

Chapter VIAfter Many a Summer and Time
Must Have a Stop

I

After exploring the waste land of twentieth century socio-intellectual life of England, Huxley turns to the East for solution of the spiritual malaise of the West and discovers it in Oriental mysticism. We have seen that in Eyeless in Gaza Huxley takes a positive step in the direction of a new vision of life, and, as a consequence, we have in Dr. Miller Huxley's mouthpiece who propounds the philosophy of integral pacifism. Huxley's is not an easy acceptance of Oriental mysticism. Being essentially highly intelligent and most crude, he must move towards his new 'vision' in his own way, exploring, examining, experimenting, questioning, sifting the various elements of mysticism, and, as a novelist, he has a further task of discussing it in terms of actual human life. After Many a Summer and Time Must Have a Stop are his further studies of mysticism. Through Mr. Propter of After Many a Summer and Bruno Rontini and his disciple, Sebastian Barnack, of Time Must Have a Stop Huxley tries to present his newly fashioned mystical approach to life, and he as a thinker examines

his ideas by placing them in various dramatic life-situations that he as a novelist creates in terms of fiction.

II

After Many a Summer

In 1939 Aldous Huxley left Europe for California and settled in Hollywood and Los Angeles. At the sight of follies more gorgeous and fantastic than any he had known in Europe, the satirist in him received a new stimulus. As a result of it, there was the publication of his After Many a Summer in 1939.

According to Jocelyn Brooke, the novel is " a comedy of longevity."¹ It is a closely knit novel with an exciting main plot, but its basic theme is philosophic - the contrast between two conceptions of time, that of the mystic and that of the scientist. According to the biologist eternity is a mere extension of physical life, while for the mystic eternity can be experienced here and now, through expansion and intensification of consciousness which is essentially a spiritual activity.

The novel opens with a satiric presentation of the reckless display of wealth in the New World very

much in the manner of the early Huxley-witty, cynical and not a little blasphemous. It is a rare picture of Jo Stoyte's twentieth century castle built in the most modern style and furnished with all modern amenities - air-conditioned rooms, a ball-room, a billiard-room, an indoor swimming-pool, a Turkish bath and so on.

The plot is concerned with the attempts of Jo Stoyte, an unattractive middle-aged American millionaire, to prolong the duration of his life, as he is " on the verge of breaking up completely. Forty pounds overweight and having had a stroke. Not a bad one, luckily; but enough to put the old bastard into a sweat. Talk of being scared to death ! " ² To this end, he subsidizes the researches of Dr. Obispo, a brilliant young scientist, to whom, out of Jo's panic, " had come his income, his laboratory for the work on the problems of longevity, his excellent assistant; had come, too, the financing of that pharmaceutical work at Berkeley, of those experiments with monkeys in Brazil, of that expedition to the study of the tortoises on the Galapogas Islands " (p.57).

At the same time Stoyte has commissioned Jeremy Pordage, a graduate from Oxford, to study the Hauberk papers which the millionaire has purchased as a rare collection of historical documents. An unexpected confirmation to Dr. Obispo's theory of longevity is

dramatically found among these papers. The Fifth Earl of Gonister living in the eighteenth century had anticipated it, tried it on himself and communicated the extraordinary result to his diary. Following the clues in the diary Dr.Obispo suggests to set off for England.

Meanwhile a sensational tragic event takes place in the castle. Jo has in the castle a Miss Maunciple, whom he calls a "baby", and whom he looks upon with an air of possessiveness. But once he sees Dr.Obispo making love to her and gets so madly infuriated that he fires his pistol ^{at} Dr.Obispo with the intention of killing him, but by accident it is Peter Boone, Dr.Obispo's assistant, who falls a victim to the shot. Hence it is necessary for Stoyte to leave America to cover up the murder. Thus all of them - Stoyte, Dr.Obispo, Miss Maunciple and Jeremy Pordage - go to England and discover the Fifth Earl of Gonister, the eighteenth-century experimenter still living in the cellars of an old English house. But time has done strange things to the 'result' : in his two hundredth year the Earl has the appearance and the behaviour of a monkey. The prolongation of life, Huxley implies, would produce not the expected superman but a regression to an earlier stage of development.

