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Color and light: Huxley's pathway to spiritual reality - author Aldous Huxley

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Unlike modern British writers such as T. S. Eliot and Evelyn, Waugh, Aldous Huxley did not convert to a specific religious community indigenous to Western culture; however, his entire life embraced a consciousness-expanding search for ultimate reality revealed to him through the mystical qualities of color and light. Like Eliot and Waugh, Huxley found himself regarded by many critics as unfaithful to his earlier writing after his conversion to a spiritual faith. Huxley's friend Christopher Isherwood states that Huxley's developing beliefs were "widely represented as the selling-out of a once-brilliant intellect" (Clark 303), and Donald Watt concurs that "in the minds of a majority of critics Huxley was fixed as an entertaining recorder of the frenetic 1920s who later recoiled into an aesthetically suicidal mysticism" (AH 31). (1) More recent critics still tend to divide Huxley's canon into two halves in which *Eyeless in Gaza* (1936) is sometimes referred to as his "conversion" novel (Bowering 114, Watt AH 19). Although the assumption has been weakening, what many critics mistakenly took to be an abrupt change of direction and attitude in Huxley's writing actually represents a continuation of his search for theological idealism. The writer's steps on the pathway to spiritual reality can be charted -- from his first book of poetry in 1916 to his last novel in 1962 -- through his distinctive use of the imagery of color and light. By 1936 Huxley had already started his troubled spiritual journey from despair toward mystical union with the "pure light of the void." Despite elements of wishful thinking and open doubt in Huxley's life and work, his conscious commitment to the struggle to believe in the Divine Light can be traced as early as 1922 in his first novel, *Crome Yellow*.

Confirmation of Huxley's intentional use of color is summarized in his "Natural History of Visions," a 1959 lecture posing the question, "Why are precious stones precious?" (Human 216). These brightly colored pebbles, says Huxley, are not beautifully harmonized like a work of art or a piece of music; they are

single objects which the human mind responds to in an unaccountable way. He states that one reason for our interest can be found in the *Phaedo* where Socrates speaks about the ideal world of which our world is in a sense a rather bad copy. Socrates says: "In this other earth the colors are much purer and more brilliant than they are down here. The mountains and stones have a richer gloss, a livelier transparency and intensity of hue" (217). Plato writes not merely about a metaphysical idea but also about another inner world which has landscape and beautiful regions of memory, fantasy, imagination, dreams, and-most remote -- "the world of visions" (218). Huxley explains the importance of light and color in this world of visions:

This experience of the pure light of the void is a visionary experience of what may be called the highest, the most mystical kind. On a rather lower level the lights seem to be broken up and become, so to speak, incorporated in different objects and persons and figures. It is as though this tremendous white light were somehow refracted through a prism and broken up into different coloured lights. In this lower form of vision we have the intensification of light in some way associated with the story-telling faculty, so that there are visions of great complexity and elaboration in which light plays a tremendous part, but it is not the pure white light of the great theophanies. (228-29)

Huxley deduces, therefore, that precious stones are precious because they are objects in the external world -- along with fire, stained glass, fireworks, pageantry, theatrical spectacle, Christmas-tree lights, rainbows, and sunlight -- which most nearly resemble the things that people see in the visionary world (232-35). Poets and storytellers, by giving us a mystic vision of these objects with gemlike qualities, bring us into contact with the visionary world and

potentially stimulate our own visions within us.

Mysticism, difficult to define, becomes more difficult with Huxley's encompassing of Eastern and Western mystical thought evident in *The Perennial Philosophy* (1944). The *Abingdon Dictionary of Living Religions* summarizes a variety of inclusive definitions: "an apprehension of an ultimate nonsensuous unity in all things, a direct apperception of deity, the art of union with reality, an immediate contact or union of the self with a larger-than-self." Several schemas for the stages in a mystic's experience are also listed, such as the "fivefold classification of awakening, purgation, surrender, illumination, and union" (508). Saint John of the Cross includes the "dark night of the soul" between the last two steps reflecting an experience of isolation from deity or reality just before union.(2) Many persons in search of the Divine Presence (including Huxley) commonly report experiencing the dark night of the soul more than once and at different stages of their mystic quest. The question for many observers and presumably for Huxley himself is whether they ever achieved this last stage of union with Absolute Reality.

