbling contrapuntal soliloquy that fairly rung the entrails and transported the pierced heart" (p.168). The reader is left feeling surfeited by the density of sensation in these passages.

Indeed, if Huxley's fiction is remarkable for anything, it is the lethally effective evocation of such excesses. Outstanding in this respect is the bizarre dystopia of synthetic pleasures depicted in Brave New World. But while this work is commonly praised for its prophetic value, its descriptions of eagerly pursued, esoteric sensations owe more to the influence of the nineteenth-century decadents than to Huxley's prescience. Synaesthetic oddities of description such as those in the cabaret scene of Antic Hay are remarkably similar, for instance, to Huysmans's accounts, in Au Rebours, of queer devices which play symphonies of taste and smell with various liqueurs and scents. In fact, the cloying intensity of sensation that Huxley's characters continually seek is the essence of Huysmans's fiction. (Compare, for example, the bizarre hothouse setting of "Happy Families" to the extreme descriptions of Des Esseintes's exotic plants in Au Rebours). It is not

surprising, then, that Joseph Wood Krutch, in a review of Antic Hay, should have wondered in passing if perhaps a new Huysmans was impending.[24] This is not to suggest that Huxley could possibly be called a decadent writer, but elements of his work spring from the same soil as the fiction of Huysmans. The difference lies in treatment: the ultimate fate of the hopelessly decadent Des Esseintes in Au Rebours evokes a grotesque pathos while the excesses of Huxley's characters seem disgusting and contemptible. Thus, Theodore Gumbril displays only a perversity of sensibility when he blows a "treacly kiss" and shamefully reduces Emily's love to the level of "chaste pleasures, sublimated sensualities. More thrillingly voluptuous . . . than any of the grosser deliriums" (p.163).

But what could be more gross than such bizarre magnifications of sensation? In this connection, Arthur Symons speaks enthusiastically of "a restless curiosity of research, an over-subtilizing refinement upon refinement"." [25] However, such refinement cannot go on indefinitely. Unfortunately the continual magnification of pleasurable sensations is bounded by the limits of physical capacity. In the cabaret scene these limitations are implicit in sensations blown to such fulness and intensity that they totter on "the verge of anguish" (p.169). The music has an "agonizing voluptuousness" (p.168), a "tone of frightful unhappiness" (p.169). Hilarious blackamoors lachrymosely chant a song which is "mournfully

pregnant" (p.170) with disillusionment. Rather than being a subtilizing refinement upon refinement, the hedonistic quest is, ultimately, a reductive process. Thus, an orgy is described in Point Counter Point as "odd and grotesque, but terribly dreary and all so very medical. A sort of cross between very stupid clowns and an operating theatre".[26] The surgical parallel is appropriate, for the incessant pursuit of intenser pleasures has a distinctly anatomizing effect on the faculties, moral and physical. This, as Gumbril sadly notes to himself, has been the result of Myra Viveash's "desperate experiments" (p.166): it is because of one of this lady's whims that she and Gumbril, at the novel's end, find themselves in Shearwater's laboratory surrounded by experimental animals. Such too will be the outcome of the "minute analysis" of love that Rosie Shearwater expects with the Complete Man.

Indeed, in the novel, Rosie becomes the subject of a rather depressing lesson in anatomy. This character moves progressively (or regressively?) from the tentative debaucheries of Gumbril as the Complete Man to the more refined and decidedly more decadent embraces of Mr. Mercaptan. Whatever it is she experiences on Mercaptan's Crebillon-haunted sofa she regards at the time as "the definitive revelation" (p.206). But the definitive revelation for Rosie will actually occur in a stark white room dominated by "one lovely and horrifying

picture" (p.238), Leonardo's study of the anatomy of love. In this setting, stripped bare of any pretension to civilized amenity, she is confronted with the blaspheming Coleman. Although Coleman seems to provoke in her only shudders of revulsion, Rosie listens "with a disgusted pleasure to his quick talk, his screams of deliberate and appalling laughter" (p.222). The depraved pleasures which he describes are "exquisitely and piercingly and deliriously vile" (p.222). Sensation has been stripped down to the most immediate of tingling nerve-ends and, like a flayed cadaver, physical desire is viewed at its starkest and most graphically physiological level. Such pleasures have moved far beyond the jovial Rabelasian obscenity of the Complete Man and Mr. Mercaptan's witty lasciviousness. But the difference lies more in degree than in kind. In Coleman's ravings the grotesque magnifications of sensation pursued by all these characters have reached their frightful culmination: "Everything becomes a thousand times life-size. Phallic symbols five-hundred feet high . . . A row of grinning teeth you could run the hundred yards on . . . Wounds big enough to let a coach-and-six drive through their purulent recesses" (p.223). The close of this episode evokes a vivid sense of the shuddering anticipation that Rosie must feel as she totters on the verge of the final, piercing sensation:

> Rosie uttered a cry, slipped through the door and, slamming it behind her, ran across the vestibule and began fumbling

> with the latches of the outer door. It wouldn't open, it wouldn't open. She was trembling; fear made her sick. There was a rattling at the door behind her. There was a whoop of laughter, and then the Cossack's hands were on her shoulder, and the blond beard dabbled with blood prickled against her neck and face (p.224).

Although the ensuing pleasure is more intense than anything Rosie has experienced before, its aftermath brings shame and disgust. It is appropriate that Rosie Shearwater, the most ingenuous creature in the novel, should be subjected to the ultimate degradation of Coleman's lust, for, as Gumbril has noted earlier, she seems to be in "the obvious movement, to like the sort of things one would expect people to like". Like Miss Runcible, a naive Bright Young Thing in Waugh's Vile Bodies (1930), Rosie manifests outwardly the unthinking carelessness of modern hedonism. But both she and Miss Runcible meet rather depressing fates as a result of their pursuits, although of the two, Rosie (like all Huxley victims) is more acutely conscious of what has happened to her. The bright surface gaiety of hedonism is vitiated by the disgust implicit in it; the Antic Hay is overshadowed by imminent disillusionment. It is not fortuitous, then, that Mr. Mercaptan's boudoir should be compared to an "elegant marbel vomitorium" (p.192). The ultimate effect of dissipation, as Porteus's son has learned under the tutelage of Coleman, is "emetic" (p.184). Young Porteous's remark, "I feel I'm going to be sick" (p.186) is echoed frequently in Waugh's novel: "The effects of their drinks had now entered on that secondary stage, vividly

described in temperance hand-books, when the momentary illusion of well-being and exhileration gives place to melancholy, indigestion and moral decay".[27] Antic Hay is structured around such a progression from intoxication to disgust, from gaiety to depression, as its characters desperately chase about London from restaurant to restaurant, from cabaret to cabaret. The result is always the same -- like driving for hours by taxi for dinner at Hampton Court only to find that the food tastes of weedy Thames water (p.59). In Point Counter Point, a character named Spandrell describes the course of such a night in terms of a death-bed scene in which, at sunrise when the bottles are empty, the revellers look like corpses and "desire's exhausted itself into disgust".[28] Such will be the final destination of Gumbril's and Myra Viveash's Last Ride.