The most significant character in the novel is Mr.Propter, a school-mate of Jo Stoyte and a retired

college teacher who is interested in "eternity-psychological eternity" (p.105) and believes that only the spiritual approach can better the lot of mankind. He regards man as "A nothingness surrounded by God, indigent and capable of God, filled with God, if he so desires" (p.90). He does not believe in the theory of the prolongation of life, for he says :

" The longer you live, the more evil you automatically come into contact with. Nobody comes automatically into contact with good. Men don't find more good by merely existing longer. It's curious that people should always have concentrated on the problem of evil. Exclusively. As though the nature of good were something self-evident. But it isn't self-evident. There's a problem of good at least as difficult as the problem of evil " (p.108).

According to him, an act is good when it contributes towards "Liberation from time.Liberation from craving and revulsions. Liberation from personality " (p.109). Throughout the novel he plays the role of a mouthpiece of Huxley's spiritual and mystical views on life. At the end of the novel there is an implication that wisdom lies not on the side of Stoyte and Dr.Obispo, but with the mystically-minded Mr.Propter, who seeks to develop his soul through the practice of universal pity.

That is why a reviewer has remarked :

" From the puritanism of the earlier novels, the misanthropical cerebration of Point Counter Point, the disgust of Brave New World, the still deeper despair of Eyeless in Gaza, Mr.Huxley has passed to the absolute of mortal version which is 'liberation from personality, liberation from time and craving, liberation into union with God!'"³

Though the novel propagates, in an elaborate manner, Huxley's theories of mysticism, a note of satire dominates the whole novel. Jo Stoyte's aristocratic pride is mocked at throughout the novel. His sketch is drawn in comic vein. For instance, his fear of death and his abnormally suspicious nature are made fun of as follows:

" 'I'll have you run out of the valley,' Mr. Stoyte was roaring. 'I'll see that you're....' He broke off in the middle of the sentence and stood there for a few seconds in silence, his mouth still open and working, his eyes staring. That drumming in the ears, that tingling heat in the face - they had suddenly reminded him of his blood-pressure, of Dr.Obispo, of death. Death and that flamecoloured text in his bedroom at home. Terribly to fall into the hands of the living God..." (pp.129-130).

In the gallery of characters portrayed in the novel, we come across only a single female character of Miss Virginia Maunciple, a young, sweet girl in her

twenties.

Huxley has introduced the character of Miss Maunciple with the intention of throwing light on the nature of Jo Stoyte. For she is a "baby" of Stoyte - "not only figuratively and colloquially but also in the literal sense of the word. His sentiments were simultaneously those of the purest father-love and the most violent eroticism. Mr. Stoyte looked upon her with a possessiveness that was at once gluttonous and paternal" (p.44). That is why, the grotto has been built for this most precious jewel in his castle, who has been transported from the precarious round of a show-girl's joys to the safe and secure heaven of Uncle Jo.

Moreover, Virginia is a sort of visible symbol of the meaning and value of "life". That is why, he has enhanced Dr. Obispo to experiment on longevity. His feelings for her are well-expressed in the following passage :

".....the Baby meant more to him than he had thought..... . It had begun by his just wanting her-wanting her to touch, to hold, to handle, to eat, wanting her because she was warm and smelt good; wanting her because she was young and he was old, because she was so innocent and he too tired for anything not innocence to excite " (pp.207-208).