Like most true mystics, Huxley never claims for himself mystical status; in fact, in his essay "One and Many" (1929) he states that he is "officially" an agnostic. He goes on to say that some days he believes that "God's in his heaven and all's right with the world" while on other days he believes he is living in an "uncaring universe" (Do 1-2). As late as 1962 he wrote to Reid Gardner, "I remain an agnostic who aspires to be a gnostic" (Letters 935). In another letter to Gardner a few months later, Huxley confided that he had a "sense of the world's fundamental All Rightness" (938). Huxley's inquiring mind typically juxtaposes skepticism with affirmation; the stages of his mystical experience do not fall into a doubt-free steady continuum. Eliot, the friend and poet whose themes Huxley often emulates, writes that "doubt and uncertainty are merely a variety of belief"

Julian Huxley recognized the mystical quality in his brother's personality when they were children:

From early boyhood, I knew in some intuitive way that Aldous possessed some innate superiority and moved on a different level of being from us other children. This recognition dawned when

Aldous was five and I a prep school boy of twelve: and it

remained for the rest of his life. (21)

Others also writing in Julian's memorial volume remember his perception of the mystery of the universe; for example, David Cecil reminisces that "he had a profound sense of some spiritual reality, not to be apprehended by the senses, existing beyond the confines of time and space, serene, inviolate, ineffable" (14). Whatever our conclusion to the question of whether Huxley ever achieved union with a larger-than-self, clearly this searcher for truth signals his progress toward visionary experience through color imagery in his poetry and fiction. We can best follow Huxley's spiritual journey in this way because he connects his natural affinity to color and light imagery with his progression toward inner visionary union. Thus he uses the imagery of luminous color and richly hued colored objects in a positive way to mark movement approaching unity with the Divine. Whereas a clear white light represents ideal mystical union, the bright colors that precede this ideal depict positive steps toward acceptance -- toward unity with the "one and many."

Huxley's interest in color may have intensified during an illness when he was sixteen. In 1911 while at Eton, Huxley had trouble with his eyes. The school matron, thinking the boy had pinkeye, advised him to stay in the dark -- an experience Huxley did not like (Bedford 32). Years later he wrote about his illness:

At sixteen I had a violent attack of keratitis punctato, which left me (after eighteen months of near-blindness, during which I had to depend on Braille for my reading and a guide for my walking) with one eye just capable of light perception. (Art vii)

"Light perception" remained an important ingredient in Huxley's creative life as a poet and novelist as well as in his pursuit of the mystical experience. The murky, blurred colors seen through near blindness would represent for Huxley stagnation (the symbolic dark night of the soul, if you will) as opposed to luminous colors which forecast mystical visionary experience. Even though

Huxley does not use an abundance of metaphoric imagery in his writing, (3) when he does, color imagery usually constitutes an integral part of the figurative language.

Looking at his spiritual journey chronologically, we see that in 1915 when Huxley published his first book of poetry, *The Burning Wheel* -- reminiscent of the Buddhist "wheel of becoming" -- he was already exploring the importance of light and color as it relates to mysticism in his need to find order in his grievous, chaotic world. Doubtful of every solution, however, the poems in the volume are either contrapuntal arguments between Huxley's different voices or parodies of Wordsworth's reassurance that unity with God is possible. Looking back from a perspective of many years, Huxley calls this earlier self a "Pyrrhonic aesthete" (one who doubts everything) (*Brave* viii). This early poetry, deliberately written in many voices, moves toward parody and satire. In "Darkness" Huxley presents the dichotomy between desired union with God and despair in terms of a brilliant, blinding vision and a wounded, twisted spirit. The darkness in the first stanza (which the speaker has never known) is an experience of dazzling beauty:

My close-walled soul has never known

That innermost darkness, dazzling sight,

Like the blind point, whence the visions spring

In the core of the gazer's chrysolite....

The mystic darkness that laps Cod's throne

In a splendour beyond imagining,

So passing bright.

The "mystic darkness" (in the language of Christian mysticism) "blinds" the human mind due to the brilliance of God's light. The second stanza, however, counterpoints with mean-spirited darkness "of lust and avarice, / Of the crippled body and the crooked heart" (*Collected* 17) -- darkness with which the speaker is all too well acquainted.

