CHAPTER - VI
It is not difficult to guess why Huxley is impressed by Chaucer. Chaucer’s attitude of ‘acceptance’, Chaucer’s respect for everything that follows the ‘law of its kind’ are qualities which Huxley himself shares, or thinks he shares, with the Father of English Poetry. Ever since Chaucer lived and wrote, writes Huxley, the English language has changed a good deal, and it constitutes a major obstacle on the path of those who would read him for pleasure. But only the body of Chaucer’s poetry has grown old; its spirit is still young and immortal. To know that spirit — and not to know it is to ignore something that is of unique importance in the history of English literature — it is necessary to make the effort to get familiar with his antique language and versification.

Dryden on Chaucer:

Chaucer’s art is, by its very largeness and objectivity, extremely difficult to subject to critical analysis. Confronted by it, Dryden could only exclaim, “Here is God’s plenty!” All that the critic can hope to do, says Huxley, is to expand and to illustrate Dryden’s exemplary brevity.
The phrase is a peculiarly happy one. It calls up a vision of the prodigal earth with its teeming life. And it is in the heart of this living and material world of Nature that Chaucer lives. He is the poet of the earth, supremely content to walk. Many English poets have loved the earth for the sake of something that lies behind it. But there have been few great poets who have been in love with the earth for its own sake. Supreme over everything in this world Chaucer sees the natural order, the "law of kind", as he calls it. The teachings of most of the great prophets and poets are simply protests against this law of kind. Chaucer does not protest, he accepts. It is precisely this acceptance that makes him unique among English poets. He does not go to Nature as the symbol of some further spiritual reality, as Wordsworth does; he likes the things in Nature for what they are — not the less delicious because they are of the earth earthy. In the same way, he takes human beings as he finds them, on the whole wonderfully decent. He has none of that strong ethical bias which is usually to be found in the English mind. He is not horrified by the behaviour of his fellow-beings, and he has no desire to reform them; he stands looking on at them, a happy spectator. This serenity of detachment, this placid acceptance of things and people as they are is emphasized
if we compare Chaucer with his contemporary, Langland. 1

**Chaucer and Dante:**

In this matter of detachment, Huxley believes, Chaucer presents a contrast not only to Langland, but even to Dante who lived a century earlier. This contrast between Chaucer and Dante is well brought out in remarks of Eustace Sarnack in *Time Must Have a Stop*: "Now, suppose", says Eustace to his nephew, Sebastian, "you were given the choice — The Divine Comedy or The Canterbury Tales. Which would you rather have written? I would choose *The Canterbury Tales*, without hesitation. And as a man — how infinitely one would prefer to be Chaucer! Living through the forty disastrous years after the Black Death, with only one reference to the troubles in the whole of his writings — and that too a comic reference! Being an administrator and a diplomat, and not regarding the fact as having sufficient importance to require even a single mention! Whereas Dante has to rush into party politics; and, when he backs the wrong horse, he spends the rest of his life in rage and self-pity. Revenging himself on his political opponents by putting them into hell, and rewarding his friends by promoting them to

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purgatory and paradise. And what could be sillier and more squalid? It is this supreme detachment of the pure artist, Huxley implies, that we the complete absence of satire in Chaucer.

Chaucer and Langland:

Clerical corruption and lawlessness were rife in England in the later years of the fourteenth century. Langland, the zealous reformer, does not spare denunciation. Indignation is the inspiration of *Piers Plowman*, the righteous indignation of the prophet. But to read Chaucer one would imagine that there was nothing in fourteenth-century England to be indignant about. It is true that most of the Canterbury pilgrims are rogues and scoundrels; but then, they are such "merry harlots" too. It is true that the Monk prefers hunting to praying, that the Friar has penitently arranged the marriages of many girls at his own cost, and the Summoner is a villain of the first magnitude; but Chaucer can only regard these things as primarily humorous. The fact of people not practising what they preach is an unerring source of amusement to him. Where Langland cries aloud in anger, threatening the world with hell-fire, Chaucer looks on and smiles.

Peasants may revolt, priests break their vows, lawyers lie and cheat, and the world in general indulge its sensual appetites; why try and prevent them, why protest? After all, they are all following the law of kind. It is characteristic of Chaucer's conception of the world, that the highest praise he can bestow on anything is to assert of it that it possesses in the highest degree the qualities of its own particular kind. Thus, of Cressida he says that

"all her limbs so well answering
Weren to womanhood, that creature
Has never losse mannish in seeming."

The horse of brass in the Squire's Tale is

"So well proportioned to be strong,
Right as it were a steed of Lombardye,
There to so horsely and so quick of eye."

Everything that is perfect of its kind is admirable, even though the kind may not be an exalted one. It is a delight, for example, to behold the Pardonor preaching to the people. In its own kind his charlatanism is perfect and deserves admiration.

Chaucer's Love of Nature:

No wonder Chaucer looks out on the world with a delight that never grows old or weary. The sights and
sounds of daily life fill him with a pleasure which he can only express by calling it a "joy" or a "heaven". It is a joy to see Cressida and her maidens playing together; a girl's voice is heavenly to hear. One could go on indefinitely citing examples to testify to Chaucer's exquisite sensibility to sensuous beauty and his immediate response to it.

It is interesting to note how frequently Chaucer speaks of animals. His Nonne Freestes Tale puts him among the great fabulists of the world, and there is also a lot of fabular matter in the Parlement of Foules. His references to the beasts are not confined to his animal stories alone. He relies for much of his psychology and for much of his most vivid description on the comparison of man with the beasts. Troilus, stubbornly refusing to love as the law of kind enjoins him, is compared to a corn-fed horse who has to be taught good behaviour and sound philosophy under the whip. Or, again, women with too pronounced a taste for fine apparel are likened to the cat. How often in that exquisite description of Alisoun, the Carpenter's wife, does Chaucer produce his clearest and sharpest effects by a reference to some bird or beast!

"Fair was this younge wife, and therewithal
As any weasel her body gent and small..."
But of her song it was as loud and yarn
As is the swallow chittering on a barn.
Thereto she couldo skip and make a game
As any kid or calf following his dame.
Her mouth was sweet as bragot is or meath,
Or hoard of apples, laid in hay or heath.
Wincing she was, as is a jolly colt,
Long as a mast and upright as a bolt."

Again and again in Chaucer's poems do we find such
similes and the result is always a picture of extraordinary
precision and liveliness. Here, for example, are a few:

"Gaylard he was as goldfinch in the shaw;"
or,
"Such glaring eyen had he as an hare";
or,
"As piled (bald) as an ape was his skull."
The self-indulgent friars are

"Like Jovinian,
Fat as a whale, and walken as a swan."
The Pardoner describes his own preaching in these words:

"Then pain I me to stretch forth my neck
And east and west upon the people I beck,
As doth a dove, sitting on a barn."
Sometimes the similes are borrowed from the world of plants. Here, for example, is a couplet in which Chaucer compares a girl to a flowering pear-tree:

"She was well more blissful on to see
Than is the new parjonette tree."

Chaucer is as much at home among the stars as he is among the birds and beasts and flowers of earth. Those whose education has been imperfect will find some difficulty in following him as he moves with easy assurance through the heavens. Still it is possible without knowing any mathematics to appreciate Chaucer's descriptions of the great pageant of the sun and stars.

**Chaucer's Scepticism:**

Besides Chaucer's whole-hearted acceptance of Nature and his power to grasp the filaments connecting one part of Nature with all others, what impresses Huxley in the great poet is his 'scientific scepticism.' Chaucer's scepticism in respect of astrology he does not find surprising. Highly as Chaucer respects authority, he prefers the evidence of experience, and where that evidence is lacking he is content to profess a quiet agnosticism. At times he doubts even the fundamental beliefs of the Church:
"A thousand sythes have I herd men telle
That there is joy in heaven and peyne in hell;
And I accord well that it be so.
But natheless, this wot I well also
That there is none that dwelleth in this countreec
That either hath in helle or heaven y-be."

Of the fate of the spirit after death he speaks in much the same style. He has no patience with superstitions. Belief in dreams, in auguries, fear of the screeching owls, he says, are all unbefitting to a self-respecting man.

Chaucer's Realism:

Chaucer's 'scientific' temper naturally made for detached observation not only of Nature, but of man. He had seen his joys and sorrows, follies and foibles. Marriage (which, among other things, is discussed at such length in The Canterbury Tales) can bring great happiness or sorrow according as it is a success or failure. In the story of January and May, in the Merchant's Tale, wherein an old man has married a young wife, Chaucer gives us a graphic and, at the same time, fearful picture of marriage as it should not be. Chaucer has a remarkable

eye for realistic detail. In the field of realism, says Huxley, Chaucer was doing things before 1400 which no other narrative artist did for nearly five centuries. In this tale, for example, when Kay receives a love letter, she hurries off, in order to read it, to the w.c. for privacy. But what other author before Flaubert would have stated this obvious fact? Huxley says he can think of no one except Chaucer.1

**Chaucer and Anatole France**

An excellent characterization of Chaucer emerges from a comparison Huxley establishes between him and Anatole France. Both men possess a profound love of this world for its own sake, coupled with a profound and gentle scepticism about all that lies beyond it. To both of them the lavish beauty of Nature is a never-failing source of happiness. Neither of them are ascetics; in pain and privation they see nothing but evil. Both of them are apostles of sweetness and light, of humanity and reasonableness. Pity and unbounded tolerance of human weakness characterize them both. Deep knowledge of the evils and horrors of this unintelligible world makes them all the more attached to its kindly beauty. But in

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at least one important respect Chaucer shows himself to be the greater spirit. He possesses, what Anatole France does not, an imaginative as well as an intellectual comprehension of things. Anatole France does not understand characters in the sense that, say, Tolstoy understands them; he cannot, by the power of imagination, get inside them; his characters are portrayed in the flat and not in three dimensions. But Chaucer has the power of getting into someone else's character; his slightest character sketches are always solid and three-dimensional. The Prologue to the *Canterbury Tales* furnishes the most obvious example of his three-dimensional drawing.

For full-length portraits of character we must turn to *Troilus and Criseyde*. When one sees with what certainty and precision Chaucer describes every movement of Crassida's spirit from the first moment she hears of Troilus' love for her to the moment when she is unfaithful to him, one can only wonder why the novel of character should have been so slow to make its appearance. The character studies in *Troilus and Criseyde* are carefully and accurately worked out. They are all alive and completely seen and understood. But they move, as it were, behind a veil — the veil of that poetic convention which had, in the earliest poems, almost completely shrouded Chaucer's genius.
Chaucer’s Cressida vs. Shakespeare’s:

Huxley has worked out a highly interesting parallel between Chaucer’s Cressida and Shakespeare’s. Shakespeare’s version of the story, planned on much coarser lines than Chaucer’s, leads obviously and inevitably to the fore-ordained conclusion; his Cressida is a minx who lives up to her character. But Chaucer’s Cressida is not a minx. From the moment he first sets eyes upon her, Chaucer, like his own unhappy Troilus, falls head over ears in love. To him Cressida is the ideal of gracious and courtly womanhood. But the old story tells us that Cressida jilted her Troilus for that gross prize-fighter of a man, Diomed. The woman whom Chaucer has made his ideal proves to be no better than she should be; there is a flaw in the crystal. Chaucer is infinitely reluctant to admit the fact. But the old story is specific in its statement; indeed, its whole point consists in Cressida’s infidelity. Called upon to explain his heroine’s fall, Chaucer is completely at a loss. He makes a few half-hearted attempts to solve the problem and then gives it up, falling back on authority. The old clerks say it was so, therefore it must be so, and that’s that. The fact is that Chaucer pitched his version of the story in a different key from that which is found in ‘olde bokes’, with the result that the note
on which he is compelled by his respect for authority to close is completely out of harmony with the rest of that which music. It is this accounts for the chief, and indeed the only, defect of the poem — its hurried and boggled conclusion.¹

_Troilus and Criseyde_ may be said to be the first novel of character in English. The portraits that we come across here and later in the _Canterbury Tales_, his masterpiece, show Chaucer's great powers of characterization. In fact, Chaucer was the first great psychologist, endowed with a deep insight into the workings of the human mind. In the past psychology was generally treated as a branch of ethics or theology. Even Boccaccio — born story-teller and passionate humanist though he was — could not pay more than the most perfunctory attention to psychology. It required a greater genius and a profounder scepticism than Boccaccio's to invent a psychology independent of theology and ethics.²

The only note of dissent that we would sound with Huxley in this warm appreciation of Chaucer is in regard to his implication of the total absence of satire in the poet. To read Chaucer, he says, one

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would imagine that there was nothing in the fourteenth century to be indignant about. But we have to admit that vice looms large in the Canterbury Tales. Though undiluted satire is rare with Chaucer, there is satire of a kind in many places. "Usually", as Emile Legouis says, "Chaucer's satire resembles that of the great comic writers. It is simply an insight into the hidden feelings and unconscious motives of the human machine. Like Moliere, he sees the selfish causes of a man's actions and views them with an equanimity, a serenity of which Moliere was not always capable. But if we wish to discover a Chaucer anxious to teach his contemporaries a lesson, we must not go to his humorous characters. .... It is when he is trying to paint the beautiful side of things, when he is idealizing, that we must watch him. The virtues of his Knight, of his Clerk, of his Parson are in fact so many hidden sermons ... In these praises given to one man (i.e. the Parson) are contained reproaches for hundreds of others." 1

In his *Principles of Literary Criticism*, I.A. Richards affirms that good tragedy is proof against irony and irrelevance — that it can absorb anything into itself and still remain tragedy. Indeed, he seems to make of this capacity to absorb the untragical and the anti-tragical a touchstone of tragic merit. Thus tried, only the best of Shakespeare can stand the test. Huxley does not agree with Richards. The tragedies of Shakespeare are veined, it is true, with irony and an often terrifying cynicism; but the cynicism, says Huxley, is always heroic idealism turned inside out, the irony is a kind of photographic negative of heroic romance. Thus, Shakespeare's ironies and cynicisms serve only to deepen his tragic world, not to widen it. A tragedian generally isolates a single element out of the totality of human experience and uses that exclusively as his material. Therefore, there is no scope for any kind of irrelevancy in a tragedy, even in the best Shakespearean tragedy.  