Miss Maunciple resembles a number of Huxleyan hedonists we have already met in his earlier novels. Her hedonistic approach to life is revealed in her appearance, her activities and her deep fondness for swimming, drinks and scooter-rides. In the novel, Huxley has criticized her moral laxity also, by narrating a number of her love-affairs. She enjoys Peter Boone's being in love with her, for whom she is like "an angel, a heavenly little angel, complete with wings, harp, and genuine eighteen-carat, fully jewelled, swiss-made virginity" (p.180). At the same time she is profoundly attracted to handsome Dr. Obispo and has sexual contacts with him. She knows that she plays a role of a double-crosser to all, for a brief she is worried and ashamed, but cannot resist her cynicism for ever.

Huxley has tried to prevent her from becoming a type by introducing a certain peculiarity in her sketch: Her deep devotion to Our Lady and her Catholicism are the dominant features of her portrait. She blindly believes that she is always protected from all worries since the grotto is built up in the castle. She says :

" Our Lady was so wonderful to me when I had sinus trouble last summer.....

" I haven't even had a cold since She's been there "(p.88).

Virginia's sketch becomes sharp especially in her dejection in the concluding part of the novel when her relations with Obispo bring about the murder of the innocent Peter Boone. Huxley implies, as he has already done in his other novels how pleasure seeking ultimately and inevitably leads one to frustration and sorrow.

According to Peter Firshow,

" Virginia Maunciple, Stoyte's child-mistress, and, as her name implies, official caterer of affection, has no such ugly awareness to hide from or struggle against. In her natural state she is a more elementary Anne Wimbush (Crome Yellow) who simply avoids the unpleasant things either not bothering to think about them or else by making some show of repentance to the Virgin Mary. Until Obispo puts an end to her old existence, she is "happy in limitation, not sufficiently conscious of her personal self to realize its ugliness and inadequacy; or the fundamental wretchedness of the human state" (pp.197-198). Her seduction by Obispo jolts her out of this happy stupidity into a stupid unhappiness. But Obispo cannot, because he will not, save her by jolting her further into a state beyond the merely human."⁴

This analysis of Miss Maunciple's character is obviously inadequate, since it doesnot bring out the 'intellectual complexity' behind the creation of this character.

Huxley's association of innocence and religious faith is important. On the one hand, he seems to imply that only the innocent can be religious, and, on the other, he seems to suggest the utter vulnerability of innocence. His ambivalence towards both innocence and faith parallels his ambivalence towards intelligence or experience and cynicism (of Dr. Obispo), and Huxley is critical of both the pairs; He dismisses both of them by devising an encounter between them - the seduction of Virginia by Dr. Obispo. The later development of these two characters indicates that, according to Huxley, Dr. Obispo can survive any crisis, thanks to his degenerate cynicism, and Virginia, though a little crushed by the crisis, emerges from her depression by taking support of the 'waste land' values of hedonism and cynicism. But Huxley keeps a side-door open for her to go out and seek her salvation - her very unhappiness and depression - which, Huxley would suggest, would lead her, under proper guidance, to some positive position. But the novel offers no scope for that kind of development since she is, after all, a minor character.

III

Time Must Have a Stop

This novel was published in 1945. The conflict between the claims of the senses and the claims of the

spirit is portrayed here with a rare vigour and consistency. The doctrine of mysticism is also presented in a more detailed and elaborate way. For it too has a mystic as a chorus figure, but Bruno Rontini has an immense superiority over Mr. Propter (After Many a Summer) in that he avoids sermons.

A large part of the novel is an echo of Huxley's early novels, especially in its plot and characterization. His early novels depict the defeat of virtue by the cruelties of the world and this is illustrated in this novel by Bruno's being arrested by the police. Most of the characters in the novel resemble the persons we have met in his early fiction. Mrs Gamble is a reflection of all social ladies like Mrs Wimbush (Crome Yellow) and Mrs Aldwinkle (Those Barren Leaves). Sebastian Barnack, the central character, resembles Denis Stone in Crome Yellow in his literary talent and romanticism, in his lack of "the necessary courage and presence of mind,"⁵ but differs from him by the fact that he is deeply influenced by the philosophy of Bruno Rontini and thus follows a positive path in his life. Mr Eustace Barnack is a larger version of Mr. Cardan while Mrs. Thwale is a typical hedonist we have already come across in the character of Anne, Mrs. Vireash and Lucy Tantamount.