Even though the poet gives no hint that the speaker's spiritual quest can be fulfilled, images of light, darkness, and color describe the glorious sight in the first stanza. "Chrysolite," a mineral in the form of a gemlike, gold-colored stone, resides in the center ("core") of the stanza surrounded by images of darkness which are actually images of the blinding brilliance of God. The darkness in the second stanza remains "static" and "rather undeveloped," according to Donald Watt, but he also agrees that it expresses Huxley's enduring theme of "the need for some guiding light in the dark night of the soul" (Meditative" 116-17).

The seeds of Huxley's developing ideas about the levels of vision in the external world also emerge in a compatible poem in *The Burning Wheel*. In "Two Realities" "I," possibly the poet, sees life in its brilliant colors -- "A waggon passed with scarlet wheels / And a yellow body, shining new" and feels a sense of the beauty of life. The speaker becomes disillusioned, however, when he realizes that his companion's vision differs -- the companion sees "a child that was kicking an obscene / Brown ordure with his feet" (Collected 20). The poet feels the futility of life because our limitations of perception imprison us. (4) The bright, shining colors of scarlet and yellow give hope because, unaccountably, the mind responds to them while the "obscene / Brown ordure," which has no brightness, represents life in a confused, muddled world of despair. Huxley (the Pyrrhonic aesthete) in modernist counterpoint juxtaposes both views but cannot choose.

In *Defeat of Youth* (1918) several poems introduce specific connections between soothing thoughts and the generic term "color." In "Stanzas," for example, the speaker would like to live in a beautiful world free from pain "like a pure angel, thinking colour and form / ... Spilling my love like sunlight, golden and warm / On noonday flowers" (73). "Poem" begins: "Books and a coloured skein of thoughts were mine; / And magic words lay ripening in my soul" (73). Frequently used images such as "Coloured skein" and "Coloured strands" symbolize for Huxley the band or spectrum of colors (like those in the rainbow) which develop from a white light after passing through a prism. These skeins and strands have the potential to recombine into white light -- the pure white light of the void.

"Scenes of the Mind" introduces ideas developed further in later novels, such as the potential for making bright colors out of dull lead (symbolically the potential for visions of ecstatic experience as opposed to deathlike paralysis in the disordered waste land of modern society) and the calm pastoral hush of

"crystal silence" where in contented evenings:

I held a wealth of coloured strands,

Shimmering plaits of silk and skeins

Of soft bright wool. Each colour drains

New life at the lamp's round pool of Gold. (74)

The optical illusion of the "pool of Gold" from the lamp's light enlivens the color in the spectrum of strands, plaits, and skeins. Miraculous transformation takes place within the mind when

Beauty or sudden love has shined

And wakened colour in what was dead

And turned to gold the sullen lead. (75)

The poet equates non-specific color citations with purity and enchanting supernatural effects of inner quiet; moreover, the "dead" "sullen lead" which "turned to gold" describes the process of developing the paint pigment, chrome yellow. This compound of chromic acid and lead becomes golden yellow in its purest hue. In idyllic moments in "Scenes of the Mind," a Wordsworthian God is seen in the waterfall or in the flame of a fire. However, in swift counterpoint the scene freezes into stone, causing "the death of gems" (75). Although Huxley cannot ultimately accept these color-filled scenes of the mind as reality, they demonstrate the importance of color to the poet's emerging mystical vision.

Leda (1920) continues with poetry of disillusionment, and Huxley uses the myth of Leda and Jove as a framework for shaping the world's chaos and perversion. In "Leda" Huxley describes the young queen in terms of ironical perfection. She undresses to become "dazzingly naked" (85) while bathing with her maidens. "The sun's golden heat" clothes her "in softest flame" (94). This scene of carefree innocence, however, fills Jove with lust; and with help from another god he schemes to rape her. Jove, disguised as a "dazzling white" swan, feigns attack by "an eagle, tawny and black" (95). This "colorless" pair's destructive plot results in a pointless, sensuous seduction of Leda. Now instead

of playing in the light of joyful innocence, she must veil her body "from the shame / Of naked light and the sun's noonday flame" (98). Offering no hope for deliverance from the negation of this spiritually barren world, the poet emphasizes colorlessness in Leda.

