CHAPTER V
LITERARY FORMS AND GENRES

Huxley was keenly interested in the subtleties of literary form, taking pleasure in their different intricacies, studying the means by which great authors of the past had resolved the technical problems presented by each. Sometimes he even tried his hand at solving the problems himself — a delightful and salubrious exercise for the mind. The forms of literature that he handled with distinction are the novel, the essay and the short story. His views on some of the forms lie scattered in his writings. We shall see briefly what he has to say about the epic, the novel, the tragedy, the comedy and the essay.

Tragedy vs. Epic:

In an illuminating essay in Music at Night, Huxley discusses how tragedy differs from epic and novel. Epic and novel, he seems to say, deal with the Whole Truth about life, whereas tragedy isolates a single element out of the totality of human experience. Homer — and what is true of Homer is true of most epic poets — is a writer who tells the Whole Truth. As a typical
example, he considers the incident of Scylla's attack on Odysseus's ship. No other poet would have concluded the story of the attack in the way Homer did. Here six men have been taken and devoured before the eyes of their friends. In any other story but the Odyssey, the survivors would have wept, of course, even as Homer made them weep. But would they have cooked their supper? Would they have drunk and eaten to satiety, and, after weeping, or actually while weeping, have dropped off to sleep? No, they most certainly would not have done any of these things. They would simply have lamented their own misfortune and the horrible fate of their companions, and the canto would have ended tragically on their tears. Homer, however, knew that the most cruelly bereaved must eat; he also knew that, even as hunger takes precedence of grief, so fatigue, supervening, drowns it in sleep. In a word, Homer refused to treat the theme tragically. He preferred to tell the whole Truth.

Tragedy vs. Novel:

The Novel is another literary form, Huxley implies, in which it is possible to tell the Whole Truth. Not that every novelist can do it. But there are some—

1. Scylla was a sea-monster.
—like Fielding, Proust\(^1\), D.H.Lawrence, André Gide\(^2\), Kafka\(^3\), Hemingway\(^4\) — who can. Tom Jones, for example, says Huxley, is one of the very few Odyssean books written in Europe; Odyssean, because never tragical; never — even when painful and disastrous things are happening. Fielding, like Homer, admits all the facts, shirks nothing. Indeed, it is precisely because these authors shirk nothing that their books are not tragical. Among the things they do not shirk are the irrelevancies, which, in actual life, always temper situations and characters. The writers of tragedy, however, insist on keeping situations and characters chemically pure. Consider, for example, the case of Sophia Western\(^5\), that most charming, most nearly perfect of young women. Fielding, it is obvious, adored her. But he nevertheless refused to turn her into one of those chemically pure beings who do and suffer in the world of tragedy. That innkeeper who lifted the weary Sophia from

1. Marcel Proust (1871-1922), French author; the founder of the psychological school of writing.
3. Franz Kafka (1883-1924), Austrian novelist.
4. Ernest Miller Hemingway (1899-1961), American novelist. He was awarded the Nobel Prize for his The Old Man and the Sea in 1952.
5. The heroine of Tom Jones.
her horse — what need had he to fall? asks Huxley. In
the tragical context, weight is an irrelevance; heroines
should be above the law of gravitation. But that is not
all. Tumbling flat on his back, he pulled Sophia down on
top of him, pulled her down head first. But head first
is necessarily legs last; poor Sophia, when they picked
her up, was blushing in an agony of embarrassment and
wounded modesty. There is nothing intrinsically improbable
about this incident. But, however true, it is an incident
which could never have happened to a heroine of tragedy.
Fielding shirked nothing; he did not want to be a
tragedian.¹

Thus, the novelist, at least the great novelist,
like the epic writer, shirks nothing. In fact, there are
some who claim a novelist to be superior to all the others,
since he takes the whole of life for his province. In
the introduction to his volume of Collected Essays, Huxley
quotes, with approval, a statement by D.H.Lawrence. "I
am a man and alive", wrote Lawrence, "For this reason I
am a novelist. And being a novelist I consider myself
superior to the saint, the scientist, the philosopher and
the poet, who are all great masters of different bits of

¹ 'Tragedy and the Whole Truth': Music at Night;
man alive, but never get the whole hog. .... Only in the novel are all things given full play." ¹

How to Write a Novel:

In an essay entitled "Sermons in Cats", Huxley discusses the question: How to write a novel? Once, to a certain young man who aspired to become a novelist and came seeking his advice, he said: "My young friend, if you want to be a psychological novelist and write about human beings, the best thing you can do is to keep a pair of cats."