**The Magic of Shakespeare's Poetry**: 

Commenting on Shakespeare in *Those Barren Leaves*, Francis Chelifer (whose view in this matter we may reference as follows:  

many critical brains have been deceived by Shakespeare — by the quickness of his tongue. They credit him with philosophy, a moral purpose and the most penetrating psychology, whereas most of his thoughts are incredibly confused and commonplace, sometimes positively false and stupid. Shakespeare's only purpose was to entertain. He has created only three characters. One, Cleopatra, is an excellent copy from the-life, like a character out of a good realistic novel, say one of Tolstoy's. The other two — Macbeth and Falstaff — are fabulous imaginary figures, consistent with themselves, but not real in the sense that Cleopatra is real. Macbeth and Falstaff are perfectly genuine and complete mythological characters, like Jupiter or Gargantua, Medea or Mr. Winkle. They are the only two well-invented mythological monsters in the whole of Shakespeare's collection; just as Cleopatra is the only well-copied reality. His boundless capacity for abracadabra has deceived innumerable people that all the other characters are as good.¹

Helmholtz (of Brave New World) is another person who pays a tribute to the magic of Shakespeare's poetry. He is fascinated, as the Savage reads out to him a scene

the orchard-scene — from Romeo and Juliet. But as he is brought up in the Brave New World, where one could have as many girls as one pleased, it seems rather ridiculous to him to get into such a state of excitement about having a girl. And yet, he admits that the poetry, taken detail by detail, is a superb piece of emotional engineering. "That old fellow*, he observes, "makes our best propaganda technicians look absolutely silly."

In Literature and Science, Huxley makes some acute observations on sheer poetic truth in Shakespeare. For readers of a later age, he goes so far as saying, the scientific and theological imprecisions of Shakespeare are preferable to the more exact expressions of Dante or Donne.

"Sit, Jessica. Look how the floor of heaven 
Is thick inlaid with patens of bright gold, 
There's not the smallest orb which thou behold'st 
But in his motion like an angel sings, 
Still quiring to the young-eyed cherubims; 
Such harmony is in immortal souls, 
But whilst this muddy vesture of decay 
Both grossly close it in, we cannot hear it." ²

1. Brave New World; Chatto & Windus, 1934; pp.216-17
2. Merchant of Venice; Act V, scene 1, lines 58-65.
The Ptolemaic system, the Pythagorean music of the spheres, Aristotle's De Caelo, Jewish and Christian angelology — the whole apparatus of classical and medieval science, philosophy and theology is here taken for granted. But fortunately Shakespeare refrains from going into details. The imagery is precise on the poetical, not on the scientific level. If he were to be too precise, his imagery would have been totally unintelligible, as Donne's or Dante's is, to posterity.

Matchless as his poetry is, Shakespeare wrote his plays to be acted, not to be read, observes Huxley. The reading of Shakespeare forms a part of the curriculum of the English schools. Speaking and acting dissipate shyness and give control of the voice and gestures. But read in the ordinary way by a class of children, out of a horrid little school edition with the sort of notes that one can be examined on, a play by Shakespeare seems meaningless and dull. Naturally; because Shakespeare intended his plays to be acted or read dramatically.

Shakespeare's Realism:

There are artists who idealise and romanticise life. In their works, all the girls are young and their

figures perfect; there is no hiccupping or bad breath, no fatigue, no boredom, no sudden recollections of unpaid bills or business letters unanswered, to interrupt the raptures. Shakespeare, though he often idealized characters and situations, could be a downright realist, as is shown by the following lines from a sonnet. In the beginning he had taken the poets too literally and seriously; now he was reacting, with a vengeance:

"My mistress's eyes are nothing like the sun; Coral is far more red than her lip's red; If snow be white, why then her breasts are dun; If hairs be wires, black wires grow on her head. I have seen roses damask'd, red and white, But no such roses see I in her cheeks; And in some perfumes is there more delight Than in the breath that from my mistress reeks."^1

Shakespeare's Heroes and Heroines:

All the heroes and heroines of Shakespeare believe in the right true end of love. They are not Platonists who generally do not have anything to do with physical passion. There was a time when Huxley believed Shakespeare to be a Platonist. In *Brave New World*, he

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introduced a character who, alone in that happier world, had read Shakespeare. He wanted this character, whom he called the Savage, to be a Platonic lover. But later on, reading through the plays, Huxley realised to his dismay that Platonic love is not a subject with which Shakespeare ever deals. Even the young romantic lovers, like Romeo and Troilus, make no attempt to overlick their love, which duly takes the old and thoroughly familiar shape. ¹

Shakespeare's heroines are both virtuous and Rabelaisian, says Huxley. Elinor, in *Point Counter Point*, we are told, had grown up in a state of well-informed and superficially cynical innocence, like one of those Shakespearean heroines, whose scientific and Rabelaisian speech accompanies actions of the most delicately virtuous refinement. ²

But Venus, the heroine goddess of Shakespeare's earliest poem, is a type by herself. Prudes and maiden aunts would swoon away if they were to hear her speak. All that she says and does, however, is quite in keeping with the erotic nature of the poem. We have come a long way, says Huxley, in this rococo Venus and her reluctant boy, from the Dea Syria and the Corn Spirit, from the

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drama of death and resurrection. "Graze on my lips, stray lower..." The cosmic has become the comic; an enormous mystery has been converted into a charming piece of impropriety. Shakespeare's way of dealing with the fertility religions is humaner. Both as literature and as morals, Venus and Adonis is better than Malleus Maleficarum. But even so, Shakespeare's is not the final answer.

Shakespeare's Philosophy:

In the notebook of Sebastian Barnack, the hero of Time Must Have a Stop, there is a commentary on those lines in Hotspur's final speech. If you say absolutely everything, says Sebastian, it all tends to cancel out into nothing. Which is why no explicit philosophy can be dug out of Shakespeare. But as a metaphysics by implication, as a system of beauty-truths, constituted by the poetical relationships of scenes and lines, and inhering in the blank spaces between even such words as "told by an idiot, signifying nothing", the plays are the equivalent of a great theological Summa. And, of course, if you choose to ignore the negatives that cancel them out, what extraordinary isolated utterances of a perfectly explicit wisdom! Those two and a half lines in which the

dying Hotspur casually summarises an epistemology, an ethic and a metaphysic, may be said to contain Shakespeare's philosophy of life:

"But thought's the slave of life and life's
time's fool,
And time, that takes survey of all the world,
Must have a stop."

Of the three clauses, the twentieth century has paid attention only to the first. But Hotspur's summary has a final clause: time must have a stop. It is only by taking the fact of eternity into account that we can deliver thought from its slavery to life. And it is only by deliberately paying our attention and our primary allegiance to eternity that we can prevent time from turning our lives into a pointless or diabolic foolery. Shakespeare seems to say: Seek timeless reality, and all the rest will be added.¹

Seekers of Timeless Reality have always been non-attached. Curiously enough, Shakespeare gives us no picture of a non-attached human being. Indeed, good pictures of non-attached men and women are singularly rare in the world's literature.² Prospero would have

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¹. Time Must Have a Stop; Harper & Bros., 1944; pp. 295-8.
². Ends and Means; Chatto & Windus, 1946; p. 207.
been such a person. The Tempest is a work charged with something of the unearthly serenity of Beethoven's Benedictus. But it concludes, says Huxley, in the most disappointing anti-climax, with Prospero giving up his magic for the sake of becoming once again a duke. 1

Shakespeare's Psychology:

In Eyeless in Gaza, a comparison is made between the psychology of Ben Jonson and that of Shakespeare. The views are expressed by Anthony Beavis. Pragmatically, Jonson's psychology was 'truer' than Shakespeare's. It took Shakespeare to see what a lot there was outside the boundaries of the Humour, behind the conventional mask. But Shakespeare was in a minority of one. Humours 'worked'; the complex partially atomised personalities of Shakespeare did not.

Take Hamlet, for example. Hamlet inhabited a world whose best psychologist was Polonius. If he had known as little as Polonius, he would have been happy. Polonius and others assumed as axiomatic that man was only a penny whistle with only half a dozen stops. Hamlet knew that, potentially at least, he was a whole symphony orchestra.

Mad Ophelia lets the cat out of the bag. "We know what we are, but know not what we may be." Polonius

1. "Variations on Goya" — Collected Essays; Chatto & Windus, 1960; p.158.
knows very clearly what he and other people are within the ruling conventions. Hamlet knows this, but also what they may be — outside the local system of masks and humours. Thus, Shakespeare was the only man of his age to know what people may be as well as what they conventionally are. That must have given him some rather disquieting moments.

Polonius is much more obviously a person than the prince. Hamlet did not have a personality — he knew altogether too much to have one. He was conscious of his total experience, and accepted no guiding principle which would make him choose one pattern to represent his personality rather than another. Hence that perplexity at Elsinore and among the Shakespearean critics ever since.

Ben Jonson

Ben Jonson's Greatness:

What is it that makes us, almost as a matter of course, number Ben Jonson among the great? It is a difficult question to answer, says Huxley. For, when we

come to consider the matter, we find that we are unable
to give any very glowing account of Ben or his greatness.
And yet, we still go on admiring him, because, in spite
of everything, we are conscious, obscurely but certainly,
that he was a great man.

Jonson had little influence on his successors;
his comedy of humours died almost without an issue.
Jonson was great neither as a founder of a school nor as
an inspirer of others. His greatness is a greatness of
character. No sirens of romance could seduce him. He
was the artist with principles protesting against the
anarchic absence of principle among the geniuses and
charlatans, the poets and ranters of his age.

In his Discoveries, Jonson writes about the true
function and nature of an artist. The true artist, says
Ben, will not run away from nature as though he were
afraid of her, or depart from life and the likeness of
truth. He will speak in such a manner as will be under­
stood by his readers. Though his language differs from
the vulgar somewhat, "it shall not fly from all humanity,
with the Tamerlanes and Tamer-chams of the late age,
which had nothing in them but the scenical strutting and
furious vociferation to warrant them to the ignorant
gapers." Jonson's theory was no idle speculation, but a
creed, a principle, a categorical imperative, conditioning and informing his whole work.

The beginning of the seventeenth century was a period of growth and decay together, of fermentation, with that extravagance of energy which characterized them in all things, the Elizabethans had exaggerated the traditions of their literature into insincerity. But in the midst of this unstable luxuriance voices of protest were to be heard, reactions against the main romantic current were discernible. Each in his own way and in his own sphere, Donne and Ben Jonson protested against the exaggerations of the age.

Jonson's Characters:

Like Donne, Jonson was a realist. He had no use for claptrap, or rant, or romanticism. His aim was to give his audiences real facts flavoured with sound morality. He, however, failed to be a great realist, partly because he lacked the imaginative insight to perceive more than the most obvious and superficial reality, and partly because he was so much pre-occupied with the sound morality that he was prepared to sacrifice truth to satire; so that in place of characters he gives us humours, not minds, but personified moral qualities. Jonson devoted the whole of his immense energy to portraying and reforming the ugly world of fact. But
his reforming satiric intentions interfered with his realistic intentions, and instead of creating in his art the actual world of men, he invented the wholly intellectual and therefore wholly unreal universe of Humours.