Huxley turned to short stories, novels, and essays during the twenties. His first novel, *Crome Yellow*, takes its name from the country house named Crome where the novel's house party gathers but more importantly from "chrome yellow," the compound of substances used as pigment in paints ranging in hue from light greenish yellow to reddish medium yellow. Chrome yellow, one of the chrome colors noted for its clearness and brilliance, reflects golden yellow in its purest hue; thus, the luminescence of both chrome yellow and the house party at Crome has the potential to captivate with its dazzling brilliance. The creative guests (including a writer, a poet, an artist, and a philosopher) arrive bringing bright promise of sparkling conversation; they fall short of their promise, however, because they cling only to their own pet topics.

Crome Yellow centers around the young poet Denis Stone, who, as his name implies, has the opportunity of being a "sparkling stone" with a bright and colorful poetic future of depth and intensity and a warm future full of love. Just as the fire in "Scenes of the Mind" freezes into the dullness of visually impenetrable stone and in "Stanzas" hardens into "chiselled stone" (Collected 73), Denis Stone remains colorless and opaque -- not a precious gem. Through color imagery early in the novel we get a hint of the young poet's potential for a meaningful life and of his ultimate failure to develop that potential. Huxley describes Denis (reminiscent of Eliot's Prufrock trying to decide whether to wear his white flannel trousers robed) on his first morning at the Wimbush estate where he has joined a house party:

Denis woke up next morning to find the sun shining, the sky serene. He decided to wear white flannel trousers -- white flannel trousers and a black jacket, with a silk shirt and his new peach-colored tie. And what shoes? White was the obvious choice, but there was something rather pleasing about the notion

of black patent leather. . . . His half might have been more golden, he reflected. As it was, its yellowness had the hint of a greenish tinge in it. (14)

Although he selects rather color-free attire, Denis's white flannel trousers, silk shirt, peach-colored tie, and black patent-leather shoes have a certain sparkle and gloss. His hair (yellow with green tinges -- a hue of chrome yellow), however, suggests dullness and loss of purity in color. This streaked mixture of yellow and green, which "might have been more golden" -- the purest hue of chrome yellow -- symbolically foreshadows Denis's lack of courage to declare his love and to stimulate his own inner poetic vision.

The poet evades reality and writes insipid Georgian verse rather than examining his life and thereby creating ironic, satirical poetry. In addition to this professional failure, Denis also fails to pursue his love for Anne Wimbush. For one brief mystical moment, however, he comes in contact with his feelings and takes positive action. The scene occurs at night in the garden where Denis assists Anne after she falls and hurts herself:

He felt in his pockets for the match-box. The light spurted and then grew steady. Magically, a little universe had been created, a world of colours and forms -- Anne's face, the shimmering orange of her dress, her white, bare arms, a patch of green turf -- and round about a darkness that had become solid and utterly blind. (82)

This vision of "colours and forms" give Denis self-confidence, and instinctively he begins to comfort and to kiss the woman he loves. For once the young poet discards his Prufrockian inertia and acts on honest emotions. The flaming match goes out, however, and the vision (Huxley's frequent sight-enhancing image of an optical illusion provided by a temporary circle of light) disappears. The inept lover's boastful offer to carry Anne back to the house ends in

humiliation as he staggers out of control; again he becomes the object of laughter. Discouraged at the way others perceive him, Denis decides to end his holiday at Crome on the subterfuge of urgent family business; he feels as if he is planning his funeral. Denis mistakenly believes he has acted decisively (albeit unwisely), but his inability to face his feelings with integrity has only served to deepen his paralysis.

The artists, Gombauld, rivals Denis for Anne's attention and for artistic veracity. Huxley's imagery of color and light in Gombauld's painting holds the most promise for mystical vision at Crome; in fact, Denis tell Anne, "I have to say that art is the process by which one reconstructs the divine reality out of chaos" (18). Denis prostitutes his art while Gombauld strives to complete his creative vision. Gombauld's half-finished picture inspired by Caravaggio involves a man fallen from a horse:

A white, relentless light poured down from a point in the right foreground. The beast, the fallen man, were sharply illuminated; round them, beyond and behind them, was the night. They were alone in the darkness, a universe in themselves. . . . A central gulf of darkness surrounded by luminous forms. (53)