Huxley hopes the young man took his advice. For it was good advice — the fruit of much experience and many meditations. But being a rather foolish young man, he merely laughed at what he must have supposed was only a silly joke: laughed as Huxley himself laughed when, years ago, that charming and talented extraordinary man, Ronald Firbank², told him that he wanted to write a novel about life in Mayfair³ and so would go to the West Indies to look for copy among the Negroes. He laughed

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2. Arthur Annesley Ronald Firbank (1886-1926), English writer. His mannered short novels are highly esteemed by some critics.
3. Mayfair, an aristocratic quarter in London.
at the time; but he sees now that Firbank was quite right. Primitive people, like children and animals, are simply civilized people with the lid off. This lid can be very conveniently studied in Mayfair, or Passy, or Park Avenue. But we know very little of what goes on underneath the lid in these polished and elegant districts by direct observation (unless we happen to be endowed with a very penetrating intuition); and, if we cannot infer what is going on under other lids from what we see, introspectively, by peeping under our own, then the best thing we can do is to take the next boat for the West Indies, or else, less expensively, pass a few mornings in the nursery, or alternatively, as Huxley suggested to his literary young friend, buy a pair of cats. And having bought his cats, nothing remains for the would-be novelist but watch them living from day to day; to mark, learn, and inwardly digest the lessons about human nature which they teach; and finally write his book about Mayfair, Passy, or Park Avenue, whichever the case may be.\(^1\)

A similar view is expressed by Philip Quarles in his notebook in *Point Counter Point*: "Since reading Alverdes and Wheeler I have quite decided that my novelist

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must be an amateur zoologist. Or, better still, a professional zoologist who is writing a novel in his spare time. His approach will be strictly biological. He will illustrate human vices by those of ants, which neglect their young for the sake of the intoxicating liquor exuded by the parasites that invade their nest. His hero and heroine will spend their honeymoon by a lake, where the grebes and ducks illustrate all the aspects of courtship and matrimony. Observing the habitual and almost sacred "pecking order" which prevails among the hens of his poultry yard — hen A pecking hen B, but not being pecked by it, hen B pecking hen C and so forth — the politician will meditate on the Catholic hierarchy and Fascism. The mass of intricately copulating snakes will remind the libertine of his orgies. Nationalism and the middle classes' religious love of property will be illustrated by the male warbler's defence of his chosen territory. And so on.1

The Novel of Ideas:

Another entry in Philip Quarles's Notebook deals with the novel of ideas. In such a novel, says Quarles, the character of each personage must be implied, as far as

1. Point Counter Point; Avon Publications, V-2031; pp.326-27.
possible; in the ideas of which he is the mouthpiece.
Insofar as theories are rationalizations of sentiments,
this
instincts, dispositions of soul, is feasible. The chief
defect of the novel of ideas is that you must write about
people who have ideas to express — which excludes all
but about .01 per cent of the human race. Another great
defect of the novel of ideas is that it is a made-up
affair. Necessarily, for people who can real off neatly
formulated notions are not quite real; they are slightly
monstrous. Living with monsters becomes rather tiresome
in the long run.¹

The observations made by Philip Quarles in his
notebook, says Mr. F.J. Hoffman², serve as a handbook for
the study of the "novel of ideas", which was practised
by Huxley himself. The "novel of ideas" is not one which
incidentally illustrates ideas, but one which uses them
instead of characterization and other qualities of the
traditional novel. The entries of Quarles are valuable
clues for those who desire to study Huxley as artist and
thinker; they also throw much light on an art form
peculiar to the twentieth century.

¹ Point Counter Point; Avon Publications, V-2031; p.307.
² "Aldous Huxley and the Novel of Ideas"; Forms of
Modern Fiction, edited by William Van O'Connor;
At first glance, continues Mr. Hoffman, the notion that ideas might take precedence over characters in a novel seems no less than monstrous; and of this reaction Quarles himself is aware. But Huxley has often demonstrated in his novels the fact that ideas may possess qualities which are comparable with those which animate persons. Ideas, as they are used in Huxley, possess dramatic qualities. Dominating as they often do the full sweep of his novels, they appropriate the fortunes and careers which ordinarily belong to persons. Each character represents a point of view drawn from the prevailing intellectual interests of his creator. On this point of view the character stands, wavers or falls. Thus, implicit in this type of novel is the drama of ideas rather than of persons; or rather, the drama of individualized ideas.