What, then, of Rosie Shearwater's insistence that one should enjoy life "passionately, adventurously, newly, excitingly, uniquely"? In a letter written to his brother in 1918, Huxley stated:

> There is no doubt that living for the moment is a danger to be most carefully avoided. For it is tremendously exciting and absorbing while it lasts, but when you wake up and look back, you find a vacuum.[29]

This is the discovery Rosie makes when she awakens in the barren starkness of Coleman's room and such, indeed, must have been Myra Viveash's discovery at some long ago date. Each new sensation leads inevitably to the same old disillusionment; the continual round of distractions propagates

only further futilities. In an essay entitled, "Fashions in Love" (1929), Huxley speaks of the younger generation's promiscuity, "which now spends itself purposelessly, without producing love, or even, in the long-run, amusement, without enhancing vitality or quickening and deepening the rhythms of living".[30] This describes perfectly the barrenness of the hedonistic pursuits depicted in Antic Hay. Lacking the capacity for genuine feeling, the novel's characters succeed in stimulating only artificial, sterile passions in themselves. Coleman appropriately labels the empty distractions of the cabaret as "substitutes for the genuine copulative article" (p.182). As Myra Viveash reflects, such revelry "filled up a space, it moved, it jigged, it set things twitching in you, it occupied time, it gave you a sense of being alive" (p.168). But only a "sense": these distractions are like the lights of Picadilly Circus which "give one temporarily the illusion of being cheerful" (p.236). And despite his sincere, agonized struggle to produce vital art, Casimir Lypiatt is able to create only works like his portrait of Myra which, as its subject recognizes, is "a dancing mummy":

> Yes, he was surely right, there must be life, life was the important thing. That was precisely why his paintings were so bad -- she saw now; there was no life in them. Plenty of noise there was, and gesticulation and a violent galvanized twitching; but no life, only the theatrical show of it. There was a flaw in the conduit; somewhere between the man and his work life leaked out (p.78).

Indeed, Lypiatt's abortive attempts to produce life in his art only reflect the general impotence of his contemporaries. Like his paintings, their desperate pursuits are, finally, barren and unproductive. As Gumbril reflects, "Many seeds had fallen in the stony places of his spirit, to spring luxuriantly up into stalky plants and wither again because they had no deepness of earth" (p.144). The Last Supper which he and his friends will eat in "profoundest gloom" (p.226) offers no hope of a future life; nor does Coleman's diabolic parody of baptism as he washes in the blood of the Lamb (p.237) -- looming over these last pages is the vision of Golgotha Hospital in which there will be no resurrection, only suffering and death. The sole indication of a new generation in the novel are the rabbles of poor, dirty children who populate the crooked alleys and Piranesian arches of London's slums; Myra Viveash has dismissed the possibility of having children of her own as "the most desperate experiment" (p.242). When, while viewing Picadilly's dancing sky lights, she emphatically insists, "They're me . . . those things are me" (p.231), she provides a depressing validation of her belief in the awfulness of tomorrow: she and her contemporaries carry within themselves only the seeds of their own disillusionment. At the novel's end these lights are most certainly still "dancing their unceasing St. Vitus's dance above the monument to the Earl of Shaftsbury" (p.230).

The philosophy of innate human goodness and wisdom postulated by the Earl seems remote and doubtful amid such noisy irrelevence.

> Ours is a spiritual climate in which the immemorial decencies find it hard to flourish. Another generation or so should see them definitely dead. Is there a resurrection? [31]

CHAPTER IV

A number of Antic Hay's original reviewers remarked on the novel's exploitation of pessimism. Joseph Wood Krutch, for example, suggested that Huxley had evidently "discovered the rich possibilities of despair."[1] Certainly the chief inspiration of Antic Hay seems to have been derived from a conviction that life is futile. The final pages of the novel indicate little hope for the future: Theodore Gumbril and Myra Viveash continue their pointless peregrinations about London while Shearwater pursues his nightmare journey on a stationary bicycle. Myra Viveash's prediction that "tomorrow . . . will be as awful as today" (p.254) carries the authority of a truth uttered from beyond the grave.

But how valid is the pessimism behind such pronouncements and to what extent does it reflect the author's own attitude? Fortunately, Huxley has provided, in the Farce presented in Chapter XVI, some indication of his personal position in this respect. This play within the novel has received a considerable amount of critical attention. It is usually seen as embodying the novel's major themes and for this reason is considered significant. Peter Firchow, for example, regards the Farce as "a mirror in which to see a caricature of the main plot".[2] Noting parallels existing

between Huxley's Farce and the interior play in Hamlet, Frederick Karl states that "if Hamlet arranges the staging of the Gonzago play in order to catch the conscience of the king, then Huxley stages his play in order to catch the consciences of his entire cast of characters".[3] The play, in effect, provides Huxley with a means to confront his characters with the pointlessness of their existence. It should be noted, however, that the particular way in which the novel's major themes are enunciated in this miniature play is as significant as the themes themselves; through its very manner of presentation the Farce constitutes a pointed comment on the world depicted in Antic Hay

The Farce is described by Theodore Gumbril as a morality play. He remarks that "there is a pleasant uplifting vagueness about these symbolical generalized figures which pleases me" (p.177). Indeed, this play is extremely simple: the Monster, the Father, the Doctor, and so on, are obvious and heavy-handed allegorical symbols. But the unreality and contrivance of this theatrical performance is deliberate and effective:

> The blackamoors had left the platform at the end of the hall. The curtains looped up at either side had slid down, cutting it off from the rest of the room -- "making two worlds," Gumbril elegantly and allusively put it, -- "where only one grew before -- and one of them a better world", he added too philosophically, "because unreal." There was the theatrical silence, the suspense. The curtains parted again (p.172).