According to Sir Kenneth Clark, the picture being imitated is Caravaggio's "Conversion of St. Paul" (Julian Huxley, Aldous Huxley 15-18) --a painting which coincides with Huxley's spiritual quest. Art critic John Canaday notes:

Caravaggio dramatized otherwise realistic scenes by means of brilliant artificial light, sometimes from a miraculous source. His most spectacular use of this device [is] The Conversion of Saint Paul.... The light itself is a symbol of spiritual transfiguration -- and is visible only to Saul. (70-71)

This pure, luminous form of chrome yellow (amber light seen as crystal white in its piercing brilliance) signifies the pure light of heaven -- a vision which only Saul has seen. Sanford Marovitz misses the significance of Huxley's use of Caravaggio's painting in Crome Yellow when he writes that the painting "has little if any relation to the rest of the novel" (174). In fact, Huxley desperately desires this "spiritual transfiguration," but, like Gombauld, he wonders about his ability to free himself from the despair of the world. How would he know if he had seen the mystical vision of God? Gombauld looks at his canvas and thinks: "But that something he was after, that something that would be so terrific if only he could catch it -- had he caught it? Would he ever catch it?" (Crome 53)

Not only was Huxley struggling with the mysticism of spiritual reality, he was also struggling with the question of Western versus Eastern mysticism. One important scene from the novel reveals, through form, light, and color, his attraction to both religious disciplines. As Denis and Anne take a morning tour of the grounds at Crome, Denis sees:

That part of the garden that sloped down from the foot of the terrace to the pool had a beauty which did not depend on colour so much as on forms. It was as beautiful by moonlight as in the sun.

The silver of water, the dark shapes of yew and ilex trees remained, at all hours and seasons, the dominant features of the scene. It was a landscape in black and white. For colour there was the flower-garden; it lay to one side of the pool, separated from it by a huge Babylonian wall of yews. You passed through a tunnel in the hedge, you opened a wicket in a wall, and you found yourself, startlingly and suddenly, in the world of colour. The July borders blazed and flared under the sun. Within its high brick walls the garden was like

a great tank of warmth and perfume and colour. Denis held open the little iron gate for his companions. "It's like passing from a cloister into an oriental palace," he said. (16)

The black and white landscape, equally beautiful by moonlight as by sunlight, depends on forms for its beauty. Huxley compares this staid garden to a cloister -- a place devoted to religious seclusion such as a monastery. Western monastic life depends on forms for its beauty: mass, liturgical offices, chanting the Psalms. The holy "hours and seasons" provide the dominant forms for observance. The "huge Babylonian wall of yews" separating the formal garden from the flower garden has to be negotiated through tunnels and a wicket in the wall. Babylon, the place of exile and captivity for the people of Israel and Judah, also symbolizes the modern, corrupt, warring world represented as the realm of resistance to God. The tunnel in the hedge, akin to the black tunnels where the mole creeps in Huxley's poem "Mole" and the dim tunnels in "The Reef" where the sightless fish swim, represent restraint, chaos, and uncertainty. Once through the mazy tunnels formed by poisonous yew trees one emerges in a flower garden of warmth, perfume, and color. This bright "oriental palace" of Eastern mysticism stirred the poorly sighted Huxley who, nevertheless, remained unconvinced that he could find his way through the tunnel to mystical union.

Huxley continues his search for spiritual belief in *Antic Hay* (1923), where Theodore Gumbriel, Jr., just like Denis Stone, loses his opportunity for love and happiness through indecision. Gumbriel takes Emily to see the flowers at Kew Gardens, where he had been happy as a child with his mother. He had drawn maps of the gardens "and coloured them elaborately with different coloured inks to show where the different flowers grew" (161). Now the green grass "glowed in the sunlight, as if it were lighted from inside" (163), and the trees make a dark shadow against the sky or sometimes a filtered pattern with moving light shining through. Gumbriel meditatively compares this outward quiet of grass and trees with an inward quiet which dispels the frenetic noise of factories, jazz bands, and newspaper vendors. Once touched by this equally beautiful and terrifying "crystal quiet" (163), he finds all the noise of daily activity in this world unimportant. "One would have to begin living arduously in the quiet, arduously in some strange unheard-of manner" (164). This quiet crystal world of mystical contemplation seems native to Emily, who tells

Gumbril: "Being happy is rather melancholy -- like the most beautiful landscape, like those trees and the grass and the clouds and the sunshine today" (170). They attend a symphony concert; then, filled with happiness, they go to Gumbril's rooms, where they spend a tender night in the enchanting atmosphere of the lights of two candles burning -- "two shining eyes of flame" (171). This image is used similarly in Huxley's poem "By the Fire" in *The Defeat of Youth*. "And candles watch with tireless eyes" (Collected 63) two lovers who sit contentedly by the fire until one of them begins to think of the world outside and its problems. The candles only temporarily push back the gloom.