Characterization:

To return to Huxley's views on the novel, the modern method of presenting character in a novel, he says, differs from that employed by the novelists of the eighteenth century. The present-day novelists offer the facts in a so-to-speak raw state, leaving the reader to draw his own conclusions from them. The older psychologists treated the facts to a preliminary process of intellectual digestion; they gave their readers something more than
the mere behaviouristic material on which psychological judgments are based; they gave them conclusions they themselves had already drawn from the facts. If we compare Constant's Adolphe with the Ulysses of James Joyce, the difference will be manifest. The novelist who employs the older method gains in definition and clarity what he loses in realism, in life, in expansive implication and suggestion. There is much to be said for both the methods of presentation; most of all perhaps, for a combination of the two.

The Plot:

In Groms Yellow, Mr. Scogan is highly critical of the plots of the present-day novels. Talking to Denis, the young novelist, he thus describes a typical plot: Little Percy, the hero, was never good at games, but he was always clever. He passes through the usual public school and the usual university and comes to London, where he lives among the artists. He is bowed down with melancholy thought; he carries the whole weight of the

1. Henri Benjamin Constant de Rebecque (1767-1830), French statesman and novelist.
2. James Augustine Aloysius Joyce (1882-1941), Irish novelist.
universe upon his shoulders. He writes a novel of
dazzling brilliance; he dabbles delicately in Amour and
disappears, at the end of the book, into the luminous
Future.

Having thus described the plot, Mr. Scogan goes
on: "Why will you young men continue to write about things
that are so entirely uninteresting as the mentality of
adolescents and artists? ... You can't expect an ordi­
nary adult man, like myself, to be much moved by the
story of his (the undergraduate's) spiritual troubles.
And after all, there are more adults than adolescents. As
for the artist, he is preoccupied with problems that are
so utterly unlike those of the ordinary adult man —
problems of pure aesthetics which don't so much as present
themselves to people like myself — that a description of
his mental processes is as boring to the ordinary reader
as a piece of pure mathematics. A serious book about
artists regarded as artists is unreadable; and a book
about artists regarded as lovers, husbands, dipsomaniacs,
heroes, and the like is really not worth writing again.
Jean-Christophe is the stock artist of literature, just

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1. Jean-Christophe is the hero of a novel of the same
name, by Romain Rolland (1866-1944), a French
writer. For this novel, a study of the life of an
imaginary musician, the author was awarded the Nobol
Prize for Literature in 1915.
as Professor Radium of Comic Cuts is its stock man of science." 1

Drama:

Now, let us see what Huxley has to say about the drama in general, tragedy and comedy in particular. The function of drama, observes Huxley, is to arouse and finally allay the most violent emotions, and its basic theme is conflict — conflict between passionate individuals or conflict between one passionate individual and the categorical imperatives of his society. Violent emotions related to conflict — these are the most absorbing of our more private experiences; and the most enduringly popular works of art are always those which stir up such emotions. Bad exciting art has always been good enough for the majority; the more civilised minority demands stimulants of a subtler, richer and more elegant kind. But from its first invention, crimes of violence and sexual scandal have been the subject-matter of drama. Stripped of their poetry, the plots of all the world's great tragedies are simply items from the front page of the Police Gazette.2

2. Literature and Science; Harper & Row, 1963; p.65

Compare also Huxley's remark on pp.34-40 on King Lear, etc.
Tragedy and the Whole Truth:

We have seen earlier how in the epic and the novel, unlike in the tragedy, there is scope for irrelevancies and absurdities. The irrelevancies that we observed in the Odyssey and Tom Jones simply cannot exist in the world of tragedy. For example, a scene showing the bereaved Macduff eating his supper, growing melancholy, over the whisky, with the thoughts of his murdered wife and children, and then, with lashes still wet, dropping off to sleep, would be true enough to life; but it would not be true to tragic art. The introduction of such a scene would change the whole quality of the play; treated in this Odyssean style, Macbeth would cease to be a tragedy. Similarly, if Desdemona, springing ashore at Cyprus, had tumbled, as the no less exquisite Sophia was to tumble, and revealed the inadequacies of sixteenth-century underclothing, the play would be no longer the Othello we know. Tragedy and the Whole Truth are not compatible; where one is the other cannot be. There are certain things which even the best, even Shakespearean, tragedy cannot absorb into itself. 1

   For a fuller account, see p.148 of the thesis.
While irrelevancies are quite out of place in a tragedy, says Huxley elsewhere, there is absolutely no scope for digression too. The author of a tragedy has little time to digress from the emotion-rousing situations.¹

The writer of a tragedy isolates a single element out of the totality of human experience and uses that exclusively as his material. Tragedy is something that is separated out from the Whole Truth, distilled from it, so to speak, as an essence is distilled from a flower. Tragedy is chemically pure. Hence its power to act quickly and intensely on our feelings.