Jonson's reduction of human beings to a series of rather unpleasant Humours is, however, sound and medicinal. 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. That is why Huxley elsewhere says that Jonson's psychology was 'truer' than Shakespeare's, pragmatically. At all times a caricature is disquieting; and it is very good for most of us to be uncomfortable now and then.¹

Ben Jonson's dramatic typology was based upon the most advanced scientific theories of his age. They were crude theories and for this reason his characters seem less real, less fully human, than do those of his less scientific contemporary, the creator of Falstaff and Cleopatra.²

An Enemy of Romanticism:

Ben hated romanticism, for whatever may have been

² Literature and Science; Harper & Row, 1963; p.84.
his bodily habits, however infinite his capacity for drinking sack, he belonged intellectually to the party of sobriety. The Romantics accuse the sober Ben of being "barren, dull, lean, a poor writer". Ben retorts that they "have nothing in them but the scenical strutting and furious vociferation to warrant them to the ignorant gapers." Ben's poetical achievement, such as it is, is the achievement of one who relied on no mysterious inspiration, but on those solid qualities of sense, perseverance and sound judgment which any decent citizen may be expected to possess.

Ben also possessed, hidden somewhere in the obscure recesses of his mind, other rarer spiritual qualities, as is proved by his additions to *The Spanish Tragedy* and his last fragment of a masterpiece, *The Sad Shepherd*. But these qualities, as Professor Gregory Smith points out, he seems to have deliberately suppressed; locked them away, at the bidding of his impious theory. He might have been a great romantic, one of the sublime inebriates; he chose rather to be classical and sober. Working only with the logical intellect and rejecting as dangerous the aid of imagination, he produced work that is in its own way excellent — well-wrought, strong, and heavy with learning. But the quality which characterises
the best Elizabethan and indeed the best English poetry of all periods, the power of moving in two worlds at once — the intellectual and the spiritual — it lacks.

With the romantic emotions of his predecessors and contemporaries Jonson abandoned much of the characteristically Elizabethan form of their poetry. That extraordinary melodiousness which distinguishes the Elizabethan lyric is not to be found in any of Ben's writing. One can understand Ben's critical contempt for those purely formal devices for producing musical richness in which the Elizabethans delighted. Jonson reacted against the facility and floridity of the Elizabethan technique. His classical training inclined him towards clarity, solidity of sense, and economy of form. He stands, as a lyricist, half-way between the Elizabethans and the Cavalier songwriters; he has broken away from the old tradition, but he has not yet made himself entirely at home in the new.

Jonson's Humour:

There is a curious kind of humour in Jonson's plays. The humour is very different from what we understand by the term today. One has only to read Volpone — or, better still to see it acted — to realise that Ben's conception of a joke differed materially from ours. There is a cruelty, a heartlessness about much of the
older humour which is sometimes shocking, sometimes astringent and stimulating. There is not a pathetic line in Volpone; all the characters are profoundly unpleasant, and the fun is almost as grim as fun can be. Its heartlessness is not the brilliant, cynical heartlessness of the later Restoration comedy, but something ponderous and vast. There is no alleviation, no purging by pity and terror. It requires a very hearty sense of humour to digest it.

The hardness and brutality that characterize almost all the comedies of Ben Jonson are 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. Shakespeare's comedy is not heartless, because the characters are human and sensitive. Too much heartlessness is intolerable, but a little of it now and then is bracing, a tonic for relaxed sensibilities. A little ruthless laughter clears the air as nothing else can do.¹

In the comedies other than Volpone, the fun is not so grim. In The Devil is an Ass, Jonson has a vivid description of seventeenth-century mind, divided between credulity and scepticism, between a reliance on the

¹ 'Ben Jonson': On the Margin; Chatto & Windus, 1948; pp.192-201.
supernatural (above all in its less creditable aspects) and a bumptious confidence in the new-found powers of applied science. In the play, Fitzdottrel is introduced as a dabbler in the magic arts. But to this belief in magic is conjoined a no less powerful belief in the quasi-rational and pseudo-scientific schemes of those company promoters who were called 'projectors'. However farcically the figure of fun, Fitzdottrel is none the less a truly Representative Man. He stands for a whole epoch, whose intellectual life was straddled insecurely between two worlds.\(^1\)

**The Masque:**

"Carpentry", said Jonson once sarcastically, "is the very soul of the masque". His contempt was motivated by resentment. The outraged laureate had evidently failed to grasp the fact that masque is a visionary art, and that visionary experience is beyond words (at any rate beyond all but the most Shakespearean words) and is to be evoked by direct, unmeditated perceptions of things. The soul of masque could never, in the very nature of things, be a Jonsonian libretto; it had to be carpentry.\(^2\)

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Swift's Hatred of the Body:

In assessing the personality of Jonathan Swift, Huxley seems to lay his finger unerringly on the causes, conscious and unconscious, of his misanthropy. Swift, he says, hated the word as well as the thing 'bowels' — hated them to the verge of insanity. It was unbearable to him that men should go through life with such things. That human beings should have to get rid of the waste products of metabolism and digestion was for Swift a source of excruciating suffering. And if the Yahoos were all his personal enemies, that was chiefly because of purely physical functions; their moral shortcomings were of a secondary importance. Swift, Huxley observes, hated all things pertaining to human physiology with such a passionate abhorrence that he felt a perverse compulsion to bathe continually in the squelchy imagination of them.

Swift's poems about women are more ferocious even than his prose about the Yahoos. For proof, it is enough to read (with a bottle of smelling-salts handy, if you happen to be delicately stomached) The Lady's Dressing Room, Cassimma and Peter, and A Beautiful Young Nymph going to Bed.1

1. 'Swift': Do What You Will; Chatto & Windus, 1949; p. 93.
Not only was Swift obsessed with woman's body, but, like a Father of the Church, he contemplated the foul corruption that lurked within. Huxley reminds us of 'that formidable' Odo of Cluny who bids us see beneath the skin. But men's eyes are not, as Odo wished they were, "like those of the lynxes of Boeotia"; they cannot see into the palpitating sewage within. That is why every muck-bag ends by getting herself embraced.

There are two types of people, Huxley explains elsewhere, who are fascinated by what horrifies and disgusts them — those who are insensitive, and those who are more than ordinarily sensitive. The insensitive can be excited only by a relatively enormous stimulus, and that is why they love horror and disgust. The second type of people — the more sensitive — also pursue what is horrible and disgusting, but for another reason. They seek out what pains and nauseates them for the sake of the extraordinary pleasure they derive from the overcoming of their repulsion. Swift, says Huxley, belonged to the second category of horror-lovers. His 'hatred of bowels' was the rationalization of an intense disgust. Why, then, did he pore so lingeringly on what revolted

2. 'Hyperion to a Satyr': Adonis and the Alphabet; Chatto & Windus, 1956; p.150.
him? It was perhaps for the pleasure of asserting his will. But his real reward was the pain he suffered. He felt a compulsion to remind himself of his hatred of bowels, just as a man with a wound or an aching tooth feels a compulsion to touch the source of his pain — to make sure that it is still there and still agonizing. For Swift the pain was pleasure.

Swift and Shelley:

The intensity, the almost insane violence of that 'hatred of bowels', is the essence of Swift’s misanthropy which underlies the whole of his work. As a doctrine, a philosophy of life, this misanthropy, Huxley observes, is profoundly silly. Like Shelley’s apocalyptic philanthropy, it is a protest against reality, childish like all such protests, from the fairy story to the socialist’s Utopia. Regarded as a political pamphlet or the expression of a world-view, Gulliver is as preposterous as Prometheus Unbound. Regarded as works of art, they are almost equally admirable. What interests Huxley, however, is the relation of these two works to the reality outside themselves. Considered merely as comments on reality, Gulliver and Prometheus are seen, for all their astonishing difference, to have a common origin — the refusal on the part of their authors to
accept the physical reality of the world. Shelley's refusal to accept the given reality took the form of a lyrical and prophetic escape into the Golden Age. Swift, on the contrary, remained earth-bound, rubbing his nose in all those aspects of physical reality which most distressed him. His *Merryhymn Utopia* was not one of those artificial paradises which men have fabricated as a refuge from a world with which they are unable to cope. For Swift the charm of the country of *Merryhymnas* consisted, not in the beauty and virtue of the horses, but in the foulness of the degraded men.\(^1\) If the campaign for sanitation that was to be launched towards the end of the nineteenth century, is Huxley's quaint comment, were to be launched during the days of Swift, he would have felt quite miserable. How deeply the spectacle of cleanliness would have disturbed him!\(^2\)

The great, unforgivable sin of the Yahoos, then, according to Swift, consisted in the fact that they possessed bowels. Swift could not forgive men and women for being vertebrate mammals as well as immortal souls. He could not forgive them, in a word, for actually existing. This refusal to accept the universe as it is given,

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2. 'Hyperion to a Satyr'; *Adonis and the Alphabet*; Chatto & Windus, 1956; p.159.
says Huxley, is childish silliness. Every man has a right to his philosophy of life, just as every man has a right to his own liver. But his liver may be a bad liver. It is the same with a philosophy of life. Every man has a right to look at the world as he chooses; but his world-view may be a bad one. The Swiftian world-view is obviously bad. It is impossible to live completely without accepting life as a whole in all its manifestations. Swift's prodigious powers were marshalled on the side of death, not life.

Swift and Rabelais:

It would be instructive in this context, says Huxley, to compare Swift with Rabelais. Both of them were scatological writers. Mass for mass, there is probably more dung and offal piled up in Rabelais' work than in Swift's. But how pleasant is the dung through which Gargantua wades, how almost delectable the offal! The muck is transfigured by love; for Rabelais loved the bowels which Swift so malignantly hated. His was the true amor fati: he accepted reality in its entirety, accepted it with gratitude and delight. In this most beautiful, ridiculous, and tragic world Swift has no part: he is shut out from it by hatred, by his childish resentment against reality for not being entirely different from what, in fact, it is.
Cause of Swift's Misanthropy:

Swift's failure to accept reality, observes Huxley, requires some explanation. The one that he would suggest — and it has been suggested before — is that Swift's hatred of bowels was obscurely, but none the less closely, connected with that "temperamental coldness" which Sir Leslie Stephen attributes to the mysterious lover of Stella and Vanessa. That any man with a normal dosage of sexuality could have behaved quite so oddly as Swift behaved towards the women he loved seems certainly unlikely. Now, when a man is not actually all too human he does not for that reason become superhuman: on the contrary, he tends to become subhuman. Cut off by some accident of body or character from the world of carnal passion and tenderness, Swift was prevented from growing to full human maturity. Remaining subhumanly childish, he continued all his life to resent reality. At the same time his separation from the human world, his sense of solitude, developed in him something of the subhuman malignity, the hate, the envious "righteous indignation" of the Puritan.

Swift's Sentimentalism:

The reverse of a ferocious hater is, as so often happens, a sentimentalist. In the writer of the baby-
language which fills so much space in Swift's *Journal to Stella* we see the most abject and repulsive typo of sentimentalist, the adult man who deliberately mimics the attitudes of childhood. The character of the age in which Swift lived was hard and virile; machinery had not begun to produce its dehumanizing effects. Naturally, Swift was ashamed of his infantility. His baby-language was a secret between himself and the two "sweet rogues" to whom he wrote his letters. In public he revealed only the Puritan, the Father-of-the-Church side of him — the respectably misanthropical obverse of the infantile medal.

It is, incidentally, interesting to note that *Gulliver's Travels*, which its author intended to be a satire on man, has today become a fascinating children's story. "Books", says Mr. Cardan in *Those Barren Leaves*, "have their destinies like men .... *Gulliver's Travels*, with a minimum of expurgation, has become a children's book; a new illustrated edition is produced every Christmas. That's what comes of saying profound things about humanity in terms of a fairy story."  

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1. "*Swift*": Do What You Will; Chatto & Windus, 1949; pp.100-106.
Wordsworth

Wordsworthian Pantheism:

To regard Wordsworth critically, impersonally, is a rather difficult matter, says Huxley in an essay in On the Margin. With the disintegration of the solid orthodoxies, Wordsworth became for many intelligent, liberal-minded families the Bible of that sort of pantheism, which filled, somewhat inadequately, the place of the older dogmas. People, who were brought up as children in the Wordsworthian tradition, were taught to believe that a Sunday walk among the hills was somehow equivalent to church-going. From this dim religious education people brought away a not very well-informed veneration for the name of Wordsworth, a dutiful conviction about the spirituality of Nature in general, and an extraordinary superstition about mountains in particular. Consequently, when they came to read their Wordsworth as adults, they found it extremely difficult to appraise his greatness. Of late, however, it has become possible, says Huxley, to look at Wordsworth as a detached phenomenon in the world of ideas and not as part of the family tradition of childhood.¹

Huxley's Attack:

Huxley attacks Wordsworthian pantheism on two grounds. First, the adoration of Nature is possible only in a temperate zone. To Englishmen who live beneath a temperate sky and in the age of Henry Ford, the worship of Nature comes almost naturally. But a Wordsworthian is liable to have his religious convictions rudely disturbed if he spends a few weeks in Malaya or Borneo, under a vertical sun and the equatorial rains. Secondly, Nature-worship is only possible to those who are prepared to falsify their immediate intuitions of Nature. For Nature, even in the temperate zone, is always alien, inhuman and occasionally diabolic.¹ Wordsworth seems to assure us that, if we trust Nature, we shall find our instinctive,

1. Compare the following sonnet by Matthew Arnold:

"In harmony with Nature?" Restless fool,  
Who with such heat dost preach what were to thee,  
When true, the last impossibility;  
To be like Nature strong, like Nature cool:  
Know, man hath all which Nature hath, but more,  
And in that more lie all his hopes of good.  
Nature is cruel; man is sick of blood:  
Nature is stubborn; man would fain adore:  
Nature if fickle; man hath need of rest:  
Nature forgives no debt, and fears no grave:  
Man would be mild, and with safe conscience blast.  
Man must begin, know this, where Nature ends;  
Nature and man can never be fast friends.  
Fool, if thou canst not pass her, rest her slave!"
atavistic fears of her transformed into serenity and joy and rapture.