Sebastian Barnack, a young and very gifted poet, has been invited by his rich uncle, Eustace, to spend a fortnight with him in Florence. Eustace, who has married a wealthy widow, delights in spending money on art. On the day of Sebastian's arrival he buys from an art dealer called Gabriel Weyl a pair of magnificent Degas sketches. One of these inspires Sebastian to write a brief poem which delights Eustace so much that he gives his nephew one of them as a present. He also promises to buy Sebastian the dinner-jacket which Sebastian's self-righteous father, John Barnack, has refused him, but dies of a heart attack before he can either put this promise into effect or make public the gift of the Degas. Sebastian sells it back to Weyl only to find that it is missing. Suspicion falls on a young Italian servant girl and Sebastian turns to Bruno Rontini for help. Bruno persuades Weyl to give him the picture back so that both Sebastian and the girl are saved. But as a result of this intervention, he himself is arrested by Mussolini's police force. This apparent defeat of virtue by a cruel and violent world is not merely a reversion to the dominant pattern in Huxley's early novels where the spirit is invariably defeated by the flesh. The example of Bruno's unselfishness leaves such a mark on Sebastian that we find him, in the epilogue to the novel, in 1944,



converted to the same mystical philosophy that had inspired Bruno's life.

Philip Thody makes some insightful comments on the novel :

" Like Eyeless in Gaza, Time Must Have a Stop is the novel of a conversion, but Bruno Rontini is a more attractive saint than James Miller, and Sebastian Barnack a less consistently caddish hero than Anthony Beavis. The intellectual energy which threatened to burst open the seams of Eyeless in Gaza has settled down to a steady and less strident conviction that one particular way of thought is undoubtedly superior to all others." ⁶

This is very true. As long as a writer, particularly a novelist, has an openness to life, without the desire to impose a pattern on it, his work has the vibrant quality of eager exploration. But once his ideology gets fixed his work goes the way of propaganda. Time Must Have a Stop is a novel which definitely goes in the direction. From that point of mysticism, Huxley's concern here is to explore the possibility of fusing mysticism with social action. While commenting upon its mysticism Dr. Jog rightly says :

" The difficult task of presenting an ethical problem in an artistic way is achieved with

remarkable success in this novel. The success is due to the convincing portrayal of Bruno Rontini, the mystical persona, impressive with his simple and sympathetic ways, his incidental discussions with his customers and his unfailing understanding of human situations. The portrait is three-dimensional and carries with it the force of conviction." ⁷

The novel concludes with these notes :

" Religion and politics are silliness and murder. Education is stupidity and destruction. Science produces lies and imbecility. Art alone saves life in our common state of spiritual ignorance (and art dissolves nothing) and squalor from complete meaninglessness and art dissolves into nothingness in awareness of the Intelligible Light and unity with the Divine Ground." ⁸

In the context of this novel the women characters do not seem to have engaged Huxley's creative sensibility, because none of them is well-developed.

Mrs. Gamble, blind, avid, monstrous in her oldage, clad in canary-coloured tailor-mades and always with a lap-dog in her jewelled hands is a typically Huxleyan social lady resembling, in her aristocracy and hedonistic approach to life, Mrs. Wimbush in Crome Yellow and Mrs. Aldwinkle in Those Barren Leaves. Her colourful dresses, her gaudy make-up to camouflage her oldage, her love of

ornaments, her fondness for eating, drinks and attending parties are typical of a confirmed hedonist. She has the usual sense of superiority over the poor and the lonely and the intellectual pretensions of hollow socialites.