The glibly aphoristic nature of Gumbril's comment here sets the tone for the ensuing performance. The scene on which the curtains open is surely too obvious a representation of the modern condition: the Monster, contemporary man, lies in a pink, beribboned cradle beside the corpse of his mother; having been conceived "in lust and darkness" (p.172) he can never know innocence or happiness. The dialogue is similarly clumsy and over-emphatic:

> THE HUSBAND: I wish that I were dead!
> THE DOCTOR: But you won't to-morrow.
> THE HUSBAND: Tomorrow! But I don't want to live to see tomorrow.
> THE DOCTOR: You will to-morrow (p.172).

The stilted style of such exchanges is further increased by the interpolation of current statistics such as the mortality rate in childbirth during 1921. The didactic intentions of the anonymous playwright are in no danger of being mistaken and Huxley does not intend that they should be. As Gumbril remarks, "A little ponderous, perhaps" (p.174).

The Monster, of course, is the central figure in the Farce. He is rickety and consumptive as a result of his industrial heritage: the "slug-dank tatters of lungs" (p.175) that he spits out are black with the soot of the city in which he has lived all his life. But despite his monstrous appearance, he is sensitive and intelligent. Deploring the sordidness of his own existence, he looks back on the past civilization of Sparta where the Spartan youth were healthy

and chaste, "their minds cool and untroubled" (p.175). As well as juxtaposing the Monster's plight with an ideal past, the author of the Farce contrasts the inner sensitivity that belies the Monster's repulsive aspect with the mean, shallow nature existing beneath the comeliness of the Young Lady and her fiancée, Roger. The message is obvious. Mocked and rejected, trapped in a bent misshapen body, the Monster represents the isolated modern sensibility. His inability to express adequately his thoughts and ideals indicates his alienation in a harsh, insensitive world; the fineness of his sensibility only emphasizes his isolation.

Myra Viveash's reaction to this figure, however, is "Lord! . . . how this young man bores me!" (p.177). If the Farce is a reconstruction of the play within a play in Hamlet, then Myra Viveash is Gertrude complaining "The lady doth protest too much, methinks" (Hamlet, III.ii.230). Besides recognizing a disquieting reflection of herself in the stage production, Myra is reacting to the over-emphatic nature of the play itself. The Monster's excessive protestations of his idealism and the self-pity behind them put in doubt the sincerity of his message. His soliloquies are ponderous and excessive:

> THE MONSTER [solus]: Somewhere 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, must be made significant. Lust, like Diabelli's waltz, a stupid air

> turned by a genius into three-and-thirty
> fabulous variations. Somewhere . . .
> "Oh dear " sighed Mrs. Viveash
> "Charming " Gumbril protested.
> . . . love like sheets of silky flame; like
> landscapes brilliant in the sunlight against
> a background of purple thunder; like the solu-
> tion of a cosmic problem; like faith . . .
> "Crikey!" said Mrs. Viveash.
> . . . somewhere, somewhere. But in my veins
> creep the maggots of the pox . . .
> "Really, really " Mrs. Viveash shook her head.
> "Too medical" (p.179).

The Monster's "too medical" preoccupation with his squalid existence is apparently a result of disappointed idealism. Indeed, he has been weaned on the milk of a tubercular cow and been condemned to "live loveless in dirt and impurity " (p.172). Reviled by the Young Lady, he cries, "there is a wound under my left pap. She has deflowered all women. I cannot . . ." (p.177). In his self-pity and bitterness he submits to the embraces of a prostitute. But just as the protestations of ideals and beliefs have been excessive, so is there a too-obvious wallowing in despair and sordidness. The description of the harlot in the play's stage-directions as "the most tasteful of nature-mortes" (p.177) is too emphatically and self-indulgently gross, as is Coleman's apparent eagerness to view this "delicious trull" (p.180). The implication, of course, is that such cynicism is the reaction of a sensitive soul to the sordidness which assails it from the external world. This is the assumption which informs the play's conclusion. Now aged, disfigured by venereal disease

and imprisoned in an asylum, the Monster mounts a chair and strains upwards, aspiring to the world which has eluded him all his life. Inevitably he falls and the play ends as he is being carried away dead to be ignobly dismembered in a dissecting room. The Monster's abject fate is an ummistakeable statement of life's futility: in such a context ideals are pointless. Huxley himself was aware of the self-indulgence that such an attitude can involve as his depiction of Spandrell in Point Counter Point demonstrates. This character describes mordantly the fundamental premise of the Farce's pessimism when he insists:

> "That's what life finally is -- hateful and boring, that's what human beings are, when they're left to themselves -- hateful and boring again. Because, once one's damned, one ought to damn oneself doubly. Because . . . yes, because I really like hating and being bored."[4]

In The Modern Writer and his World, G.S. Fraser points out that, at the popular level, the cultural upheaval experienced by the post-war generation "often led to a cheap hedonism, a cheap cynicism, and an equally cheap sentimentalism".[5] The Farce, in its ponderous sententiousness, constitutes such a vulgarization of an age's mood. In effect, it reduces what could be a defensible intellectual position to the level of bromide. Significantly, this modern morality play has been staged in a fashionably "smart" London cabaret. The prevailing mood is at once dionysian and threnodic: "'What's he to Hecuba?' Lachrymosely, the

hilarious blackamoors chanted their question, mournfully pregnant with its foreknown reply" (p.170). This reply -- "Nothing at all" -- is incessantly chanted back to accompanying strains of jazz. The glib message of the Farce is perfectly appropriate amid such chic nihilism:

> "I wish they'd hurry up with the second scene." said Mrs.Viveash. "If there's anything that bores me it's entr'actes."
>
> Most of one's life is an entr'acte," said Gumbril whose present mood of hilarious depression seemed favourable to the enunciation of apoththegms.
>
> "None of your cracker mottoes, please," protested Mrs. Viveash (pp.174-175).