The "eyes" of the candles and the "crystal silence," like that in Huxley's poem "Scenes of the Mind," do not last. The enchantment shatters because Gumbril is frightened by this contemplative inner world of quiet; therefore he sabotages his relationship with Emily by allowing his drunken friends to draw him back into their fellowship. He even entertains his friends by revealing intimate details of Emily's life. Gumbril delays his departure for his appointment in the country with her. When he finally makes his journey, he finds the cottage empty. Gumbril's indecision smashes any possibility of entering the (contrapuntally both feared and desired) symbolic "crystal silence" of visionary experience.

Using Eliot's images, Huxley writes, "Aridly, the desiccated waste extended" (212). Gumbril's friends, involved in sordid affairs, five lives of desperation while he continues to carouse with Myra Viveash. They spend one night endlessly circling the West End in a taxi looking for an end to boredom. Each time they crisscross London, they pass through Piccadilly Circus with its garish neon lights creating a St. Vitus's dance of animated pictures. This satirical perversion of the sanctity of colors in the world of visionary experience reinforces other symbols of meaningless activity: the blinking neon lights create the illusion of motion in their circular patterns; the antic-hay ring dance moves circularly to the music of Pan; Myra and Gumbril circle London aimlessly; Shearwater pedals his stationary bicycle mile after mile. In a parody of the Buddhist wheel of life, death, and rebirth, this pointless activity precludes any inner growth in -- what Eliot would later call "the still point of the turning world" -- the crystal quiet of the soul.

In *Those Barren Leaves* (1925) mystical solitude finally emerges as a feasible alternative to the frantic circular emptiness of modern life. Calamy, a house-party guest (similar to those in *Crome Yellow*), contemplates the mystery of the

universe. He wishes to fix his spirit on the secret of the other world until "its symbols cease to be opaque and the light filters through from beyond" (267). During a sensual night with Mary Thriplow, Calamy performs a basic exercise of mystical contemplation. In the dark bedroom he holds his opened hand against a window with the starlit night shining through and ponders "all the different ways in which these five fingers ... have reality and exist" (340). He believes that if he had the freedom to concentrate on his fingers for a period of time (even months) he might cut "right through the mystery and really get at something -- some kind of truth, some explanation" (340). In *The Perennial Philosophy* Huxley writes that many Eastern and Western spiritual teachers recommend intense concentration on an image or idea. Such an exercise is helpful when it results in "mental stillness, such a silence of intellect, will and feeling, that the divine Word can be uttered within the soul" (32).

In the final scene of the book a melancholy yet determined Calamy withdraws from the world to begin his silent, contemplative quest for union with absolute reality. Huxley directly links Calamy's vision of clear color and sparkle with the inner world of mystical experience:

The cottage was in the shadow now. Looking up the slope he could see a clump of trees still glittering as though prepared for a festival above the rising flood of darkness. And at the head of the valley, like an immense precious stone, glowing with its cold inward fire, the limestone crags reached up through the clouds into the pale sky. Perhaps he had been a fool, thought Calamy.

But looking at that shining peak, he was somehow reassured. (379-80)

The trees "glittering as though prepared for a festival" and the limestone crags "like an immense precious stone, glowing with its cold inward fire" represent those brilliantly colored objects in the external world which Huxley believes lead people to mystical experiences in the visionary world. Huxley's "cold

inward fire" does not burn with heat; instead, it gives forth a glow, a light from within, a nimbus illuminating the hope that life can be ordered through the discipline of mind and body in meditation. Calamy has seen the "shining peak" and although it may not be the "pure light of the void" (Perennial 32) he feels "reassured." From his first book of poetry, Huxley has used imagery of color and light to suggest a quest for union with the infinite, but until now he has been unable to surrender himself to the possibilities of mystical illumination.