What Catharsis Means:

It is because of its chemical purity that tragedy so effectively performs its function of catharsis. It refines and corrects and gives a style to our emotional life, and does it so swiftly, with power. Brought into contact with tragedy, the elements of our being fall, for the moment at any rate, into an ordered and beautiful pattern, as the iron filings arrange themselves under the influence of the magnet. From the reading or the hearing of a tragedy we rise with the feeling that we too would be unconquerable if subjected to agonies,
we too should continue to love, might even learn to exult. It is because it does these things to us that tragedy is so valuable.

Tragedy, thus, is an arbitrarily isolated eddy on the surface of a vast river that flows on majestically, irresistibly; it nearly seems unaware of the existence of the entire river. The exultations that follow the reading or hearing of a tragedy are in the nature of temporary inebriations. Our being cannot long hold the pattern imposed by tragedy. Remove the magnet and the filings tend to fall back into confusion. The catharsis of tragedy is violent and apocalyptic. ¹

Speaking of catharsis, Mr. Cardan says, in Those Barren Leaves, that the tragedy of bodily suffering and extinction has no catharsis. Punctually it runs its dull, degrading course, act by act, to the conclusion. It ennobles neither the sufferer nor the contemplator. Only the tragedy of the spirit can liberate and uplift. But in actual life, Mr. Cardan adds, the greatest tragedy of the spirit is that sooner or later it succumbs to the flesh. Sooner or later every soul is

stifled by the sick body; sooner or later there are no more thoughts, but only pain and vomiting and stupor.¹
This is the difference between life and art; that in the latter — in tragedy, for instance, — the spirit is isolated — by a chemical process as it were — from the flesh.

Modern Tragedy:

In relation to the modern play, says Huxley elsewhere², it is sheer nonsense to talk about the Aristotelian catharsis. A Greek tragedy was much more than a play; it was also a cathedral service, it was also one of the ceremonies of the national religion. The performance was an illustration of the scriptures, an exposition of theology. Modern dramas, even the best of them, are essentially secular. People go to them, not in order to be reminded of their philosophy of life, not to establish some kind of communion with their gods, but merely to 'get a kick'.

Tragedy vs. Comedy:

In a passage in The Devils of Loudun, Huxley brings out the distinction between tragedy and comedy.

². Ends and Means; Chatto & Windus, 1948; p.205.
we participate in a tragedy, he says; at a comedy we only look. The tragic author feels himself into his personages; and so, from the other side, does the reader or listener. But in pure comedy there is no identification between creator and literary creature, between spectator and spectacle. Pure comedy cannot be kept up for very long. That is why so many of the greatest comic writers have adopted the impure form, in which there is a constant transition from outwardness to inwardness, and back again. At one moment we merely see and judge and laugh; the next, we are made to sympathize and even to identify ourselves with one who, a few seconds before, was merely an object.¹

Tragedy and Farce:

It is not difficult to turn a tragedy into a farce, says Mr. John Rivers in The Genius and the Goddess. Oedipus, for example, or Lear — you could make a roaring farce out of either of them. It is just a question of describing your characters from the outside, without sympathy and in violent but unpoetical language. In real life farce exists only for spectators, never for actors. What they participate in is either a tragedy or

¹. The Devils of Loudun; Chatto & Windus, 1952; p.324.
a complicated and painful psychological drama. Every man is ridiculous, remarks Mr. Casimir in Antic Hay, if we look at him from outside, without taking into account what is going on in his heart and mind. Like Oedipus and Lear, even Hamlet could be turned into an epigrammatic farce, with an inimitable scene when he takes his adored mother in adultery. One could make the wittiest Guy de Maupassant short story out of the life of Christ. It is only a question of the point of view. Every man is a walking farce and a walking tragedy at the same time. The man who slips on a banana-skin and fractures his skull describes against the sky, as he falls, the most richly comic arabesque.