"Let Nature be your teacher," says Wordsworth. But how strangely, remarks Huxley, Wordsworth himself put the precept into practice! Instead of listening, he himself dictates the lesson he desires to hear. Our direct intuitions of Nature tell us that the world is bottomlessly strange: alien, even when it is kind and beautiful; never personal, or conscious or moral; often hostile and sinister; sometimes even unimaginably evil.

In his youth, it would seem, Wordsworth's intuitions of the world were unwarped. As years passed, however, he began to interpret them in terms of a preconceived philosophy. By the time he was thirty, "something far more deeply interfused" had made its appearance on the Wordsworthian scene. Years thus brought about a change in Wordsworth's attitude to life and Nature. He began as a poet and an aesthete and ended as a moralist, a thinker, and a Tory. He used his intellect to distort his exquisitely acute and subtle intuitions of the world, to simplify them into a comfortable metaphysical reality. Nature had endowed him with great poetical gifts. But he chose to be a philosopher, comfortably at home with a man-made and comprehensible system, rather than a poet,
adventuring for adventure's sake through the mysterious world revealed by his direct and undistorted intuitions.¹ It is thus that we witness, states Huxley elsewhere, the depressing spectacle of a great poet who, during the last half a century of a long life, wrote about his philosophy and preserved an almost unbroken record of dullness.²

It is a fact, as Huxley says, that Wordsworth wrote poetry that was good, bad or indifferent. His *Ecclesiastical Sonnets* are absolute bathos, just as the finest passages in the *Prelude* and *Excursion* are absolute poetry. But we cannot agree with Huxley in his criticism of Wordsworthian pantheism. He sets out with the wrong assumption that Nature, particularly in the tropics, though at times beautiful, is hostile, sinister and evil. The Indian mystics who always lived in the heart of dense forests never found Nature sinister and diabolic. It has been possible for men to live in peace and harmony even with tropical Nature. Huxley himself later turned to this view, as we can see from a statement in *Themes and Variations*. While discussing Wordsworth and Main de Biran, the French philosopher, as 'Nature mystics', he

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² Introduction to *Texts and Pretexts*; Chatto & Windus, 1949; p.10.
says, "In Europe, the capacity to see in the more savage aspects of Nature not only terrifying power, but also of beauty, love and wisdom, is a fairly recent growth. In the Far East, on the contrary, this capacity is of very high antiquity. Moreover, Nature is not invariably savage, and at all times and in all places persons have had no difficulty in perceiving that her more smiling aspects were manifestations of the divine." 1

**Wordsworth's Mysticism**

In a further comment on Wordsworth's poetry, Huxley hints at his own notion of the nature of poetry, and, incidentally, his attitude towards the whole disputed question of poetry and beliefs. Like many philosophers, and especially philosophers of a mystical tinge of thought, Wordsworth based his philosophy on his emotions. The mystic who feels within himself the stirrings of inenarrable emotions is not content with these emotions as they are in themselves. He feels it necessary to invent a whole cosmogony that will account for them. The mystical emotions have what may be termed a conduct value; but they do not have any truth

value. We need not, therefore, read, says Huxley, the theology of Wordsworth's mysticism, the pantheistic explanation of his emotions. One can be moved by the sight of the primrose without thinking of it in philosophical terms. If we think so, it would be the theology of our primrose emotion. But it is the emotion itself which is important, not the theology. The emotion has its own powerful conduct value; whereas the philosophy or mysticism derived from it possesses only the smallest value as truth.¹

This is what Huxley thought of mysticism during his early years. They were the days when he would not touch mysticism, as they say, even with a pair of tongs. But what a contrast the later Huxley presents! This is, for instance, what he writes about mystics in Grey Eminence, a later book: "The mystics are channels through which a little knowledge of reality filters down into our human universe of ignorance and illusion. A totally unmystical world would be a world totally blind and insane."²

Nature - Worship Past and Present:

Huxley compares, in one of the essays in Do What You Will, the nature-worship of modern times with that

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¹ 'A Wordsworth Anthology': On the Margin; Chatto & Windus, 1948; (first published, 1923); pp.156-60.
² Grey Eminence; Chatto & Windus, 1942; p.32.
of the ages gone by. No man can live — richly and harmoniously live — no man can beautifully create, who sometimes does not subdue himself to things — to the unknown modes of being of the external world and of his own unconsciousness. Modern 'nature-worship' springs from a recognition of this fact. "Come forth", said Wordsworth,

"Come forth, and bring with you a heart
That watches and receives."

Nature-worship is, indeed, a modern and somewhat artificial invention of refined minds. The Greeks were not Wordsworthians; they never went for walking tours nor wasted their energies unnecessarily climbing to the tops of mountains. Nevertheless their religion kept them more intimately in touch with Nature than all the nature-worship of the moderns would have done.1

**Nature and Personality**

In another essay, in *Proper Studies*, Huxley comments on what Wordsworth has to say about the part played by Nature in the making of the personality. The chaotic nature of the elements from which a personality

must be made has always been recognized. Here is Wordsworth’s account of them and of the process by which they are co-ordinated:

"Dust as we are, the immortal spirit grows
Like harmony in music; there is a dark
Inscrutable workmanship, that reconciles
Discordant elements, makes them cling together
Into one society."

The lines are noble; but the beauty of the language, says Huxley, must not blind us to the defect in the ideas which it expresses. Wordsworth attributes too great a part in the making of the personality to 'the dark inscrutable workmanship' of Nature in the sense of an external and providential power, too little to the deliberate artistry of the individual himself and the formative influences of his education. Huxley believes that the personality is a product of our own and of other deliberate human efforts; that the desirable end can be, ought to be, and is achieved by man himself and not, in Wordsworth's words, "thanks to the means which Nature deigned to employ." 1

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1. ‘Personality and Discontinuity of Mind’ : Proper Studies; Chatto & Windus, 1933; pp.232-33.
Wordsworth on Subject-Matter of Poetry:

Elsewhere, Huxley writes about Wordsworth as a critic. Wordsworth has something of value to say about the subject-matter of poetry in his preface to *Lyrical Ballads*. His literary criticism is illumined by a penetrating intelligence. Speaking of the relations between poetry and that vast world of abstractions and ideas — science and philosophy — into which so few poets have penetrated, he writes: "The remotest discoveries of the chemist, the botanist, or mineralogist will be as proper objects of the poet's art as any upon which he is now employed, if the time should ever come when these things shall be familiar to us, and the relations under which they are contemplated shall be manifestly and palpably material to us as enjoying and suffering beings." The sentence, though formidable, Huxley comments, is full of critical truth.

The gist of Wordsworth's argument is this. All subjects can serve the poet with material for his art, on one condition: that he, and to a lesser degree his audience, shall be able to apprehend the subject with a certain emotion. The subject must be somehow involved in the poet's intimate being before he can turn it into poetry. It is not enough, for example, that he should
apprehend it merely through his senses or in a purely intellectual manner. An abstract idea must be felt with a kind of passion, it must mean something emotionally significant, it must establish a personal relationship before it can be made into poetry.¹

Wordsworth's Theory of Poetic Diction:

Illuminating as Wordsworth's remarks on the subject-matter of poetry are, what he says and does in respect of the language of poetry Huxley finds disappointing. Wordsworth, he observes, set out to use a language really used by men — 'a selection of the real language of men in a state of vivid sensation' a dialect actually spoken by some class of human beings; in other words, a genuinely colloquial language. The poet who would write of common things in common, colloquial language is beset with two great difficulties. To begin with, he must make his colloquialism genuinely colloquial. Poems like The Idiot Boy are unsatisfactory because, among other reasons, Wordsworth did not use the language really used by men. He tried to be colloquial and failed.

"And Botty's husband's at the wood,
Where by the week he doth abide,
A Woodman in the distant vale :-"

This is not the language actually spoken by human beings. It is bad poetic diction. Wordsworth could never strip off the last clinging rags of linguistic fancy dress. Hence his failure to write good colloquial poetry.

The other difficulty confronting the colloquial poet is the difficulty of giving to colloquialisms the sharpness and the memorable concentration required of poetic language. Thus, 'The Idiot Boy', when it is colloquial and not conventionally poetic, is diffuse and dim in its colloquialism. Indeed, so far from heightening colloquial speech, Wordsworth often contrived actually to lower it. Here is another example:

"Poor Susan moans, poor Susan groans;
The clock gives warning for eleven;
'Tis on the stroke — 'He must be near',
Quoth Betty, 'and will soon be here,
As sure as there's a moon in heaven.'

The clock is on the stroke of twelve,
And Johnny is not yet in sight;
The Moon's in heaven, as Betty sees,
But Betty is not quite at ease;
And Susan has a dreadful night."
Almost any old country woman's account of those events would be much sharper, much more penetratingly intense than this. Wordsworth's versifying has had the effect of taking the bright edge off 'the real language of men in a state of vivid sensation'. What is true of 'Poor Susan' is true of many other poems. 1

It is doubtful whether Wordsworth ever professed to write 'colloquial' language. What he aimed at was to fit 'to metrical arrangement a selection of the real language of men in a state of vivid sensation'. He proposes to 'choose incidents and situations from common life, and to relate or describe them, throughout, as far as was possible in a selection of language really used by men, and at the same time, to throw over them a certain colouring of imagination .... ' That Wordsworth failed to live up to his profession, only means that some of his work was not of the highest order; it does not invalidate his theory. 2

Huxley is mainly, though not exclusively, concerned with Shelley's ideas — notably with his ideas of liberty, love and marriage. Shelley and his contemporaries, he writes, believed in the ideal of democracy. Democracy in those days was young and attractive. When she spoke of the native equality and potential perfection of human beings, men believed her. For Shelley and his philosophical masters, vice and stupidity were the fruits of ignorance and despotic government.\(^1\)

The political and the philosophical literature of the eighteenth century teems with such notions. It was only to be expected. For the philosophers of the day, such as Locke\(^2\) and Descartes\(^3\), held that reason is the same and entire in all men. It followed, therefore, that men are made or marred exclusively by environment and education; the inequalities of intelligence and virtue were due to the

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2. John Locke (1632-1704), English philosopher.
3. René Descartes (1596-1650), French philosopher.
inequalities of instruction. Men were naturally reason-
able and therefore good; but they lived in the midst of vice and abject superstition. Why? Because evil-minded legislators — kings and priests — had created a social environment which warped the native reason and corrupted the morals of the human race. Therefore, get rid of priests and kings, Shelley said, and the world will become a paradise.

But Huxley asks: why should the kings and priests, who, as human beings, were themselves naturally reasonable and therefore virtuous, have conspired against their fellows? Why should their reasonable fellows have allowed themselves to be put down by these crafty corrupters? These questions have never been adequately answered. Whatever the answers may be, says Huxley, the king-priest theory is the inspiration and subject of much of Shelley's finest poetry.¹

There is a passing comment on this view in an early novel of Huxley's. Mr. Bojanus says in Antic Hay: "Who's freer for political liberty? Not a soul, Mr. Gumbril. There was never a greater swindleatched

¹ The Idea of Equality'; Proper Studies; Chatto & Windus, 1933; pp.11-12.
in the 'ole of 'istory. And when you think 'ow those poor young men like Shelley talked about it — it's pathetic, really pathetic ..." 1

Shelley's Ideas on Love and Marriage:

Shelley also believed that you had only to get rid of social restraints and erroneous mythology to make the Grand Passion universally lasting. He failed to see, Huxley comments, that the Grand Passion was produced by the very restraints that opposed themselves to the sexual impulse. Where there are no psychological or external restraints, the Grand Passion does not come into existence, and must be artificially cultivated. Too much enjoyment 'blunts the fine point of seldom pleasure.' Unrestrained indulgence kills not merely passion, but, in the end, even amusement. Too much liberty is as life-destroying as too much restraint.2

Shelley's ideas on love are naturally related to his views on marriage. "I was never attached", he says in Epipsychidion, "to that great sect whose doctrine is", briefly, monogamy. Shelley had read his encyclopaedists;

Godwin was his master as well as father-in-law. But Godwin's disciple was also the heir to a baronetcy and a poet who did not feel bound to explain and rationalize his non-conformity.