But Myra herself is inclined to a similarly aphoristic view of her plight. She has, really, anticipated Gumbril's apophthegm with her remark about disliking entr'actes. Besides, she recognizes the applicability of even such "cracker mottoes" to her personal sense of tragedy: after all, she reflects, what has she been doing but waiting for the curtains to go up again which so long ago had rung down on her dead lover (p.175). And however much Gumbril has glibly devalued Myra Viveash's weariness of spirit, young Porteous renders it irrevocably trite with his foolish and uncomprehending affectation of cynicism:

> "And if there's one thing I dislike more than another," said the boy, breaking silence for the first time, with an air of the greatest earnestness, "it's . . . it's one thing more than another."
>
> "And you're perfectly right in doing so," said Coleman. "Perfectly right."
>
> "I know, the boy replied modestly (p.181).

The ignoble falsifications of emotion manifest in the Farce and its audience are evident throughout Antic Hay. The novel's characters seem to protest too much; as a result, the feelings they display seem contrived and forced. As Gumbril says of a projected autobiography, "They'll think I'm a sort of dingy Romain Rolland, hopelessly trying to pretend that I feel the emotions and have the great spiritual experiences, which the really important people do feel and have" (p.229). In this connection, a parallel exists between the Farce and Casimir Lypiatt's art showing in Chapter VII. Myra Viveash's exclamation of "Crikey!" at the histrionics of the Monster is echoed by Mr. Mercaptan when he peruses Lypiatt's catalogue. Just as the Farce is excessive in its protestations, so Lypiatt's "declaration of faith" (p. 86) is pure fustian. His catalogue is a collection of banalities:

> "Oh, the usual cracker mottoes." Mr. Mercaptan laughed. "I know the sort of thing. "Look after the past and the future will look after itself', "God squared minus Man squared equals Art-plus-life times Art-minus-Life." "The Higher the Art the fewer the morals" -- only that's too nearly good sense to have been invented by Lypiatt.

Indeed that last Wildeian-sounding cliché would be likely to appeal to Mr. Mercaptan's own rather emphatic aestheticism. At any rate, Lypiatt's triteness of expression puts in doubt the sincerity of his convictions. The maxim, "le style c'est l'homme" (p.86), uttered by Mr. Mercaptan, aptly describes this artist's dilemma. Although his ideals may be genuine -- for indeed, even in his suicide note Lypiatt maintains that he has always been sincere -- his lack of talent obstructs his in-

tentions. Gumbril observes of him, "such a bad painter, such a bombinating poet, such a loud emotional improviser on the piano!" (p.40). Thus, in Chapter VI, desperately trying to express in musical terms his conceptions, Lypiatt produces instead the distorted ghost of an intention: "'You see?' he asked feverishly, when the ghost was laid again and the sad cheap jangling had faded again into silence. 'You feel?'" (p.77). Unfortunately, Lypiatt produces only a theatrical show of life; as Myra reflects, he protests too much (p.78). His hankering after spiritual significance seems as bogus, in the blatancy of its expression, as the Monster's grotesque aspirations.

This figure's inept protestations of positive belief seem inimical to the prevailing pessimism of Antic Hay. Whereas Lypiatt is patently romantic in his bias, the novel's other characters display a characteristically modern cynicism which is seemingly averse to the emotional excesses of romanticism. However, as we have noted, the Farce's cynical avowal of life's futility has been the result of disappointed idealism: pitted against an uncomprehending, insensitive world, the idealist inevitably falls to earth as the Monster does at the play's end. But always beneath the pessimism is the emphatic asseveration of inner sensitivity.

In his study, Journey Through Despair, 1880-1914, John A. Lester Jr. discusses the significance for the modern sensibility of the mask motif. Lester writes, "The mask can protect the sensitivity that is wounded and driven into isolation.

It can reunite subject with object; for if the mask is aloof and impassive, it yet must have been born of the inner life of the one who created it".[6] Although he pointedly dissociates himself from his contempories, Lypiatt nevertheless indulges in such an affectation of cynical disregard. In Chapter III, for example, describing the persecution heaped upon him for his genius, he utters "a laugh that was meant to show that the bitterness, the cynicism, justifiable as events might have made them, were really only a mask, and that beneath it the artist was still serenely and tragically smiling" (p.42). Similarly, confronted with the scepticism of Gumbril and Mr. Mercaptan in Chapter IV, Lypiatt laughs "his loud Titan's laugh, the laugh of cynicism which seems to belie, but which, for those who have understanding, reveals the high, positive spirit within" (p.46). But in fact, very little insight is required to interpret the intended meaning of Lypiatt's pose. The fine sensibility which is understood to exist behind the embittered mask is never for a moment to be forgotten. Like Lypiatt's acquaintances, one cannot help wondering if the implicit idealism is of as deliberate contriv nce as the outward pose of cynicism. Thus, Lypiatt is described as "looking at himself from outside . . . through the veil of cynical je-m'en-fichisme to the bruised heart beneath" (p.58). There is always the sense that he is "facing misfortune with a jest a little too self-consciously" (p.71).

This mordant depiction of Lypiatt's penchant for self-dramatization constitutes a pointed comment on the particular cynicism associated with the modern sensibility. The patently romantic nature of his pose serves to delineate the gross excesses of sentimentality behind the similarly specious cynicism expressed by the novel's other characters. The "aloof and impassive" mask which, as Lester points out, posits an inner sensitivity, becomes, in the world depicted by Huxley, complete in its affectation, as false in what it implies as in its outward aspect. Such is the import of Huxley's satirical portrait of Mary Thriplow in Those Barren Leaves:

> How could one guess what lay behind her gaiety? "The more sensitive one is," she used to tell herself,"the more timid and spiritually chaste, the more necessary it is for one to wear a mask." Her laughter, her little railleries were the mask that hid from the outside world what was in her soul; they were her armour against a probing and wounding curiosity.[7]

But, in fact, Miss Thriplow's feelings are as bogus as her sardonic literary manner. Her flippant pose is, in its way, as blatant as the Monster's protestations in the Farce. The characters of Antic Hay hide behind a similarly mocking humour; and there is always the sense that their witticisms and railleries are forced, that, like Lypiatt, they are a little too consciously laughing in the face of sillusionment.