Tragedy and Romantic Art:

Romantic style is not suited to tragedy, says Mr. Cardan in Those Barren Leaves. Romanticism makes violent gestures; it relies on violent contrasts of light and shade, on stage effects; it is ambitious to present emotion in the raw and palpitating form. That is to say, the romantic style is in essence a comic style. Art which is to move its contemplator must itself be

Passion must never be allowed to dissipate itself in wild splashings and boilings over. It must be shut up, so to speak, and compressed and moulded by the intellect. Concentrated within a calm, untroubled form, its strength will irresistibly move. Styles that protest too much are not fit for serious, tragic use. They are by nature suited to comedy, whose essence is exaggeration. Except in the hands of a few colossal geniuses, romantic art is almost always comic. Tragic writers who tried to be romantic were betrayed into being farcical by the essentially comic nature of the style. Balzac, for example, in a hundred serious passages; George Sand in all her earliest novels; Beddoes, when he tries to make his Death's Jest Book particularly blood-curdling. And what prevents Herman Melville's Moby Dick from being a really great book is precisely the pseudo-Shakespearean idiom

1. This is in direct contradiction to Horace's famous dictum in the Ars Poetica.
2. Honoré de Balzac (1799-1850), French novelist.
3. George Sand was the pen-name of Armandine Lucile Aurore Dudevant (1804-76), French novelist.
4. Thomas Lovell Beddoes (1803-49), English poet.
5. Herman Melville (1819-91), American novelist.
in which what were meant to be the most tragical passages were couched — an idiom to whose essential suitability to comedy the exceptional tragic successes of Shakespeare himself, of Marlowe and a few others have unfortunately blinded all their imitators.

**Romantic Style and Comedy:**

If the romantic style is essentially fitted to comedy, it is also true, conversely, that the greatest comic works have been written in a romantic style. For example, *Pantagruel*¹ and Aristophanes's² *Frogs.* And the finest passages in Milton's reverberating prose are precisely those where he is writing satirically and comically. A comic writer is a very large and copious man with a zest for all that is earthy, who unbuttons himself and lets himself freely go, following wherever his indefatigably romping spirit leads him. The unrestrained, exaggerated, wildly gesticulating manner, which is the romantic manner, exactly fulfils his need.³

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1. *Pantagruel,* a work by François Rabelais (c.1495-1553), French satirist and humorist.
2. Aristophanes (c.444-380 B.C.), the most renowned of the Greek comic dramatists.
If, as Huxley has already pointed out, all literature is born of suffering, dualism, conflict, he would naturally see in similar factors the genesis of tragedy. Tragedy, he says, and social instability always go together. The comments made by the Controller, in *Brave New World*, are significant in this connection. "You can't make tragedies", he says, "without social instability. The world's stable now. People are happy; they get what they want, and they never want what they can't get. They're well off; they're safe; they're never ill; they're not afraid of death; they're blissfully ignorant of passion and old age; they're plagued with no mothers or fathers; they've got no wives, or children, or lovers to feel strongly about." Obviously, in that Utopian world, the atmosphere is not conducive to the writing of tragedy. They had to choose between happiness and high art. They chose happiness and sacrificed high art. Thus, if there is stability, there is no conflict; and if there is no conflict, there is no tragedy.

1. See pp. 51-52 of the Chapter on Literature.
In one of the essays in *Along the Road*, Huxley glances at a problem connected with drama as well as the novel — what he calls the mystery of the theatre. He was intrigued, he says, by a curious phenomenon of which nowhere could he find an explanation. Cultured and better educated people, who, in the privacy of their homes, would read the better class of novels, do not mind spending their time and money on a drivelling play. In their novels they demand a certain minimum of probability, truth to life, credible characterization and decent writing. But to a play which is exactly lacking in these very things they flock in their thousands. They will be moved to tears and enthusiasm by situations which, in a novel, they would find merely ludicrous. This is indeed a strange anomaly. Why does the penny novelette disgust, in book form, those who delight in it when exhibited on the stage?

Bernard Shaw once said that it is easier to write a novel than a play. But on the other hand, says Huxley, it is much easier to write a bad play that will be successful — even with a quite intelligent and

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discriminating audience — than a bad novel that will take in readers of the same class. A dramatist can 'get away with' a play in which there is no characterization subtler than caricature, no beauty of language less coarse than ranting rhetoric, no resemblance to life — only an effective situation. The novelist cannot.

What makes it possible for the dramatist to put so little into his plays and yet so successfully 'get away with', Huxley explains, is the living interpreters. If he knows the trick, the dramatist can pass on to the actor the greater part of his responsibilities. All that he need do, if he is lazy, is to invent effective situations and leave the actors to make the most of them.