Hilton too advocated polygamy, but, unlike Shelley, he tried to justify his views. He does not dare to be unorthodox on his own responsibility. He feels it necessary to prove by irrefutable argument that he is right and that those who call themselves orthodox are wrong. Hence those quotations from the Bible, whose authority he accepts. In this the militant Protestant of 1650 reveals himself more humble than the aristocratic revolutionary of 1800. He is never content, like Shelley, to assert his preferences; he must always believe and make others believe that his desires and the heaven's are the same. Bored by his wife, he writes a book to demonstrate that God has no objection to divorce. The book is censured; Milton writes another to prove that God is on the side of free speech.

The irrepressible and encyclopaedic Huxley proceeds to show how Blake's position in respect of marriage is intermediate between Milton and Shelley. One difference between Milton and Blake is that whereas Milton has to do all his justifying in terms of existing
myths, Blake feels himself free to invent new ones for himself. Individualism and subjectivism have triumphed; the time is ripe for Shelley's simple assertion of a personal preference.

That three of the most considerable English poets should have wanted to be polygamous (Shelley was the only one of them who ever came near fulfilling his wishes) is certainly a curious fact — but though curious, not astonishing. Good artists are, as a rule, says Huxley, but indifferent monogamists. They tend to combine a more than ordinary sensibility, energy and curiosity with a more than ordinary reluctance to assume the responsibilities of common life.¹

Huxley is not taken in by Shelley's voluminous parade of Platonism. In matters of love, he says, Shelley was not a Platonist. Spenser is the only considerable Platonizer in the whole range of English literature. All the other poets of importance agree at bottom with John Donne, who believes in the right true end of love, that is, the physical side of it. To love and not to propose the right true end of it is monstrous, says

Donne. Equally unmonstrous and as little Platonic is the love so lyrically sung by Shelley, by Byron with such raptures and cynicisms.¹

Shelley's Imprecision:

Like Arnold, Huxley finds Shelley's poetry guilty of imprecision, but is not sure that precision is right in all cases. Much of Shelley's poetry, he says, is dreamlike, like that of Swinburne. Even when it is not dreamlike, its long-drawn imprecision is apt to leave one cold. Shelley's effects, like Spenser's, are mainly cumulative, and one lacks the patience to let them accumulate. This does not mean, of course, that Huxley would like all poets to say their say in four-line epigrams. Certain things can only be expressed at considerable length and in terms of the most improbable metaphors and word-magic.²

Mark Rampion on Shelley:

That Shelley was a great deal in Huxley's mind at all times is shown not only by the remark, quoted above, of Mr. Bojanus in so early a novel as Antic Hay, but by Mark Rampion's observations in Point Counter Point. Rampion pokes fun at Shelley's Platonism and the

¹ Texts and Pretexts; Chatto & Windus, 1949; pp.117-18.
² Ibid., pp.7-8.
too ethereal, spiritual nature of his poetry. "There is something dreadful about Shelley," he says. "Not human, not a man. A mixture between a fairy and a white slug. Exquisite and all that. But what a bloodless kind of slime inside! No blood, no real bones and bowels. Only pulp and a white juice. And oh, that dreadful lie in the soul! The way he was always pretending for the benefit of himself and everybody else that the world wasn't really the world, but either heaven or hell. And that going to bed with women wasn't really going to bed with them, but just two angels holding hands. Ugh! Think of his treatment of women — shocking, really shocking. The women loved it, of course — for a little. It made them feel so spiritual — that is, until it made them feel like committing suicide. So spiritual. And all the time he was just a young schoolboy with a sensual itch like anybody else's, but persuading himself and other people that he was Dante and Beatrice rolled into one ... Dreadful, dreadful! The only excuse is that, I suppose, he couldn't help it. He wasn't born a man; he was only a kind of fairy slug with the sexual appetites of a schoolboy. And then think of that awful incapacity to call a spade a spade ... Do you remember the ode "To a Skylark"? ... Just pretending, just lying to himself as usual. The lark couldn't be allowed to be a mere bird,
with blood and feathers and a nest and an appetite for
caterpillars. Oh no! That wasn't nearly poetical
enough, that was much too coarse. It had to be a dis-
embodied spirit. Bloodless, boneless. A kind of ether-
ecal flying slug. It was only to be expected. Shelley
was a kind of flying slug himself, and after all, nobody
can really write about anything excepting himself. ....
But I wish to God the bird had had sense enough to drop
a good large mess in his eye. It would have served him
damned well right for saying it wasn't a bird. Blithe
spirit, indeed! Blithe spirit!^2

Even Dr. Obispo of After Many a Summer cannot
help some remarks on Shelley. Talking about romantic
literature, he says that most of it is the result of bad
doctoring. If only they had cured Shelley of his chronic
tuberculous pleurisy, his melancholy poetry would not
have been written.2

Tolstoy
Artist Turned Moralist:

Huxley has, in several of his works, a good deal
to say about the later Tolstoy, both as creative writer

1. Point Counter Point; Avon Publications, V-2031,
   pp. 128-29.
2. "After Many a Summer; Chatto & Windus, 1959; p.234.
and social prophet. It takes all sorts to make a world, Huxley remarks. By and large, we come across two types of people in life — the Dr. Jekylls who do the metaphysical and scientific thinking and so forth; and the natural and spontaneous Mr. Hydes who do the physical, instinctive living. Poets and artists belong to the second type. The world which is generally dominated by intellectuals and moral angels, can ill afford to lose its poets and artists. When one of the artists deserts to the side of the angels, it is the most odious of treasons. Tolstoy was a great artist who, in his later years, joined the opposite camp. He was, says Huxley, the perfect Mr. Hyde, the complete embodiment, if ever there was one, of the non-intellectual, non-moral, instinctive life. Unfortunately, he betrayed his own nature, betrayed his art, betrayed life itself, in order to fight against his earlier allegiances, under the standard of Dr. Jesus-Jekyll. In other words, Tolstoy ceased to be the consummate artist that he was and became a staunch moralist. It is a thousand pities that he chose to be a social reformer.

1. Curiously enough, a similar charge has been made against Huxley himself by admirers of his early "pure art" books.
And yet, let us be thankful, says Huxley, that he has given us memorable works like *The Death of Ivan Illyitch* and *Anna Karenina*. The former is one of the artistically most perfect and at the same time one of the most terrible books ever written. It is the story of an utterly commonplace man who is compelled to discover that the public personage with whom, all his life, he has identified himself is hardly more than a figment of the collective imagination, and that his essential self is the solitary, insulated being who finally finds himself alone and naked in the presence of Light. Tolstoy is never emphatic, speaks simply of the most difficult matters, and matter-of-factly of the most terrible. That is why his book is so profoundly disturbing to our habitual complacency; for nothing is more desolating than a thorough knowledge of the private self.  

Huxley returns to this story in another of his essays. In this terrifying book, he writes, Tolstoy has shown how deep, how wide, is the gulf that separates a man in health from the same man when death has laid its hand upon him. It was from pain and gradually approaching

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dissolution that Ivan Ilyitch learned to understand the futility of his respectable bourgeois career. This book and Dostoievsky's Notes from Underground, says Huxley, are worth a whole library of treatises on the theory of knowledge and the nature of reality.  

Elsewhere, Huxley makes a significant and interesting comment on Anna Karenina through the mouth of Mark Staithes in Eyeless in Gaza. Anna Karenina, says Mark, is a good novel as novels go. But he complains of its profound untruthfulness. It is a presentation of a tragic life entirely bowdlerised — abstracted from the physiological, domestic and other trivial details which give tone and quality to life. In other words, Anna Karenina lacks in what Huxley calls elsewhere 'the whole Truth.'  

Tolstoy on Science:  

In Adonis and the Alphabet, Huxley writes about Tolstoy's pre-occupation with social and moral problems. Tolstoy saw in applied science the greatest threat to

1. 'Pascal': Do What You Will; Chatto & Windus, 1949; p.231.  
2. For a fuller account of this aspect of Anna Karenina, see pp.54-55 of the thesis.  
3. See 'Tragedy and the Whole Truth': Music at Night.
liberty, the most powerful instrument of oppression in the hands of tyrants. "If the arrangement of society is bad (as ours is)", says Tolstoy, "and if a small number of people have power over the majority and oppress them, every victory over Nature will inevitably serve to increase that power and that oppression. This is what is actually happening." It was for this reason (among others) that Tolstoy advocated a return to handicraft production.

It is easy enough, says Huxley, to detect the flaws in Tolstoy's arguments against science and machinery and in favour of handicraft production. All of them fail to take into account the most important single fact of modern history — the rapid, almost explosive, increase in human numbers. The existence of this increased population is dependent on the existence of modern machinery. If we scrap the machinery, we kill at least half the world's population. Therefore, the machines must stay. But the fact that man cannot now survive without advanced technology and machinery, Huxley hastens to add, does not mean that Tolstoy was entirely wrong. For, in fact, every victory over Nature has been at the same time a victory of the few over the many.¹

¹ 'Liberty, Equality, Machinery': Adonis and the Alphabet; Chatto & Windus, 1956; pp.105-10.

Also, compare Science, Liberty and Peace; Chatto & Windus, 1950; pp.5-6.
Machines are not only a threat to human liberty, says Huxley, but also bring in other evils. Creative work, of however humble a kind, is a source of great happiness. Machines rob the majority of human beings of the very possibility of this happiness. Leisure has now been almost as completely mechanized as labour. Men no longer amuse themselves creatively, but sit and are passively amused by mechanical devices. But since we cannot get rid of machines, we must learn how to make the best of a bad job. Mechanical work must be regarded as a necessary evil to be compensated for by the creative labours or amusements of leisure; but before leisure can be made to serve as an antidote to life-destroying work, Huxley suggests, it must be de-mechanized.  

Tolstoy on Leisure:

While Tolstoy advocated the handicrafts because of the joy of creation they provide, he condemned the idea of universal leisure. What seemed more important to Tolstoy was not that the workers should get more leisure, but that the leisured should work. For him the social ideal was labour for all in natural surroundings. His dislike of leisure was partly due to his own experience.

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1. 'Spinosa’s Worm': Do What You Will; Chatto & Windus, 1949; pp. 86-87.
as an idle youth. As things are at present, he said, leisure is generally more of a curse than a blessing. Huxley, too, is of the same opinion. It is difficult, he remarks, when one visits Monte Carlo or the other earthly paradises of the leisured, not to agree with Tolstoy. Most minds only do work under compulsion. Leisure is only profitable to those who desire, even without compulsion, to do mental work; only in a society composed of such active minds leisure would be an unmixed blessing.

Tolstoy's Objection to Cleanliness:

Huxley is amused by a corollary to Tolstoy's creed of universal brotherhood. Tolstoy objected to too much of cleanliness on the ground that it was a badge of class. In a society where, say, only one in five can afford the luxury of being clean and sweet-smelling, Christian brotherhood will be all but impossible. Only where there is equality in dirt can there be a genuine unforced fraternity. Huxley contrasts this with the solution proposed to the same problem by Tolstoy's disciple, Mahatma Gandhi, he observes, chose a different solution to the problem of differential cleanliness. Instead of urging the bathers to stop washing, he worked indefatigably to help the non-bathers keep clean. While

Tolstoy's remedy is that we should all stink together, Gandhi said that we should make it economically possible for every man to wash daily. Huxley himself, of course, prefers the second alternative.¹

**Shaw**

Shaw's *Propaganda Fails*:

Having pointed out the disastrous effects of propaganda upon art in Tolstoy, Huxley remarks on the self-defeating character of literary propaganda in a writer like Shaw. A propagandist, he says, sometimes achieves results quite unlike those he meant to achieve by his writings. Invectives often act as a kind of vaccination against the danger of reform. Shaw's writings are revolutionary in intention, and yet he has become a favourite among the more intelligent members of the bourgeoisie. They read his satires, laugh at themselves a little, and then, feeling that they have paid the tribute which capitalism owes to social justice, go on behaving as they have always done. Thus, instead of producing the active will to change, Shaw's satires produce a cynical acceptance of things as they are.²

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The Cult of the Superman:

It is not merely that such literary propaganda as Shaw's is foredoomed to failure; it is that some items of his revolutionary propaganda are essentially and fundamentally unsound. Shaw, says Huxley, is the most aspiring of the modern superhumanists. The ideal of superhumanness is a finally unattainable ideal. What is worse, at the root of this aspiration to be more than human we find, in the last analysis, a kind of cowardice, a refusal to cope with the complicated, difficult facts of life. To aspire to be superhuman is a most discreditible admission that you lack the guts and the judgment to be human; to see and accept things as they are.

Chesterton on Shaw:

Strangely enough, this view is shared by G.K. Chesterton. Shaw, he says, in his illuminating essay in The Heretics, has never seen things as they really are. For, "it is not seeing things as they are to think first of a Briareus with a hundred hands, and then call every man a cripple for having only two. It is not seeing things as they are to start with the vision of Argus with his hundred eyes, and then jeer at every man with

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two eyes as if he had only one. And it is not seeing things as they are to imagine a demi-god of infinite mental clarity, who may or may not appear in the latter days of the earth, and then to see all men as idiots."