By 1928 Huxley (excessively influenced by the "life force" philosophy of D. H. Lawrence represented by Rampion in Point Counter Point) temporarily neglects the literary expression of his mystical vision, seen through images of color and light, in order to satirize perverted sexual relationships and perverted scientific reason. Jerome Meckier states that "It is possible to assume that under the impact of renewed acquaintanceship with Lawrence, Huxley, in 1926, makes an about face from the semi-mystical conclusions Calamy comes to at the end of Those Barren Leaves" (Aldous Huxley 80-81). This assumption is borne out by the absence of familiar imagery of color and light.

Huxley returned to poetry at the end of the decade in two short volumes: Arabia Infelix (1929) and The Cicadas (1931). For Huxley spiritual crises scar these years, and poem after poem reflects the torment of his soul. As Meckier emphasizes, no longer can Huxley's persona of the sceptical "Pyrrhonic aesthete" contentedly expose the "apparent meaninglessness of modern, that is, post-war life" (Aldous Huxley 210). Huxley strives in these poems to overcome his own despair, i.e., his own dark night of the soul, and reach out to the visionary world signified by pure, wondrous color. In "The Yellow Mustard," the final poem in Huxley's 1931 collection, Huxley describes the shadowy mustard fields which are concealed by low clouds and entombed by "Grey mountain-heaps of slag and stone" (Collected 165). These emblems of the poet's mind "dark with repinings" turn to "glory," however, when the clouds open and a "conquering ray" reveals the pure chrome yellow of the glittering mustard field:

And touched, transfiguringly bright

In that dull plain, one luminous field;

And there the miracle of light

Lay goldenly revealed.

Although the external world offers no consolation -- "despair / Hung dark, without one rift of blue" -- there "sleeps" within each one of us "some grain of mustard seed" (166). By alluding to these synoptic Gospel references to the power of faith and the Kingdom of God within each human being, Huxley emphasizes that we must waken this hallowed core of our existence (the ground of our being) which is revealed through the mystical power of color and light.

Brave New World (1932) explores colorlessness, the polar opposite of positive mystical color imagery. This dystopian novel, continuing to reflect Huxley's spiritual crisis, portrays a strictly controlled society which has scientifically eliminated individuality. "Happiness" is programmed through sexual freedom and a drug (soma) which creates feelings of euphoria. Scent and color organs provide music and momentary pictures on the ceiling such as an artificial tropical sunset followed by a bogus sunrise (51). In this synthetic world Huxley eschews bright primary color imagery in favor of dull, dark hues which border on colorlessness. To identify the stereotyped levels of society, for example, Deltas wear khaki, Epsilons (genetically manipulated to be stupid) wear black, hard working Alphas wear grey, upper-caste Gammas wear green, and so on. These drab colors, far from translucent or glossy, serve utilitarian purposes; they in no way lead to creativity outside of this genetically controlled community. Religious thought becomes virtually impossible in a society that forbids being alone and seeking silence. A note of affirmation resides in the novel, however, because Helmholtz Watson defies the laws and his genetic conditioning and writes a poem which celebrates silence and acclaims a spiritual "presence."

Huxley named Helmholtz Watson, at least in part, for Hermann Ludwig Ferdinand Von Helmholtz (1821-1894) the noted German physiologist, psychologist, mathematician, and physicist (Meckier "Our Ford" 47).(5) This modern Renaissance man wrote what is probably the most important work on the physics and physiology of vision. His three-volume Physiological Optics (1856-1866) includes his conception of the structure and action of color perception and how light illumination changes the vision. Von Helmholtz also invented the ophthalmoscope, an optical instrument for examining and focusing light on the interior of the eye. This brilliant scientist and color theorist perfectly symbolizes his namesake Helmholtz Watson, who has a mental excess which makes him aware of his individuality and sets him apart from other people. A lecturer at the college of emotional engineering, Watson

ably invents phrases, but he wants to write penetrating ones which look beneath surface reality. Just as the scientist Von Helmholtz invented an instrument for looking into the interior of the eye in an effort to understand the effects of color and light on one's vision, Huxley's *Helmholtz Watson* wants to invent brilliantly colored phrases which look into one's soul to a world of mystical vision. The authorities exile this poet and a fellow maverick to the Falkland Islands, where they can think or write poetry amid the silence of wind and storm. Watson will survive and continue his creative development because the "spiritual presence" in his poetry triggers theocentric stirrings within him. His retreat from the brave new world's soma-controlled society will free him to pursue mystical oneness -- the same goal Huxley desires for his own life.