Drama and Opinion:

Huxley, who is ordinarily intensely concerned with the psychological and social effects of literature, is not so sure of the effect of the Theatre on opinion. The exponents of Communism and Moral Rearmament, he observes, are agreed on the primary importance of the theatre as an instrument of propaganda. Whether the drama is really as effective in moulding opinion as the moralists and the Russians believe, it is hard indeed to say. Personally Huxley doubts it. People go to the theatre in order to have their emotions excited and, when
the excitement has lasted long enough, cathartically appeased. The excitement and the appeasement make up a single self-contained experience, having little or no relevance to the non-emotional aspects of the spectator's life. As a medium for conveying important information and expounding significant ideas, the drama is not so effective, concludes Huxley, as the essay, the treatise or even the fictional narrative with digressions.¹

The Essay:

Lawrence said: "Only in the novel are all things given full play." What is true of the novel, says Huxley, is only a little less true of the essay. For, like the novel, the essay is a literary device for saying almost everything about almost anything. By tradition, almost by definition, the essay is a short piece, and it is therefore impossible to give all the things full play within the limits of a single essay. But a collection of essays can cover almost as much ground, and can cover it almost as thoroughly as can a long novel.

Essays belong to a literary species whose extreme variability can be studied most effectively within a three-poled frame of reference. There is the pole of the personal and the autobiographical; there is the

¹. 'Spoken Literature': Adonis and the Alphabet; Chatto & Windus, 1956; pp.118-19.
pole of the objective, the factual, the concrete-particular; and there is the pole of the abstract-universal. Most essayists are at home and at their best in the neighbourhood of only one of the essay's three poles, or at the most only in the neighbourhood of two of them. There are the predominantly personal essayists, who write fragments of reflective autobiography and who look at the world through the keyhole of anecdote and description. There are the predominantly objective essayists who do not speak directly of themselves, but turn their attention outward to some literary or scientific or political theme. In a third group we find those essayists who do their work in the world of high abstractions, who never condescend to be personal and who hardly deign to take notice of the particular facts from which their generalizations were originally drawn.

Each kind of essay, Huxley observes, has its special merits and defects. The personal essayists may be as good as Charles Lamb at his best, or as bad as Mr. X at his cutest and most self-consciously whimsical. The objective essay may be as lively, as brassy contentious as a piece by Macaulay; but it may also, with

1. Thomas Babington Macaulay (1800-1859), English statesman, historian and essayist.
fatal ease, degenerate into something merely informative, learned and academic. And how splendid, how truly oracular are the utterances of the great generalizers like Bacon and Emerson! But the medal of solemn and lapidary generalization has its reverse. The constantly abstract, constantly impersonal essayist is apt to give us not oracles, but algebra.

The most richly satisfying essays are those which make the best not of one, not of two, but of all the three worlds in which it is possible for the essay to exist. Freely, effortlessly, thought and feeling move in these consummate works of art, here and there between the essay's three poles — from personal to the universal, from the abstract back to the concrete, from the objective datum to the inner experience.

The perfection of any artistic form is rarely achieved by its first inventor. To this rule Montaigne is the great and marvellous exception. By the time he had written his way into the Third Book, he had reached the limits of his newly discovered art. Free association

1. Michel de Montaigne (1533-1592), French essayist. He is one of the few great writers who have invented a literary kind. The Essay as he gave it had no forerunner in modern literature and no direct ancestor in the literature of classical times. Perhaps the only actual parallel to Montaigne in literature is Lamb.
artistically controlled — this is the paradoxical secret of Montaigne's best essays. One damned thing after another — but in a sequence that in some almost miraculous way develops a central theme and relates it to the rest of human experience. And how beautifully Montaigne combines the generalization with the anecdote, the homily with the autobiographical reminiscence? How skilfully he makes use of the concrete particular, the chosé, to express some universal truth, and to express it more powerfully and penetratingly than it can be expressed by even the most oracular of the dealers in generalities! Here, for example, is what a great oracle, Dr. Johnson, has to say about the human situation and the uses of adversity. "Affliction is inseparable from our present state; it adheres to all the inhabitants of this world, in different proportions indeed, but with an allotment which seems very little regulated by our own conduct. It has been the boast of some swelling moralists that every man's fortune was in his own power, that prudence supplied the place of all other divinities, and that happiness is the unfailling consequence of virtue. But, surely the quiver of Omnipotence is stored with arrows, against which the shield of human virtue, however adamantine it has been boasted, is held up in vain; we
do not always suffer by our crimes, we are not always protected by our innocence. Nothing confers so much ability to resist the temptations that perpetually surround us, as an habitual consideration of the shortness of life, and the uncertainty of those pleasures that solicit our pursuit; and this consideration can be inculcated only by affliction. This is altogether admirable; but there are other and better ways, says Huxley, of approaching the subject. "I have seen in my time hundreds of artisans and labourers, wiser and happier than university presidents," says Montaigne. Again, "Look at poor working people sitting on the ground with drooping heads after their day's toil. They know neither Aristotle nor Cato, neither example nor precept; and yet from them Nature draws effects of constancy and patience purer and more unconquerable than any of those we study so curiously in the school." Add to one touch of nature one touch of irony, and you have a comment on life more profound, in spite of its casualness, its seeming levity, than the most eloquent rumblings of the oracles. "It is not our follies that make me laugh," Montaigne, "it is our sapiences." And why should our sapiences provoke a wise man to laughter? Among other