Not being pleased with man as he is, Chesterton adds, Shaw decides to throw him overboard and go in for progress for its own sake. It is as if a nurse had tried a rather bitter food for some years on a baby, and on discovering that it was not suitable, should not throw away the food and ask for a new food, but throw the baby out of window, and ask for a new baby.¹ To quote Chesterton again, from his fuller study of Shaw: "In the Shavian atmosphere, the philosopher is not trying to get rid of the troubles of men, he is trying to get rid of men because they are the troubles of the philosopher."²

In the same vein, Huxley says that Shaw consoles himself for man's failure to realise the Superman by retiring into a world of fancy. He invites us, in Back to Methuselah, to share his raptures at the spectacle of a future Earth inhabited by sexless old monsters of

¹. "Mr. Bernard Shaw": Heresies; The Bodley Head, 1939; pp.56; 60.
². "George Bernard Shaw": The Bodley Head, 1942; p.290.
mental and physical deformity. Shaw's earthly paradise turns out to be a charnel-house. Under the stimulation of his wit, the mummies frisk about; it is all very amusing, but how unspeakably horrible! All Shaw's writing is lifeless for all its appearance of twitching liveliness. In *Back to Methuselah* the bony rattling, the crackling disintegration of the mummied tissues are deafeningly loud. Inevitably; for *Back to Methuselah* is the most loftily idealistic, the most superhumanistic of all Shaw's plays. In fact, the highest is the lowest. Chesterton remarks that, when we really see men as they are, we do not criticise, but worship. This is precisely, but only in part, Huxley's view. He wants us to see men as they are; but is far from Chesterton's worship; he would criticise.

It is obvious that Huxley is not interested in Shavian or any other Utopia; as he has triumphantly demonstrated in *Brave New World*, it is only anti-Utopia that appeals to him. Whenever he sees a book about the Future, his feeling is one of boredom and exasperation. What on earth, he asks, is the point of troubling one's head with what men may be like in A.D. 30,000? The hypothetical Superman can really be left to look after himself. The only thing in our power is to do our best
to be men, here and now. Let us think about the present, not the future. If we don't, there will very soon be no future to think about.¹

Shaw on Leisure:

Having dealt with Tolstoy's views on leisure, Huxley is naturally interested in knowing what another social prophet has to say on the same theme. What shall human beings do with the leisure which social re-organization and perfected machinery are to give them? The prophets of the future, says Huxley, give fundamentally the same answer to this question. Henri Poincaré, for example, imagined that the human beings of the future would fill their long leisures by 'contemplating the laws of nature'. H.G.Wells² portrays, in Men like Gods, a race of athletic scientists who go about making free love in a rational manner between their experiments. They also take an interest in the arts and play games. Bernard Shaw's Ancients, in Back to Methuselah, having ceased, by the time they are four years old, to take any interest in such childish things as love, art and the society of their fellow beings, devote their indefinitely prolonged existences to meditating on the mysterious and miraculous beauty of the cosmos.³

¹ 'Spinoza's Norm': Do What You Will; Chatto & Windus, 1949; pp.70-72.
² Herbert George Wells (1866-1946), English novelist and sociologist.
³ 'Work and Leisure': Along the Road; Chatto & Windus; 1948; pp.233-34.
Wells, thinks Huxley, is a greater optimist than Shaw. While Wells puts his Utopia only three thousand years into the future, Shaw, less optimistically trusting to nature and a process of conscious evolution, removes his to the year 30,000 A.D. But even three thousand years seem, in Huxley's eyes, an uncommonly long time. The thought that, three thousand or thirty thousand years hence, human beings may be leading a lovely and rational existence is only a poor comfort. Thirty thousand years hence, all may be well. But meanwhile that bad geological quarter of an hour which separates us from that rosy future has got to be lived through.\footnote{1}\\n
\textit{Shaw's Economics}:

Huxley has another bone to pick with Shaw, in the matter of equal incomes. As a socialist Shaw believed in the principle of equalization of income. This consummation, says Huxley, is in the process of being realized under the capitalist system of America. The proletariat is today becoming a branch of the bourgeoisie. Out of the working hours the way of life

\footnote{1} \textit{Work and Leisure':} \textit{Along the Road}; Chatto & Windus, 1948; pp.244-45.
of these two branches of the modern bourgeoisie is the same. Incomes are being equalized; and it is as it should be. For why should one man receive more than another? A century would see the more or less complete realization, in the industrial West, of Shaw's dream of equal incomes for all.

And when that dream has been actualized, Huxley asks, what then? Will humanity live happily ever afterwards? Shaw, at any rate, seems to imagine so. Only once, says Huxley, in the whole of the _Guide to Socialism_ does Shaw suggest that Man does not live by equal incomes alone. Nothing could be more chimerical than the notion that Man is the same thing as Economic Man. To suppose that the equalization of income could solve the problems of life is slightly absurd. The real trouble, Huxley comments, is that the modern industrial system, by completely mechanizing work as well as leisure, makes life fundamentally unliveable for all.¹

Huxley is, however, not altogether hostile to Shaw. He approves of his unflinching realism in the matter of sex and allied social problems. Shaw's _Mrs. Warren's Profession_, he writes, was banned in

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¹ _Revolutions!_: Do What You Will; Chatto & Hindus; 1949; pp.219-25.
England for about a quarter of century; and yet, countless plays, whose appeal was frankly pornographic, were licensed during the period of Mrs. Warren’s exile from the stage. Shaw’s crime, says Huxley, was to have discussed frankly and seriously the subject of prostitution. He broached certain ideas, used certain words. And this shocked the Puritans who wear the fig-leaf over the mouth.\(^1\) The same thing happened to some of the works of D.H. Lawrence. Authority was wild with him, because he had used plain Anglo-Saxon words to describe things pertaining to sex.\(^2\) Briefly, it is the realist in Shaw that Huxley approves; his quarrel is with Shaw’s Utopian idealism.

G.K. Chesterton

Chesterton on T.H. Huxley:

G.K. Chesterton and Huxley have, as we have seen, certain fundamental attitudes in common. But they also have their radical divergences. And Huxley enjoys breaking a lance with that master of paradox. To take one instance: Chesterton, he says, has a genius for saying

\(^{1}\) **Jesting Pilate**: Chatto & Windus, 1946; p.285.
\(^{2}\) *To the Puritan All Things are Impure*: Music at Night; Penguin Books, 1955; p.113.
new and surprising things about old subjects; but it sometimes happens that what Chesterton says is so new and so surprising that it has very little relevance to the subject under discussion. For example, in The Victorian Age in Literature, Chesterton says of Lord Macaulay and T.H. Huxley¹ that "they were both much more under the influence of their own admirable rhetoric than they knew. Huxley, especially, was much more of a literary than a scientific man."

Well, this is new and surprising enough, Huxley comments — new and surprising, indeed, to the point of being quite untrue. T.H. Huxley was a man of science first of all — a man of science who, like quite a number of other men of science, had a literary gift.

Being himself of the literary profession, Aldous Huxley knows, or thinks he knows, how Chesterton could arrive at so bold a conclusion. The process is, says Huxley, simplicity itself. All that is required is a little systematic and selective ignorance. Ostrich-like, one shuts one's eyes to the scientific achievements of one's subject and concentrates exclusively on his more literary productions. The result is — that one comes,

¹ Thomas Henry Huxley (1825-1895), English scientist.
logically and inevitably, to Chesterton's conclusion. It would be easy to apply the same process to any other man of science and to arrive at exactly similar conclusions.

True, scientific achievement is quickly outdated, and every generation must start where the previous generation left off. Naturally, as a scientific man, T.H. Huxley would now be a mere historical figure. As a literary man, however, he is still a living force. Persistent contemporariness is a quality of all good art. If Chesterton had said that T.H. Huxley "is much more of a literary than a scientific man", he would have been quite right.  

Chesterton's Conflict with Coulton:

Having questioned the soundness of Chesterton's logic, Huxley proceeds to demolish Chesterton's historical good faith. As an Utopist, states Huxley, Chesterton came into conflict with Coulton, the scholar, on the issue of medieval puritanism. As a good Catholic and a romantic believer in a medieval 'Merry England' and even a 'Merry Europe' before the Reformation, Chesterton was naturally distressed when Coulton began piling up evidence to prove the intense puritanism of official Catholic

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Christianity during the Middle Ages. Armed with his usual eloquence and a cautious statement by St. Thomas, Chesterton, says Huxley, rushed into the arena. Coulton, who had the bad taste to read all the documents, repulsed the attack with another shower of puritanical quotations. The impartial spectator was forced to conclude that, if England was ever merry, it was not because of official Catholicism, but in spite of the Church's constant denunciation of merriment. Huxley concludes that Chesterton's particular brand of retrospective Utopianism is now untenable.  

Chesterton on St. Francis:

Further evidence of Chesterton's romantic sentimentalism and his aptness to be tripped up by his Catholic bias, is adduced by Huxley. Writing about St. Francis, Chesterton mentions the Saint's 'exquisite feeling for nature' as seen in his apt attributions of sex — as of femininity to Sister Moon and maleness to Brother Sun, and so on. A philologist would, however, find in these attributions only a tribute to Latin and Italian grammar. Luna is grammatically of the feminine gender, as Sol is of the masculine. But admitting, for the sake of argument, that the Saint had more

than merely grammatical intentions, he adds that the case against grammar is strongest in regard to the birds (masculine in Italian and feminine only in Latin) whom St. Francis addresses as his sisters. "My little sisters, the birds", he used to say, and Chesterton would doubtless applaud. But, Huxley comments, how would the drake and the cockbullfinch, the sparrow, the gaudy pheasant, and the arrogantly strutting cock protest against the insult! Now, how can one say, asks Huxley, that St. Francis had an exquisite feeling for nature?

Chesterton and Democracy:

Another example of Chesterton's romanticism provokes too much for his logic. Chesterton, Huxley writes, has been eloquent, among so many other things, about democracy. This is the first principle of democracy, writes Chesterton in his Orthodoxy, that the essential things in men are the things they hold in common, not the things they hold separately. And the second principle is merely this: that the political instinct or desire is one of these things which they hold in common. Government is a thing like falling in love or blowing one's own nose. These things we want a man to do for himself even if he does them badly. After some more brilliant

1. 'Francis and Grigory': Do What You Will; Chatto & Windus, 1949; p.165.
illustrations, Chesterton goes on to say that mankind recognizes these universal human functions, and that democracy classes government among them. In short, the democratic faith is this, that the most terribly important things must be left to ordinary men themselves—the mating of the sexes, the rearing of the young, the laws of the state. This is democracy, says Chesterton; and in this he has always believed.

There is something very engaging, says Huxley, about Chesterton's mixture of frankness and sophistry. He professes a chronic and unshakable faith in conceptions which he admits are quite probably not true. "I am not here arguing the truth of any of those conceptions", he says, with an honesty that does him enormous credit. (Or, is it merely that Chesterton thinks these things need no arguing, but are self-evident?) But he then goes on to confuse the issue by talking about vicariously chosen wives and delegated nose-blowing. Huxley thinks that this is a rhetorical device to lead us to believe that people's attitude to choosing their wives and blowing their noses is the same as their attitude to governing themselves. The truth is, of course, says Huxley, that the people who do not want to choose their own wives or blow their own noses are infinitely rarer than the
people who do not want to take a share in 'ruling the tribe'. Chesterton had begun to say something like this: "I think all men ought to take an interest in government, and I think so passionately in spite of the fact that, in practice, most of them take no interest whatever in the matter." But since a frank and full statement of the fact would have made nonsense of his political ideal, Huxley thinks, Chesterton checked himself half-way, and having admitted that his ideal might not necessarily rhyme with the facts, he proceeded to imply that, after all, it did rhyme more or less. It seems obvious to us that Chesterton was referring to the self-governing instinct in the average man, not to his ability or willingness to govern a nation. Huxley pounces upon the apparent weakness in Chesterton's argument. He notices that Chesterton's use of the word 'tribe' instead of 'nation' is another ingenious and artistic trick; for 'tribe' connotes a small group of human beings, 'nation' a large one. By using the word 'tribe', Chesterton has evoked the cozy and idyllic atmosphere of the Greek city-state. 'Nation' would have summoned up all the enormously complicated and uncomfortable realities of modern industrial life. Chesterton, says Huxley, is an artist in words; it is a pleasure to draw attention to
his artistry. In other words, Chesterton is more persuasive than convincing.

Huxley on Democracy:

Ordinary men, Huxley comments, ought to take part in government. But in fact they are not much interested. Chesterton has tried to anticipate criticism by saying that ordinary men ought to govern, even though they do it badly. But have men enjoyed being governed badly, Huxley asks, even when they themselves took part in the government? Have they felt comfortable in hell, even when the hell was of their own making? The answer, surely, is that they have not. Falling in love, says Chesterton, is more poetical than dropping into poetry, and governing is, or ought to be, like falling in love. But if one wants to read poetry, Huxley retorts one would rather read the poetry of Keats than that of an ordinary love-sick young man. It is the same with government. Helping to rule the tribe may be a very poetical act in itself; but the act has results, and the results may be as bad as a love-sick young man's verses. In other words, while Chesterton's is the attitude of pure democratic idealism, Huxley rather tends to a more 'aristocratic' view of government.