Perhaps the most extreme of the novel's desperate japes are uttered by the outrageous diabolist, Coleman. He indulges

in deliberately blasphemous behavior; his bursts of shattering laughter and "nameless and fantastic malice" (p.49) are patently theatrical. Just as Lypiatt has a penchant for "philosophical paranomasia" (p.71), Coleman is inclined towards parodying the scriptures. In Chapter IV, for example, he delivers an inverted version of the Apostle's creed: "I believe in one devil, father quasi-almighty, Samael and his wife, the Woman of Whoredom" (p.51). In his mouth, the Genesis Creation becomes an account of modern nihilism:

> The laws of gravidy, first formulated by Newton, now recodified by the immortal Einstein. God said, Let Newstein be, and there was light. And God said, Let there be Light and there was darkness o'er the face of the earth (p.166).

But there is something ponderous and contrived about Coleman's puns. They are too insistent and often verge on extreme silliness. In scenes such as those in Chapters IV and V, Coleman incessantly voices his blasphemies to the point where they are as tedious as Lypiatt's protestations. Indeed, at one point, Mr. Mercaptan shrugs and complains, "What with Lypiatt on one side, being a muscular Christian artist, and Coleman on the other, howling the black mass . . . Really!" (p.57).

Although Coleman himself is depicted as an extreme extrovert -- nowhere in the novel is there an explicit indication of what lies beneath his cynicism -- it is clear from his behaviour that he is putting on a show and that he takes a great deal of pleasure in shocking his listeners. Spandrell,

in Point Counter Point, is a more round and complex version of this type, yet, like his counterpart in Antic Hay, has a "rather melodramatically cynical way of talking".[8] "So damned pleased with his naughtiness! Like a stupid child, really," observes another character of him.[9] Spandrell's behavior has arisen from an adolescent horror of the more unpleasant aspects of physiological existence; his blind immersion in sordid debaucheries is the extreme reaction of an over-sensitive mind. Like Baudelaire, on whom Huxley modelled him, he displays the "cynicism and perversity of adolescence."[10] The factors behind Coleman's brutal cynicism are less clear, but one can detect a note of self-consciously appalled horror in his graphic accounts of obscenity and disgust:

> Does it occur to you . . . that at this moment we are walking through the midst of seven million distinct and separate individuals, each with distinct and separate lives and all completely indifferent to our existence? Seven million people, each one of whom thinks himself quite as important as each of us does. Millions of them are now sleeping in an impested atmosphere. Hundreds of thousands of couples are at this moment engaged in mutually caressing one another in a manner too hideous to be thought of, but in no way different from the manner in which each of us performs, delightfully, passionately and, beautifully, his similar work of love. Thousands of both sexes are dying of the most diverse and appalling diseases, or simply because they have not had enough to eat. And they are all alive, all unique and separate and sensitive, like you and me. It's a horrible thought (p.57).

The combination of relish and horror conveyed in the use of words like "empested" indicates a self-indulgent wallowing in

disgust. Coleman's attempts to make human existence sound as repulsive as possible suggests what Mr. Cardan, in Those Barren Leaves, calls inverted sentimentalism: the ordinary sentimentalist "pretends that so-called real-life is more rosy than it actually is. The reversed sentimentalist gloats over its horrors".[11] Just as Lypiatt's blatant protestations seem intended to convince himself of the significance of his ideals, so Coleman is preoccupied with the spiritual significance of his gross enormities. In both cases the mask is too suggestive of the wearer's inner feelings; through their inept theatricality they reduce their emotions to the level of cheapness which characterizes the Farce.

Huxley's exposure of such specious posing extends to his characterization of Theodore Gumbril. Because Gumbril is the most introspective of the novel's characters, the falsity of emotion involved in the affectation of cynicism receives its most effective expression in him. At the same time, however, it is in the depiction of this figure that Huxley's detachment seems unsure. Although the vitiating self-pity and sentimentality motivating the Farce and the novel's other characters is evident in Gumbril, it is difficult to ascertain the extent to which Huxley's treatment of this weakness in him is ironic. This in turn renders ambiguous Huxley's own position in regard to such excesses.

In Chapter I, for example, Gumbril indulges in associations and word-play as strained and far-fetched as those of

Coleman. A pebble imbedded in the forehead of Goliath in a stained-glass representation gives rise to a facetious Freudian interpretation; the concept of theology is parodied in a series of associations involving theosophy, theognomy, theo-physics, and so on (p.7). This irresponsible mockery is obviously intended to reflect his disenchantment with the ideals being preached by Mr. Pelvey. Thus, having decided that the human race stands below Good and Evil like earwigs, Gumbril makes a mental gesture and inwardly declaims, "I glory in the name of earwig" (p.8). Significantly, he assumes this pose again in Chapter IV, just after Lypiatt's exhibition of cynical stoicism:

> "I glory in the name of earwig," said Gumbril. He was pleased with that little invention. It was felicitous; it was well chosen. "One's an earwig in sheer self-protection," he explained (p.47).

The significance of his pose is as obvious as the immediately preceding laugh of cynicism which Lypiatt has uttered to reveal "the high positive spirit within" (p.46). Gumbril's assumption of ironic self-deprecation is also, in its way, as blatant a display of disappointed idealism as the cynicism of the Farce's conclusion.

Alternating with these cynical poses are moments of serious misgiving. In the midst of reciting an obscene French quatrain, at the end of Chapter V, Gumbril stops short when he remembers Mr. Mercaptan "and the thought depressed him" (p.70). Similarly, in Chapter XI, he assumes a facile pose

of philosophical detachment when talking to Shearwater, but "suddenly he became rather disgusted with himself. He shook himself; he climbed up out of his own morass" (p.132). He recognizes his prankish referral of Rosie Shearwater to Mr. Mercaptan's address as "ultimate clownery in the worst of deliriously bad taste" (p.190). These instances aptly express the wincing shame behind conscious pretension: in the mordant depiction of such petty meannesses Huxley is unequalled. However, Huxley further attempts to use these moments of introspection to evoke a tragic sense of self-recognition, and here he is unsuccessful.