1. Marcus Porcius Cato (95-46 B.C.), Stoic philosopher.
reasons, because the professional sages tend to express themselves in a language of highest abstraction and widest generality.

For forty years Huxley himself wrote essays of every size and shape and colour. Essays almost as short as Gracian's¹ and, on occasion, longer even than Macaulay's; essays autobiographical; essays about things seen and places visited; essays in criticism of all kinds of works of art, literary, plastic, musical; essays about philosophy and religion, some of them couched in abstract terms, others in the form of an anthology with comments, others again in which general ideas are approached through the concrete facts of history and biography; essays, finally, in which, following Montaigne, he has tried to make the best of all the essay's three worlds, to say everything at once in as near an approach to contrapuntal simultaneity as the nature of literary art will allow of. ²

Dada:

Huxley's dogged modernity tries to see the good in every experiment in literature no less than in science.

¹ Baltasar Gracian y Morales (1601-1658), Spanish Jesuit writer, a supporter of Gongorism, a peculiar artificial style for serious poetry.
² Preface to Collected Essays; Chatto & Windus, 1960; pp. v-ix.
Dadaism, for instance, that short-lived movement inspired by a post-war mood, fails to appeal to him; and yet, Huxley confesses himself strangely moved by its products. The Dadaists advocated total verbal recklessness. Dictionary definitions, fixed rules of syntax and grammar are only for the dead, for fossils, in a word, for academicians. Every word is an idea, as Rimbaud said. When isolated from the other words in relation to which it makes the accepted kind of sense, a word takes on a new magical significance. It becomes more than an idea; it becomes an *idée fixe*, a haunting enigma. It is possible, as Tennyson discovered, to talk oneself out of one's own familiar identity simply by repeating the syllables of one's own name. And something similar happens when one isolates a word, meditates upon it and treats it, not as an element in some familiar kind of sentence, but as an autonomous pattern of sounds and meanings. Out of such word-ideas, the Dadaists claim, will be forged the future

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1. Dadaism was a movement in art and literature, started about 1920, named from a child's first essays in speech ("da-da") and carrying the theory that art should be the direct expression of sensation, without intellectual interference, to its logical conclusion in the inarticulate and meaningless.

universal language of poetry. By using liberated word-ideas in a reckless way, the poet can express, can evoke, can even create potentialities of experience hitherto unrecognized or perhaps non-existent, can discover aspects of the essential mystery of existence.

Needless to say, it was psychologically and even physiologically impossible for the Dadaists to practise consistently what they preached. Do what they might, some kind of sense, some logical coherence kept breaking in. By the mere fact of being biologically committed to survival, of being human beings in a certain place at a certain moment of time, they had to be more consistent, more grammatical and even more rational than, on their own principles, they ought to have been. As a literary movement, Dada failed. But even in its failure it rendered a service to poetry and criticism by carrying to its logical, or rather to its illogical, conclusion the notion of verbal recklessness.¹

The magical potency of Dadaism, Huxley seems to say, is real; he himself feels uncomfortable when confronted by Dadaist literature. Is it because it shakes his faith in human reason? Perhaps this apparently

accidental sequence of words, he remarks, contains the secret of art and life and the universe. It may; who knows? We go on poring over this literature and regard it upside down in the hope of discovering that secret. But somehow, we cannot induce the words to take on any meaning whatsoever.¹

Utopias:

Utopia is not, strictly, a literary form, in the structural sense of that word. However, it does constitute a literary genre, which has, of late, been widely cultivated and popular. Hence our interest in what Huxley, himself the author of a best-selling Utopia, has to say on the genesis and psychological significance of all Utopias.