1. 'Political Democracy': Proper Studies; Chatto & Windus, 1933; pp.139-56.
D. H. Lawrence

Lawrence and Blake:

For many reasons, Huxley was much closer to Lawrence than to Chesterton; like Lawrence, Huxley believed in a whole-hearted acceptance of things as they are. Chesterton was quite another sort of artist.¹ It is impossible to write about Lawrence, says Huxley, except as an artist. Lawrence had many affinities with Blake, including his 'terrifying honesty'. Like Blake, he was predestined by his gifts.² Lawrence himself had great admiration for Blake, which is eloquently expressed by Mark Rampion (who is none else than Lawrence himself) in Point Counter Point: "Blake was civilized. Civilization is harmony, completeness. Reason, feeling, instinct, the life of the body — Blake managed to include and harmonize everything. Barbarism is being lopsided. You can be a barbarian of the intellect as well as of the body, a barbarian of the soul and the feelings as well of sensuality. Christianity made us barbarians of the soul and now science is making us barbarians of the intellect. Blake was the last civilized man."³

¹ See pp.11-12 of the thesis.
³ Point Counter Point; Avon Publications, V-2031; p.111.
Lawrence's Gifts:

Now, what sort of gifts did Lawrence have? And how did the possession of these gifts affect the way he responded to experience? Lawrence's special and characteristic gift, says Huxley, was an extraordinary sensitiveness to what Wordsworth called "unknown modes of being." He was always intensely aware of the mystery of the world, and the mystery was always for him a numen, divine. Lawrence could never forget, as most of us continuously forget, the dark presence of the otherness that lies beyond the boundaries of man's conscious mind. This special sensibility was accompanied by a prodigious power of rendering the immediately experienced otherness in terms of literary art. Lawrence's possession of this gift accounts for many things. It accounts, to begin with, for his attitude towards sex. For Lawrence, the significance of sexual experience was that, in it, the immediate, non-mental knowledge of divine otherness is brought to a focus—a focus of darkness. In other words, sex is 'something not ourselves that makes for,' not righteousness, but for life, for union with the mystery.1

1. 'D.H. Lawrence': The Olive Tree; Chatto & Windus, 1947; pp.203-204.
Lawrence’s Attitude to Sex:

Huxley compares Lawrence’s attitude to sex with that of a French writer, in *Devils of Loudun*. There is an elementary sexuality, he writes, which is innocent, and there is an elementary sexuality which is morally and aesthetically squalid. Lawrence has written very beautifully of the first, Jean Genet, with horrifying power and copious detail of the second. The sexuality of Eden and the sexuality of the sewer — both of them have power to carry the individual beyond the limits of his or her insulated self. But the second and the commoner variety takes those who indulge in it to a lower level of sub-humanity.\(^1\)

Huxley is of the view that many people have quite misunderstood Lawrence’s doctrine of sex, and mistaken him for an advocate of lasciviousness and libertinism. But in fact he had a great horror of all sensualists and libertines; so much so that, about the time he was writing *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*, he read the memoirs of Casanova\(^2\) and was profoundly shocked.

\(^1\) *Devils of Loudun*, Chatto & Windus, 1952; p.363.

\(^2\) Casanova de Seingalt (1725-98), Italian adventurer noted for his wit, accomplishments and intrigues. His memoirs throw a revealing light on the manner of life he led.
How to Communicate Sexual Experience?

Closely connected with the problem of sex in Lawrence is the problem of communicating sexual experience, which, for the literary artist, is in some ways even more difficult than the problem of communicating mystical experience. Should an artist use scientific jargon and abstraction, polite circumlocution, or the four-lettered Saxon words? So far as Lawrence was concerned, there was only one right way to communicate the right kind of sexual experience, and that was by means of the Saxon words. People were shocked by the things they found in Lady Chatterley's Lover; and given their upbringing, it was inevitable that they should be really disgusted and outraged. Cultured and tolerant people may ask: What is the point of shocking people? What is the point of using the brief Saxon words when you can express the meaning, more or less, by means of circumlocutions of Graeco-Roman polysyllables?

The answer to all this is: Lawrence was crusading for a cause — the right of the body and the instincts. He was insisting that the body should be treated with the same honour as the mind. Man is an animal that thinks. To be a first-rate human being, Lawrence argued, a man must be both a first-rate animal and a first-rate
thinker. And he cannot be a first-rate thinker, at any rate about human affairs, unless he is also a first-rate animal. And this seems to be, by and large, — and with the restraints imposed by his different 'upbringing' — Huxley's own view about the 'whole man'.

If humanity is to be saved, says Lawrence, there must be reforms, not only in the social and economic spheres, but also within the individual psyche. Lawrence concerned himself mainly with these psychological reforms. The problem, for him, was to bring the animal and the thinker together again. In order to effect this bringing together certain barriers must be broken down. Very significant in this connection are the tabooed words which describe in the directest possible manner the characteristic functions of bodily life. Early training has so conditioned the normal bourgeois and his wife that they shudder whenever one of these words is pronounced. For these words bring the mind into direct contact with the physical reality which it is so desperately anxious to ignore. Lawrence set out to recondition them with a course of shocks.1 The theory, says Huxley elsewhere, is psychologically sound. But in practice, — and it is

here that Huxley diverges from Lawrence, — unfortunately, and at this moment of history, within this particular culture, it has its drawbacks. Being still taboo, the Saxon words produce effects in the reader's mind out of all proportion to the frequency of their use. The balance of the book is upset and its composition distorted out of all recognition. Perhaps, after all, there was more to be said for eighteenth-century periphrases than Lawrence was ready to admit. It would appear, Huxley's own psychology is more integral, if less profound and original, than Lawrence's.

Lawrence's Doctrine of the Body:

Huxley is alive to several limitations in Lawrence's make-up consequential on his extreme position. Lawrence's religion was a belief in the blood, the flesh, as being wiser than the intellect. He disapproved of too much knowledge, on the score that it diminished men's sense of wonder and blunted their sensitiveness to the great mystery. All scientists he dismissed as liars. Huxley perceives that science and philosophy would be incompatible with Lawrence's individual gift — the immediate perception and artistic rendering of divine otherness. If Lawrence refused to know abstractly, it was because he preferred to live and wanted other

people to live. He also believed that art and thought should not be made excuses for leading a life of abstraction. In fact, he did not expect art, any more than he expected flowers, to grow in nice clean vacuums. As Mark Rampion remarks, “They need mould and clay and dung. So does art.”

Also, in condemning science so vehemently, Lawrence only wanted to emphasize the fact that the mind should not develop at the cost of the body. To quote Mark Rampion once again: “The lizards died of having too much of body and too little of head. But what about the mental size? These fools (i.e. the intellectuals) seem to forget that they’re just as topheavy and clumsy and disproportioned as any diplodocus. Sacrificing physical and affective life to mental life. These intellectuals and scientists and moralists and spiritualists and technicians and literary and political uplifters and all the rest of them haven’t the sense to see that man must live as a man, not as a monster of conscious brainlessness and soulfulness.”

It is interesting to note in

2. Point Counter Point; Avon Publications; p.119.
3. Ibid., pp.219-20.
this connection what Katy, the wife of the physicist, Henry Maartens, says in *The Genius and the Goddess*: "All scientists ought to be compelled to take a post-graduate course in Lawrence."  

Lawrence's doctrine of the body and its instincts may look like a gospel of animalism. But it is far from it, says Huxley, and puts his defence in the mouth of Mark Rampion himself:  

"If men went about satisfying their instinctive desires only when they genuinely felt them, like the animals you are contemptuous of, they would behave much better than the majority of civilized human beings behave today. It is not natural appetite and spontaneous instinctive desire that makes them so beastly — no, 'beastly' is the wrong word; it implies an insult to animals — so all-too-humanly bad and vicious. It's the imagination, it's the intellect, it's the principles, it's tradition and education. Leave the instincts to themselves and they will do very little mischief. If men made love only when they were carried away by passion, if they fought only when they were angry or terrified, if they grabbed at property only

when they had need or were swept off their feet by an uncontrollable desire for possession — why, I assure you, this world would be a great deal more like the Kingdom of Heaven than it is under our present Christian-intellectual-scientific dispensation. It is not instinct that makes Casanovas and Byrons and Lady Castlemaines1; it is a prurient imagination artificially tickling up the appetite, tickling up desires that have no natural existence. If Don Juans and Don Juanesses only obeyed their desires, they'd have very few affairs. They have to tickle themselves up imaginatively before they can start being casually promiscuous. And it's the same with other instincts. Think of civilized war. It has got nothing to do with spontaneous combativeness. Men have to be compelled by law and then tickled by propaganda before they all fight. You'd do more for peace by telling men to obey the spontaneous dictates of their fighting instincts than by founding any number of Leagues of Nations."

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1. Barbara Villiers, Duchess of Cleveland (1641-1704), mistress of Charles II of England. In 1659, she married Roger Palmer who was made the Earl of Castlemaine.
Lawrence on Art:

It was Lawrence's aesthetic principle that art must be wholly spontaneous, and, like the artist, imperfect, limited and transient. He would have no truck with that kind of perfection, whether ethical or aesthetic, intellectual or literary, which is the result of knowing and of the laborious application of knowledge. Art, thought Lawrence, should flower from an immediate impulse towards self-expression or communication and should wither with the passing of the impulse. That is why, says Huxley, he allowed his works to flower as they liked from the depths of his being and would never use his conscious intellect to force them into a semblance of more than human perfection. He used to say that he was incapable of correcting. If he was dissatisfied with what he had written, he rewrote. In other words, he gave the daimon another chance to say what he wanted to say. The conscious intellect was not allowed to impose, after the event, its abstract pattern of perfection.

Lawrence on the Art of Living:

It was the same in the sphere of ethics as in that of art. Every man, Lawrence insisted, must be an artist in life. The sensitive artist in life must
accept his own nature as it is, and not try to force it into another shape. The mysterious darkness and otherness, no less than the light of reason and the conscious ego, must be woven together into a satisfactory pattern; and to be satisfactory, it must be his pattern, not somebody else's. Mark Rampion says in this connection: "A man can't abolish his sensations and feelings completely without physically killing himself. Every attempt at being something better than a man — the result is the same. Death, some sort of death. You try to be more than you are by nature and you kill something in yourself and become much less. I'm so tired of all this rubbish about the higher life and moral and intellectual progress and living for ideals and all the rest of it. It all leads to death. Christians and moralists and cultured aesthetes and bright young scientists and Smilesian businessmen — all the poor little human frogs trying to blow themselves up into bulls of pure spirituality, pure idealism, pure efficiency, pure conscious intelligence, and just going pop, ceasing to be anything but the fragments of a little frog. You try to be more than human, but you only succeed in making yourself less than human."

2. Point Counter Point; Avon Publications, V-2031, pp.410-2
Lawrence's Limitations as Artist:

Mark Rampion is a fair portrait, not — as sometimes alleged — a caricature, of Lawrence; but he speaks here only for himself, not for Huxley, who did not share Lawrence's dislike for abstract knowledge and material progress. Loyalty to his genius left Lawrence no choice but to be concerned with the mysterious forces of otherness which are scattered without, and darkly concentrated within, the body and mind of man. But this pre-occupation imposed upon him, as a writer, observes Huxley, a very serious handicap. For according to his view of things, most of men's activities were more or less criminal distractions from the proper business of human living. It was a serious limitation on Lawrence's fiction that he not only refused to write of the main activities of the contemporary world, but went still further and, in some of his novels, refused even to write of human personalities in the accepted sense of the term. It is the inhuman will, call it physiology or physiology of matter, that fascinated him. He does not so much care about what a woman feels; he only cares about what she is, inhumanly, physiologically, materially. Another limiting factor of Lawrence's art, Huxley finds, is his environment. Lawrence knew by actual experience that the real writer
is essentially a separate being; but he certainly suffered his whole life from the essential solitude to which his gift condemned him. Spasmodically he tried to establish contact with the body of mankind. There were recurrent projects for colonies in remote corners of the earth; they all fell through. Like the hero of his novel, _Kangaroo_, Lawrence decided against contact. He was by nature not a leader of men, but a prophet, a voice crying in the wilderness — the wilderness of his own imagination.¹