After being commanded to lunch by Myra Viveash, Gumbril sends a telegram to Emily claiming that he has had a slight accident and is "a little indisposed" (p.161). The feeble humour of this phrase causes him to blush with retrospective shame later when he has lost Emily. It is the knowledge that his irresponsible behaviour has cut him off from Emily's love -- has, in effect, caused his fall from the innocence represented by Emily -- wherein the tragedy of Gumbril's situation apparently lies. However, the quality of emotion with which this character has been endowed is not sufficient to support a tragic view of his plight. Although the ideal happiness offered by Emily is evidently intended as a serious alternative to Antic Hay's prevailing pessimism, the cloyingly sentimental nature of Gumbril's relationship with this character undermines the over-all ironic tone of the novel. In Evelyn Waugh's

hands such sentimental excesses in characters are subordinated to the author's ironic intent. Tony Last's feudal ideals, for example, in A Handful of Dust (1934), are integral to the framework of the novel. Last's ultimate fate takes on an exquisitely macabre character in the light of his sentimental attachment to past traditions; there is also an unmistakeable pathos implicit in Last's situation. However, the irony in Antic Hay is not handled nearly so adeptly as that in Waugh's novel. Although he recognizes and deplores the grotesque affectations of his characters, Huxley allows the vitiating sentimentality underlying their poses to seep into his own position. If the pretensions to tragic significance in the Farce are intended ironically, as I have argued, Huxley is nevertheless guilty of using a similarly ponderous dichotomy between mocking cynicism and the bruised heart beneath as the premise for Antic Hay's final vision of futility.

That tragedy underlies farce -- that, as Lypiatt writes, "every one's a walking farce and a walking tragedy at the same time" (p.214) -- is the basis of Antic Hay: a conviction of this was surely behind Huxley's letter of justification to his father discussed in Chapter I. The main device with which Huxley attempts to convey this tragic sense is the clown figure. Thus, in Chapter XIV, when Gumbril has given up the opportunity for happiness with Emily, he becomes a kind of tragi-comedian. Just as the Monster has

fallen and broken his neck as he strains upwards, so Gumbril falls away from the ideal vision represented by Emily. Thenceforth his actions are those of a seemingly irresponsible clown who is, nevertheless, acutely conscious of his tragic role. When Myra Viveash petulantly asks, "What is the meaning of this clowning?" (p.161), Gumbril feigns ignorance but inwardly he knows that his pose of clownish irresponsibility conceals his real pain. This becomes clearer in Chapter XVII when he recounts the story of Grimaldi, the clown:

> "Here's to secrecy," Gumbril proposed. Shut it tightly, keep it dark, cover it up. Be silent, prevaricate, lie outright. He laughed and drank. "Do you remember," he went on, "those instructive advertisements of Eno's Fruit Salts they used to have when we were young? There was one little anecdote about a doctor who advised the hypochondriacal patient, who had come to consult him, to go and see Grimaldi the clown; and the patient answered "I am Grimaldi. Do you remember?"
>
> "No," said Mrs. Viveash. "And why do you?"
>
> "Oh, I don't know. Or rather, I do know." Gumbril corrected himself, and laughed again (pp.184-185).

Here the tragi-comic pose which Gumbril has assumed is obvious. He is, so to speak, laughing on the inside and crying on the outside; even as he clowns he is weighed down by thoughts of Emily and her cottage in the country. Thus, at a lunch with Myra Viveash during which he has clowned away in inimitable style, "Gumbril put his hand to his breast and bowed. He felt suddenly extremely depressed" (p.163). The ghost of Grimaldi is unmistakeably present in this gesture; yet the pain which Gumbril feels is evidently meant to be genuine enough. In the following chapter, Gumbril's efforts to forget

Emily in the midst of the cabaret's hilarious depression approach bathos:

> "What's he to Hecuba?"
>
> "Nothing at all," Gumbril clownishly sang. The room in the cottage, had nothing to do with him. He breathed Mrs. Viveash's memories of Italian jasmines, laid his cheek for a moment against her smooth hair. "Nothing at all. Happy clown!"(p.171).

Such demonstrations seem over-done and melodramatic. Gumbril's role as tragi-comedian is as hackneyed as the Eno's anecdote.

However, it is in these clownish protestations of disappointed idealism that Antic Hay's final statement of futility has its source. While entertaining company in his rooms, Gumbril cries "I am Grimaldi", and then reflects, as he looks at Myra Viveash and Coleman sitting where Emily had lain previously, that "further than this it was difficult to see where the joke could go" (p.186). This "joke" involves the irresponsible clownery into which Gumbril has retreated as a result of rejecting Emily. Even at the park with her, he has thought:

> How simple it was . . . to puddle clear waters and unpetal every flower! -- every wild flower, by God! one ever passed in a governess cart at the heels of a barrel bellied pony. How simple to spit on the floors of churches! Si prega di non sputare. Simple to kick one's legs and enjoy oneself -- dutifuly -- in pink underclothing. Perfectly simple (p.148).

Such a possibility has been realized in the painful experience

of seeing Myra and Coleman, in effect, desecrate, by their very presence, the room in which he and Emily had spent their solitary night. In becoming Grimaldi, Gumbril shows himself to be aware of the tragic irony of the situation. The inevitable outcome of this "joke", however, will be the "Last Ride" in which the novel culminates.

This frenetic taxi-ride around London taken by Gumbril and Myra Viveash is intended to reflect, in its utter pointlessness, the moral and social chaos of the post-war era which, as Huxley stated to his father, it was his intention to depict in Antic Hay.[12] In this final vision of futility, the irresponsible cynicism which has arisen as a reaction to disillusionment receives its most intense expression. The precarious world of Gumbril and his contemporaries is shaken loose by the reckless abandon of Huxley's pessimism in these final pages.

In an essay entitled "Vulgarity in Literature", Huxley describes American fiction as being "almost Rabelaisian" in its depiction of despair![13] A similar spirit in Antic Hay motivates Gumbril's and Myra Viveash's aimless peregrinations about London in Chapters XXI and XXII. Gumbril has returned from his vain attempts to find Emily (in Chapter XVII) and found Myra at home resting after a luncheon with Piers Cotton. In the chapters immediately preceding, Lypiatt has finally realized his failure as an artist and, contemplating suicide, has written a lengthy note of self-justification; Shearwater has been confronted with his obsessive desire for Myra Viveash;

and his wife, Rosie, has experienced the ultimate degradation at the hands of Coleman. Now, in Myra's drawing-room, Gumbril embarks on a lengthy, disconnected monologue containing odd bits of irrelevent erudition and his vague plans for the future, after which Myra revives and jumps up crying, "Come on . . . I feel ready for anything" (p.230). Thenceforth, pessimism is predominant and any earlier indications of positive hope are drowned in the wake of Antic Hay's bitter cynicism.