Utopias, in several cases, are histories written as wish-fulfilment, observes Huxley. Utopists have looked either to the past or to the future for an ideal society. Each generation has its private history, its own peculiar brand of prophecy. What it shall think about past and future is determined by its own immediate problems. It will go to the past for instruction, for sympathy, for justification, for flattery. It will look

¹. 'Water Music': On the Margin; Chatto & Windus, 1948; pp. 43-44.
into the future for compensation for the present — into the past too. For even the past can become a compensatory Utopia, indistinguishable from the earthly paradises of the future. From age to age the past is recreated. A new set of Waverly Novels is founded on a new selection of facts. The Waverly Novels of one age are about the Romans, of another about the Greeks, of a third about the Crusaders, or the Ancient Chinese. Sometimes the classical examples are used as sticks with which to beat the priests and kings, as levers with which to overturn the current morality. Sometimes China was held up as an example of sweet reasonableness to shame the benighted folly of the West. In beating the West with an extreme-oriental stick, contemporary writers like Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson and Bertrand Russell have only revived a most respectable tradition. The primitive and pre-historic Utopias of D.H. Lawrence and Elliot Smith have as good a pedigree.

The last years of the eighteenth century and the first of the nineteenth were a period of violent change. The past changed with the present; Greece and Rome took

1. The Waverley Novels are the historical novels by Sir Walter Scott (1771-1832), Scottish poet and novelist.

2. Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson (1862-1932), English author. He published his *After Two Thousand Years* in 1930.

3. Sir Grafton Elliot Smith (1871-1937), British anthropologist. He was an authority on early man, the evolution of man and brain structure.
on a succession of new meanings. Later on when industrialism and the policy of laissez-faire had had time to produce their most dreadful results, the Middle Ages began to connote something rather different. The wish-fulfilling world to which William Morris and his friends looked back was picturesque, indeed; it was a world of sound economic organization, a pre-mechanical world, peopled by not too highly specialized artist-craftsmen.

Of all the various pasts, the medieval is still one of the most lively. It has inspired several contemporary politico-economic ideals. It is looked back to yearningly by enemies of capitalism, such as Tawney,¹ by enemies of democracy such as Maurras,² by enemies of the overgrown industrial state such as Belloc³ and Chesterton, by all the artistic enemies of mass production, by Catholics, Socialists, Monarchists alike.

The medieval is by no means the only past in which we take a wish-fulfilling interest. Thus, a fabulously spiritual Indian past has been invented by the theosophists to compensate ideally for the far from

2. Charles Maurras (1868-1952), French author and Royalist politician.
spiritual Western present. Archaeological discoveries of the last twenty years have opened up a very glorious receding vista of new Utopias. Almost no weapons have been found at Harappa. For that alone our war-wounded world must love and cherish it.

And finally, there are the savages — not even noble ones now; we almost prefer them ignoble. Physically our contemporaries, but mentally belonging to a culture much more ancient, much less advanced, than that of Ur or Harappa, the few remaining primitive peoples of the earth have achieved a prodigious popularity among those who have wishes to fulfil. As actual primitives disappear under the influence of drink and syphilis on the one hand and of education on the other, this admiration for them will tend to increase. With every advance of industrial civilization the savage past will be more and more appreciated and the cult of D.H. Lawrence's "Dark God" may be expected to spread through an ever-widening circle of worshippers.

1. Harappa in the Punjab and Nohenjo-daro in Sind were the centres of a pre-historic culture, known as the Indus Valley Culture.

2. Ur was an ancient city in Mesopotamia, near the confluence of the rivers Tigris and Euphrates. It was the Biblical 'Ur of the Chaldees', birthplace of Abraham. It was excavated since 1919 and temples, streets with domestic dwellings, tombs etc. were found.

The kind of Utopia Huxley himself affects most is indicated in the following remarks in an essay, *Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow*. Until very recent times, observes Huxley, the creators of Utopias have been abysmally uninventive in the fields of pure and applied science. Most of the Utopias, written by artists, satirists, political reformers and science fictioneers, are the products of phantasy and idealistic zeal. Less picturesque, however, but more enlightening than these are the forecasts made by sober and well-informed men of science during recent years. ¹

¹ 'Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow'; *Collected Essays*; Chatto & Windus, 1960; p.292.