**Primitivism vs. Civilization**

It was, thinks Huxley, the sense of being cut off that sent Lawrence on his restless wanderings round the earth. His travels were at once a flight and a search: a search for some society with which he could establish contact; a flight from the miseries and evils of the society into which he had been born. His search was as fruitless as his flight was ineffective. In _Beyond the Mexique Bay_, Huxley comments on Lawrence's enthusiasm for the natural man. Lawrence, he says, wrote eloquently and sometimes over-emphatically of the merits of man in a state of nature. But it is significant that, whenever

he lived among the primitives, he found it necessary, in spite of his principles, to refresh himself by occasional contacts with civilization. The attempt to return to primitiveness is both impractical and wrong, says Huxley. For a lily is a lily and we know that it is better than a weed. That it should fester is deplorable; but the moral to be drawn from the stench is not that lilies are bad, but that our methods of preserving them should be improved. Lawrence so much hated the misapplication of science that he thought that science itself should be abolished. But the only thing, Huxley comments, that can prevent science from being misapplied is more science of a higher quality. If primitivism is the only possible alternative to the evils of science, then one might as well commit suicide.¹

This problem — the problem of primitivism versus civilization — is discussed by Huxley once again with reference to Lawrence's The Plumed Serpent. He says that the book is an artistic failure because of some inner uncertainty of conviction. Lawrence had discovered a belief in the supremacy and the rightness of the blood. But this belief was sustained, Huxley suspects, in defiance of many contrary intuitions. Lawrence deliberately cultivated his faith in the blood; he wanted to

¹ Beyond the Mexique Bay; Chatto & Windus, 1949; pp.249-250.
believe. But doubts, it is evident, often came crowding in upon him. The questioning voices had to be shouted down. But the louder he shouted, the less was he able to convince his hearers. Art is convincing only when it springs from conviction. The advance from primitiveness to civilization, from mere blood to mind and spirit, Huxley goes on to say, is a progress whose price is fixed; there are no discounts even for the most highly talented purchasers. To Lawrence it seemed this price was too high, and he proposed that we should return the goods and ask for our money back. When man became an intellectual and spiritual being, he paid heavily for his new privileges with a treasure of intuitions and emotions. Lawrence was of the opinion that we should abandon the new privileges in return for the old. But, in practice, he found that this was psychologically impossible. Hence the shrill note in his writing.¹

**Lawrence's Personality:**

But all these limitations Huxley is ready to condone Lawrence as being part of his genius. He might be incorrect, unfair, absurd. But all this, says Huxley, did not much matter. What mattered was always Lawrence

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himself, was the fire that burned within him, that
glowed with so strange and marvellous a radiance in al-
most all he wrote. Almost every one who knew him, says
Huxley, must have felt that he was a man, somehow, of
another order, more sensitive, more highly conscious,
more capable of feeling than even the most gifted of
common men. (In the words of Mary, Mark Rampion's wife,
"he could smell people's souls ") To be with him was
to find oneself transported to one of the frontiers of
human consciousness.

It is one more proof of Huxley's normal scienti-
fic detachment as a critic that, while alive to Lawrence's
grave limitations as man and artist, and disagreeing with
his sweeping generalisations, he adores him on this side
idolatry. "He is one of the few people", he writes,
"I feel real respect and admiration for. Of most other
eminent men I have met I feel that at any rate I belong
to the same species as they do. But this man is some-
thing different and superior in kind, not degree."

1. 'D.H. Lawrence': The Olive Tree; Chatto & Windus,
1947; pp.231-32.
Dickens's Emotionalism:

It is vulgar in literature, says Huxley, to make a display of emotions which you do not naturally have, but think you ought to have. It is also vulgar to have emotions and to express them so badly, with so many protestings, that you seem to have no natural feelings, but to be merely fabricating emotions by a process of literary forgery. The really monstrous emotional vulgarity of which Dickens is guilty now and then in all his books and almost continuously in The Old Curiosity Shop, is not the emotional vulgarity of one who simulates feelings which he does not have. It is evident, on the contrary, that Dickens felt most poignantly for and with his Little Nell; that he wept over her sufferings, piously revered her goodness and exulted in her joys. He had an overflowing heart; but the trouble was that it overflowed with such curious and even rather repellent secretions. The creator of the later Pickwick and the Cheeryble Brothers, of Tom Linkwater the bachelor and

1. Charles Dickens (1812-1870), English novelist. His works did much to call attention to the various social evils and to lead to their reform.
Mr. Garland and so many other gruesome Peter Pans was obviously a little abnormal in his emotional reactions. There was something wrong with a man who could take this lachrymose and tremulous pleasure in adult infantility.

One of Dickens's most striking peculiarities is that, whenever in his writing he becomes emotional, he ceases instantly to use his intelligence. The overflowing of his heart drowns his head and even dims his eyes; for whenever Dickens is in the melting mood, he ceases to be able to see reality. His one and only one desire on these occasions is just to overflow and nothing else. Little Nelly's sufferings and death distressed him as, in real life, they would distress any normally constituted man. It was Dickens's business as a writer to recreate in terms of his art this distressing reality. He failed.

Dickens and Dostoevsky:

What a contrast Dickens presents to Dostoevsky! 1 A child, Ilusha, suffers and dies in The Brothers Karamazov. Why is this history so agonizingly moving, when the tale of Little Nell leaves us not merely cold, but derisive? Comparing the two stories, we are instantly struck by the incomparably greater richness in

1. Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoevsky (1821-1881), Russian novelist.
factual detail of Dostoevsky's creation. Feeling did not prevent him from seeing and recording, or rather re-creating. All that happened around Ilusha's deathbed he saw, unerringly. The emotion-blinded Dickens noticed practically nothing of what went on in Little Nelly's neighbourhood during the child's last days.¹

Edward Lear ²

There are few writers, says Huxley, whose works he cares to read more than once, and one of them is certainly Edward Lear. Nonsense, like poetry to which it is closely allied, like every product of the imagination, is an assertion of man's spiritual freedom in spite of all the oppression of circumstance. The existence of nonsense is the nearest approach to a proof of that unprovable article of faith: that life is worth living. It is when circumstances combine to prove that life is not worth living, says Huxley, that he turns to Lear to find comfort and refreshment.

Lear and Lewis Carroll:

Lear is a genuine poet. For what, asks Huxley, is his nonsense except the poetical imagination a little

¹. 'Vulgarity in Literature': Collected Essays; Chatto & Windus, 1960; pp.113-14.
². Edward Lear (1812-1888), English artist and humorist; author of Book of Nonsense.
twisted out of its course? Lear had the true feeling for words. Lewis Carroll wrote nonsense by exaggerating sense — a too logical logic. His coinages are intellectual. But Lear wrote nonsense that is an excess of imagination, coined words for the sake of their colour and sound alone. His is the purer nonsense, because more poetical. Change the key ever so little and the "Dong with a Luminous Nose" would be one of the most memorable romantic poems of the nineteenth century.

Lear's Limericks:

Lear's genius is at its best in the Nonsense Rhymes, or Limericks as they are called now. In them Huxley sees not only a poet and a draughtsman, but also a profound social philosopher. No study of Lear would be complete without at least a few remarks on "They" of the Nonsense Rhymes. "They" are the world, the man in the street, Public Opinion. The Nonsense Rhymes deal with the behaviour of the genius or the eccentric, and the public reaction to it. Public Opinion universally abhors eccentricity; and "They" are doubtless right. When "They" are not offensive, they content themselves with being

1. Lewis Carroll, pseudonym of Rev. Charles Lutwidge Dodgson (1832-1898); author of the famous Alice in Wonderland.
foolishly inquisitive. In these encounters the geniuses and the eccentrics often get the better of the gross and heavy-witted public. Occasionally, the men of genius adopt the policy of fleeing from the besetting crowd. For example, the Old Person of Basing (whose presence of mind, for all that he was a Symbolist, was amazing) went out to purchase the steed which he rode at full speed and escaped from the people of Basing. He chose the better part; for it is almost impossible to please the mob.¹

Edward Thomas ²

The poetry of Edward Thomas, writes Huxley, affects one morally as well as aesthetically and intellectually. It is strengthening and consoling, not because it justifies God's ways to man or whispers of reunions beyond the grave, not because it presents great moral truths in memorable numbers, but in a more subtle and very much more effective way. On minds grown weary in the midst of the intolerable turmoil of daily existence, Thomas's poetry falls with a touch of momentary rejuvenation.

¹ 'Edward Lear': On the Margin; Chatto & Windus, 1948; pp.167-72.
² Philip Edward Thomas (1878-1917), English poet and critic.
Thomas as a Nature Poet:

Thomas is genuinely a nature poet. To be a nature poet it is not enough to affirm vaguely that God made the country and man made the town, it is not enough to talk sympathetically about familiar rural objects. To be a nature poet a man must have felt profoundly and intimately those peculiar emotions which nature can inspire, and must be able to express them in such a way that his reader feels them. The real difficulty that confronts the poet of nature is that these emotions are of all emotions the most difficult to pin down and analyse, and the hardest of all to convey. Happiness of whatever sort is extraordinarily hard to analyse and describe. A man who feels an emotion that is very difficult to express is often tempted to describe it in terms of something entirely different. Thomas was too honest to do so. He never philosophizes the emotions which he feels in the presence of nature and beauty, but presents them as they stand, transmitting them directly to his readers without the interposition of an obscuring medium. Rather than attempt to explain the emotion, he presents it for what it is. Here, for example, is a passage from "Tears":

"... Strange solitude was there and silence.
A mightier charm than any in the Tower
Possessed the courtyard. They were changing guard, 
Soldiers in line, young English countrymen, 
Fair-haired and ruddy, in white tunics. Drums 
And fifes were playing 'The British Grenadiers.' 
The men, the music piercing that solitude 
And silence, told me truths I had not dreamed, 
And have forgotten since their beauty passed."

The emotion is nameless and indescribable, but the poet has intensely felt it and transmitted it to us, so that we too feel it with the same intensity. Different aspects of this same nameless emotion of quiet happiness shot with melancholy are the theme of almost all Thomas's poems. They bring to us precisely that consolation and strength which the country and solitude and leisure bring to the spirits of those long pent up in populous cities.¹

Writing elsewhere, Huxley says that Thomas's Pocket Book of Poems and Songs for the Open Air is his favourite anthology. For, out of the huge tribe of modern versifiers who have babbled of green fields, Thomas is almost the only one who is a nature poet by right of birth and the conquest of real sympathy and understanding.²

² 'Books for the Journey': Along the Road, Chatto & Windus, 1948; p.66.
Thomas's Style:

Thomas devised a curiously bare and candid verse to express with all possible simplicity and clarity his clear sensations. "This is not", as Walter de la Mare says, "a poetry that will drug or intoxicate ... It must be read slowly, as naturally as if it were prose, without emphasis." With this bare verse, devoid of any affectation, Thomas could do all that he wanted.\(^1\)

Lytton Strachey\(^2\)

Strachey and Voltaire:

If Voltaire\(^3\) had lived during the days of Lytton Strachey, Huxley writes, he would have written about the Victorian age, about life and letters at large, very much as the latter has written. Both had that lucid common sense and that sharp illuminating wit. Voltaire, however, makes mistakes in his judgments on men and things, as the sum of knowledge at the disposal of the

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2. Giles Lytton Strachey (1880-1932), English biographer and critic.
3. François Marie Arouet de Voltaire (1694-1778), French philosopher, historian and poet.
old Encyclopaedists was singularly small. He, therefore, lacks the sympathetic irony and ironical sympathy which Strachey brings to bear upon his subject. Strachey makes us like the old Queen, while we smile at her; he makes us admire the Prince Consort in spite of his priggishness. With all the untutored barbarity of their notions, Gordon and Florence Nightingale are presented to us as sympathetic figures.

It is only in the case of Dr. Arnold that Strachey permits himself to be unrestrainedly Voltairean. The irony of that description is tempered by no sympathy. To make the man appear even more ridiculous, Strachey adds to the portrait a stroke or two of his own contriving — little inventions which deepen the absurdity of the caricature. For instance, he attributes to the Doctor short logs, which are his own invention.

Strachey on Blake:

Commenting on Strachey's estimate of Blake¹ in Books and Characters, Huxley says that the essay is interesting, not because there is anything novel in the way of criticism, but because it reveals, in spite of

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¹. William Blake (1757-1827), English poet, engraver and mystic.
Strachey's admiration for the great artist in Blake, his profound antagonism towards Blake's view of life. Strachey could not swallow mysticism; he found it very difficult to understand what all this fuss about the soul signified. That is the reason why Strachey generally has refrained from dealing with any of these strange and incomprehensible characters. Blake is the only one he has tried his hand on, and the result is not entirely satisfactory. He is more at home with the Gibbons¹ and Humes² of this world, and when he is not discussing the reasonable beings, he likes to amuse himself with the eccentrics, like Mr. Creevey³ or Lady Hester Stanhope⁴. The formidable mystics he leaves severely alone. Similarly, we cannot imagine him writing about Dostoevsky or other great explorers of the soul.⁵

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1. Edward Gibbon (1737-1794), English historian.
2. David Hume (1711-1776), British philosopher, statesman and historian.
3. Thomas Creevey (1768-1838), English politician and diarist.
4. Lady Hester Stanhope (1776-1839), daughter of Charles Stanhope, English statesman and scientist; on his death she settled on Mt. Lebanon, gaining great authority over the local tribes.
5. 'The Author of Eminent Victorians': On the Margin; Chatto & Windus, 1946; pp.141-46.