One by one the novel's characters are visited and then left to their fates. In between, Gumbril and Myra taxi through London's dark streets, around the park, through Piccadilly Circus, to be revitalized by the twitching sky signs with their "illusion of jollity" (p.241). Behind all this are Gumbril's embittered memories of lost love. As Myra informs Coleman, the occasion of this celebration is Gumbril's broken heart (p. 238). Thus, as they pass the park, Gumbril sadly wonders "where Emily could be now" (p. 234). The "Last Ride" is Gumbril's gesture of cynical resignation in the face of his disappointment. His professed intention of leaving England the next morning "unshaved, exhausted and filled with disgust" (p.226) is as emphatic a protestation of his mood as Lypiatt's romantic pose as the embittered titan. Similarly, Myra Viveash's adjuration to "drive, drive, drive" (p.247) seems somehow too insistent in its avowal of hopeless abandon. The negative ebullience which animates this "Last Ride" suggests a self-

indulgence as excessive as that which characterizes the Farce, and the undertone of futility is as emphatic:

> They ate their sandwiches, they drank their wine. The taxi drove on and on.
>
> "This is positively exhilerating" said Mrs. Viveash as they turned into the Edgware road.
>
> Polished by the wheels and shining like old and precious bronze the road stretched on before them, reflecting the lamps. It had the inviting air of a road which goes on for ever (p.241).

At the end of Chapter XVI, there is one optimistic note in Gumbril Sr's sacrifice for his friend, Porteus. But after the brief vision of hope engendered by this act, the ride resumes and there can be no doubt of the pointlessness of such actions. Indeed, this intrusion of positive idealism only serves to emphasize the bitterness which informs the pessimism of these pages. As Myra cries immediately afterwards, "The Last Ride Again" (p.247). Her later statement, "To-morrow . . . will be as awful as to-day" makes emphatic the circle of futility which this night journey is intended to describe. Such is the import of the novel's last lines in which Myra suggests a further trip to visit Piers Cotton. The "joke" has come to its inevitable conclusion.

But the irony is never without its insistent protestations of disappointed idealism. For if Huxley will not allow his characters to stop their futile circlings, he nevertheless makes them view the impossible vision embodied by St. Paul's dome in these final pages. The silence with which Theodore Gumbril and Myra Viveash gaze at this "human symbol hanging miraculously

in the moonlight" (p.253) clearly expresses a wistful yearning for lost ideals. The resignation evident as these characters prepare to continue their pointless journey at the novel's close is obviously intended to convey a sense of the cynical stoicism with which they are apparently meeting their fate. One reviewer thought he detected in the novel "a faint suggestion of 'ungestured sadness'".[14] But surely Huxley's presentation of Antic Hay's final pessimistic vision evinces an unmistakeable sense of gesture.

CONCLUSION

That Huxley could mordantly portray the characteristic features of the post-war period and the emotional excesses resulting from them, and, at the same time, betray these characteristics in his own attitude, is what must have made him so compelling to his young contemporaries. Of his early reaction to Huxley's works, George Woodcock writes:

> I had felt . . . without completely understanding it, the characteristic ambivalence of novels like Crome Yellow and Antic Hay, the sense of delicious treason in the knowledge that Huxley was fascinated as well as repelled by the life of meretricious, intellectuality and futile moneyed gaiety which he portrayed so sardonically and yet, at times, so seductively. I was dazzled -- how could one be less?[1]

The "characteristic ambivalence" which Woodcock notes in the early novels is a product of the peculiarly vulnerable position from which Huxley viewed his contemporaries. One senses in Antic Hay, particularily in its final pages, that Huxley is as susceptible as his characters to the infective mood of disillusionment and pessimism evoked in the novel. Like Theodore Gumbril and Myra Viveash at the Farce, he too is drawn by the spectacle of his own modernity.

Gerald Gould, in a review of Antic Hay, remarked that "the cheap, the obvious, the popular have a fatal fascination for Mr. Huxley".[2] This very perceptive observation describes

an essential characteristic of Huxley. Highly intelligent and cultured, with an acute moral sense, he nevertheless often displays a side of himself, at least as a writer, which delights in the cheap and the sensational. In a lengthy essay entitled "Vulgarity in Literature", he deals with the implications of such an inclination for the "self-conscious artist".[3] He describes the pleasure arising from indulging in "the too emphatic irony, the too tragical scene, the too pathetic tirade, the too poetical description".[4] Such offences, he tells us, are "intoxicatingly delightful to commit", and, significantly, can appeal to a corresponding side of the reader's nature.[5]

Antic Hay partakes of the more blatant symptoms of post-war unrest, the "Turkish-bath atmosphere of self-pity" as George Orwell calls it.[6] But it was clearly in the deliberate evocation of such excesses that young readers like Woodcock felt a "sense of delicious treason". "For myself as, no doubt, for most of my contemporaries, the philosophy of meaninglessness was essentially an instrument of liberation," Huxley writes as he looks back on the 1920's. The liberating influence (mentioned in Chapter I of this study) of Huxley's works on his contemporaries, seems to have arisen out of the cathartic release offered by the abandoned pessimism and cynicism of novels like Antic Hay. (One reviewer remarked that Huxley had thoroughly purged himself "of much perilous stuff"

in Antic Hay[7]). Indeed, there is a peculiar element of dissipation evident in such an attitude. At the same time, there is the justifying sense of disillusioned idealism behind the mask of cynical laughter and this is the basis of the "too emphatic irony" characterizing the novel.

Like the transitory sensation of the hedonist's pleasures, however, the overwhelming popular appeal of a book like Antic Hay is necessarily short-lived. It is significant that George Woodcock, Angus Wilson and others, have described their infatuation with this novel in retrospect. For, the attitude which it embodies is not one which can sustain itself and withstand the scrutiny of a mature and objective viewpoint. Whereas The Waste Land, also an expression of the age's despair and disillusionment, has a resonance and weightiness of expression which has preserved the effectiveness of its statement, Antic Hay, due to its more sensational evocation of the post-war ethos, has proved to be a more ephemeral work. As Huxley himself writes:

> Excessive protestings convince a certain public, at a certain time. But when the circumstances which have rendered the public sensitive to the force and blind to the vulgarity of the too much protesting have changed, the protests cease to convince.