Another notable female figure in the novel is Mrs. Veronica Thwale, a young, attractive widow, who shares Eustace's fate at least on the earth. As a companion of Mrs. Gamble she lives a life of a parasite, of a maid of a glorified lady. She is a well-bred would-be Eustace without Eustace's money and hence without his easy-going charm. She is quite shrewd enough to know how to live. Her hatred for poverty is the outcome of her living a life of poverty and chastity in her childhood. Hence when her husband dies she does not go back to her parents, but lives with Mrs. Gamble to read to her. She says :

" Personally I'd rather be a hangeron in a house like yours than on my own with...." (p.72).

Mrs.Thwale resembles Lucy Tantamount and Mary Amberley in her thorough understanding of the elementary libidinal and ego-satisfying drives in man and in her single-minded determination to apply that understanding to her chosen victims. Her policy is to enjoy herself,

" making certain all the while that she will never become personally or emotionally involved

in the consequences of her action. Her seduction of Sebastian is motivated by this perverse impulse. What for her is merely " an interesting scientific experiment" (p.214) is for the inexperienced youth an almost surrealistic experience of " cannibals in bedlam " (p.223). Unlike Sebastian she never bothers to calculate what the repercussions of her " experiments " might be in terms of emotional and physical suffering..... She is simply interested in her version of science for its own sake. But, of course, running a laboratory of scientific pleasures of this sort requires a good deal of financing and Veronica does her best to lure the wealthy, American Paul de Vries into marriage." ⁹

The character of Mrs.Daisy Ockham is created for providing a contrast to that of Mrs.Gamble. This step-daughter of Eustace, who after his death, becomes an heiress to a large property, is worried at " all that money and, along with it, all the responsibility for using it as if ought to be used, as God would want it to be used. At the mere thought of the future burden, Mrs. Ockham sighed profoundly" (pp.195-196).

Mrs.Ockham, a " pink hairless pug with a bad complexion " (p.2) plays the role of a sentimental woman in the novel. As her husband and son are prematurely dead, she pours her unsatisfied motherhood on Sebastian who is, for her, an image of her dead Frankie.

Mrs. Ockham is a foil to Mrs.Thwale, and both have a functional value in relation to the development of Sebastian. In the triangle of femininity - Mrs.Gamble, Mrs.Thwale, Mrs.Ockham - it is clear that only Mrs. Ockham strikes a positive note, but in the context of the novel with its focus on Sabastian, Huxley has no creative space left for a fuller development of Mrs. Ockham than what she is now - a mere caricature.

IV

These two novels are, as indicated earlier, didactic in nature. The novel of ideas has become in these novels a tract rather than a multi-dimensional exploration of ideas in terms of life. It has succumbed to the danger of becoming a vehicle of propaganda. The consequence in terms of characters is that they tend to become allegorical figures pointing outside themselves towards the ideas and attitudes that they represent. The women characters have suffered more damage in these novels than in the earlier ones. They are reduced to minor, allegorical, card-board-like figures designed to promote the central pre-determined action - the movement of the hero from the waste land to the realm of mystical vision.

Notes

- 1 Jocelyn Brooke, Aldous Huxley (London : Longmans, Green and Co.,1954), p.26.
- 2 Aldous Huxley, After Many a Summer (London : Chatto and Windus, 1939), p.57. All subsequent references to the text will be indicated by giving the relevant page number at the end of every quotation.
- 3 "Novel of the Week : Mr.Huxley's Dark Vision", The Times Literary Supplement, 14 October 1939, p.591.
- 4 Peter Firshow, Aldous Huxley : Satirist and Novelist (Minneapolis : Jones Press, 1972), pp.159-160.
- 5 Aldous Huxley, Time Must Have a Stop (London : Chatto and Windus, 1945), p.1.
All subsequent references to the text will be indicated by giving the relevant page number at the end of every quotation.
- 6 Philip Thody, Aldous Huxley : A Biographical Introduction (London : Studio Vista, 1973), p.92.
- 7 D.V.Jog, Aldous Huxley : The Novelist (Bombay: The Book Centre Private Ltd.), p.90.
- 8 "Time's Fool", The Times Literary Supplement, 24 March 1945, p.137.
- 9 Peter Firshow, pp.168-169.