Antic Hay appeared at a time when its emphatic protestations carried conviction. Although the novel's pessimism may seem contrived and specious to a reader today, it portrays the plight of the twenties generation as they themselves saw it. The desperate hedonism, the cynicism with its vitiating under-

tone of sentimentalism, the facile sense of despair, all these characteristics of the post-war period find their expression in Antic Hay. And Huxley, the commentator, is, as Joseph Wood Krutch observed, very much "part of the confusion which he describes."[9]

NOTES TO INTRODUCTION

[1] Aldous Huxley: The Critical Heritage, ed. Donald Watt, pp.129-130.

[2] Letters of Aldous Huxley, ed. Grover Smith, p.224.

[3] pp. 3-4.

[4] The Critical Heritage, p.89.

[5] On the Margin, p.22.

[6] Ibid., pp. 24-25.

[7] Ibid., p.25.

[8] The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell, ed. Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus, Vol. I, pp.509-510.

[9] "Beliefs", Collected Essays, p.367.

[10] Letters, p.544.

[11] Enemies of Promise, p.44.

[12] The Critical Heritage, p.89.

NOTES TO CHAPTER I

[1] The Critical Heritage, p.82.

[2] Ibid., p.96.

[3] Ibid., p. 157.

[4] Ibid., p. 88.

[5] Ibid., p. 96.

[6] Aldous Huxley, 1894-1963: A Memorial Volume, ed. Julien Huxley, p. 13.

[7] "The House Party Novels: Crome Yellow and Those Barren Leaves", Aldous Huxley: A collection of Critical Essays, ed. Robert E. Kuehn, p.21.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Letters, p. 224.

[10] Ibid.

[11] p. 53.

[12] Ibid., p. 55.

[13] Enemies of Promise, p. 44.

[14] Ibid., p.37.

[15] Children of the Sun: A Narrative of "Decadence" in England After 1918, p.14.

[16] The Critical Heritage, p.90.

[17] Letters, p. 224.

[18] The Vanishing Hero: Studies in Novelists of the Twenties, p.20.

[19] The Critical Heritage, p. 276.

[20] "Ben Jonson", On the Margin, p. 202.

[21] The Critical Heritage, p. 175.

[22] Letters, p. 165.

[23] "Ben Jonson", pp. 200-201.

[24] Ibid., p. 200.

[25] The Collected Poetry of Aldous Huxley, ed. Donald Watt, p. 27.

[26] p. 156.

[27] Children of the Sun, pp. 20-23.

[28] Ibid., pp. 31-32.

[29] p. 586.

[30] Children of the Sun, p. 32.

[31] p. 542.

[32] Aldous Huxley: A Literary Study, p. 17.

NOTES TO CHAPTER II

[1] "Romanticism and Classicism", Critical Theory Since Plato, ed. Hazard Adams, p. 869.

[2] Ibid., p. 774.

[3] Ezra Pound: Selected Poems, p. 175.

[4] Aldous Huxley: A Study of the Major Novels, p. 54.

[5] p. 24.

[6] "Youth at the Helm and Pleasure at the Prow: Antic Hay, Aldous Huxley: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Robert F. Kuehn, p. 18.

[7] Children of the Sun, p. 40.

[8] Selected Poems, p. 175.

[9] Enemies of Promise, p. 41.

[10] The Modern Writer and his World, p. 84.

[11] The Vanishing Hero, p. xlii.

[12] "Youth at the Helm and Pleasure at the Prow: Antic Hay", p. 19.

[13] The Great War and Modern Memory, p. 18.

[14] p. 186.

[15] Letters, p. 224.

[16] p. 75.

[17] Ibid., p. 407

[18] Dawn and the Darkest Hour: A Study of Aldous Huxley, p. 96.

[19] Aldous Huxley: A Study of the Major Novels, p. 54.

[20] "Variations on The Prisons", Themes and Variations, p. 203.

[21] "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock", The Complete Poems and Plays, p. 4.

[22] The Withered Branch: Six Studies in the Modern Novel, p. 154.

[23] The Critical Heritage, p. 89.

[24] "Baudelaire", Do What You Will, p. 195.

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[1] The Critical Heritage, p. 223.

[2] Aldous Huxley: A Collection of Critical Essays, p. 19

[3] Ibid., p. 20.

[4] "The World as Ballet", Poetry and Prose, ed. R. V. Holdsworth, p. 811.

[5] The Collected Poetry, p. 98.

[6] The Vanishing Hero, p. 4.

[7] T. S. Eliot, The Complete Poems and Plays, p. 41.

[8] "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock", p. 4.

[9] "Thersites: On the Surviving Zeus", Collected Early Poems of Ezra Pound, p. 206.

[10] p. 145.

[11] Aldous Huxley: Satirist and Novelist.

[12] Aldous Huxley.

[13] Ibid., p. 51.

[14] pp. 116-117.

[15] The Collected Poetry, p. 109

[16] Journey Through Despair, 1880-1914: Transformations in British Literary Culture, p. 127.

[17] Puzzles and Epiphanies, p. 9.

[18] "The Russian Ballets", Dramatis Personae, p. 296.

[19] Limbo, p. 228.

[20] Ibid.

[21] p. 238.

[22] "Complaint of a Poet Manque", The Collected Poetry, p. 69.

[23] p. 114.

[24] The Critical Heritage, p. 95.

[25] "The Decadent Movement in Literature, "Dramatis Personae, p. 97.

[26] p. 435.

[27] Vile Bodies, p. 177.

[28] p. 200.

[29] Letters, p. 159.

[30] Do What You Will, p. 142

[31] "Silence is Golden", Do What you Will, p. 61.

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[1] The Critical Heritage, p. 63.

[2] Aldous Huxley: Satirist and Novelist, p. 70.

[3] "The Play Within the Novel in Antic Hay", Renascence, XIII (Winter, 1961), 60.

[4] p. 304.

[5] pp. 83-84.

[6] pp. 152-153.

[7] pp. 48-49

[8] p.133.

[9] Ibid.

[10] "Baudelaire", Do What You Will, p. 197.

[11] p. 371.

[12] Letters, p. 224.

[13] Music at Night, p. 286.

[14] The Critical Heritage, p. 90.

NOTES TO CONCLUSION

[1] Dawn and the Darkest Hour, p. 13.

[2] The Critical Heritage, p. 88.

[3] Music at Night, p. 296.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid., pp. 294

[6] The Critical Heritage, p. 79.

[8] "Vulgarity in Literature", pp. 310-311.

[9] The Critical Heritage, p. 159.

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