Eyeless in Gaza (1936), rather than a "conversion" novel, acts as a summation of Huxley's spiritual journey up to this point. It functions as a *Bildungsroman* not only of Huxley's development from adolescence to maturity but also of the evolution of his mystical vision seen in the color and light imagery in his work. The title refers to the Israelite, Samson (solar or sun's man), who became blinded by vanity and thereupon revealed the secret of his strength. Having failed to rely upon the Lord, Samson lost his legendary power, allowing his Philistine captors to put out his eyes. Samson remains eyeless in Gaza until he again calls upon the Lord for strength. Feeling his strength and his divine purpose returning, he receives second sight and pulls down the Philistine temple upon himself and his captors. Huxley's play on sight, loss of sight, insight, and second-sight embraces not only the biblical story of Samson but also Milton's interpretation of this story in *Samson Agonistes*, Milton's own blindness, and Huxley's near-blindness. By the end of the novel, the synthesis of the spiritual journeys of author and protagonist culminates in the guise of Dr. Miller (modeled after Huxley's friend Gerald Heard, among others), who instructs Anthony Beavis in mystical meditation.

In adolescence young Anthony travels on a train with his father and uncle to Lollingdon for his mother's funeral service. Anthony has a mystical reverie; the wheels of the train begin to chant "dead-a-dead-a-dead," and he cannot keep the refrain from shouting in his head, "for ever." Anthony begins to cry and has to wipe his eyes. Then, "luminous under the sun, the world before him was like one vast and intricate jewel. The elms had withered to a pale gold. Huge above the fields, and motionless, they seemed to be meditating in the crystal light of the morning" (18). As in his first book of poetry, Huxley parodies Wordsworth's philosophy found in "Tintern Abbey" and *The Prelude*. Whereas Wordsworth

describes his childhood as a time of unconscious mystical oneness with the universe, Huxley satirically counterpoints Anthony's paradisiacal reveries with intrusive images of death. The mixture of nightmare imagery with the glowing hopefulness of light continues as the three mourners make their way to the burial plot. "The old horse drew them; slowly along lanes, into the heart of the great autumnal jewel of gold and crystal, and stopped at last at the very core of it. In the sunshine, the church tower was like grey amber" (21). But as they move to the church, Anthony becomes trapped like a dwarf in the middle of a black well of adults. It was as though "Their blackness hemmed him in, obscured the sky, eclipsed the amber tower and the trees.... This black well was dark with the concentrated horror of death. There was no escape. His sobs broke out uncontrollably" (23-24). Although Anthony, like the child in "Tintern Abbey" and *The Prelude*, has an affinity for supernatural beauty in his mystical reverie, fragmentation and grief emerge instead of oneness and peace.

Anthony (now at Oxford) and his friend Brian Foxe have a theological-debate about mystical books such as *The Way of Perfection*. Anthony admits that he believes "in the fundamental metaphysical theory of mysticism" (81), but this is known truth and not experienced truth. At a party that evening, drunk on champagne, Anthony suddenly sees the world in a new light:

The apples and oranges in the silver bowl were like enormous gems. Each glass under the candles, contained, not wine, but a great yellow beryl, solid and translucent. The roses had the glossy texture of satin and the shining hardness and distinctness of form belonging, to metal or glass. Even sound was frozen and crystalline. (90)

This vision resonates with Huxley's earlier writing. The gemlike colors of the apples and oranges trigger recollections of the shimmering orange of Anne's face in Denis's match light in *Crome Yellow*. The wine transformed into "yellow beryl" in the light of the candles recalls the shining eyes of candle flame in Gumbril's room in *Antic Hay*. Although Anthony is opening his mind to new ideas through his reading at Oxford, it is only while in a drunken reverie that he

feels free enough to experience these ideas. Sober again, Anthony mirrors societal mores, and participates in the "alien element" by repeatedly betraying his friend Brian; his betrayal of the confidences of Brian's fiancée (similar to Gumbril's betrayal of Emily in *Antic Hay*) results in Brian's suicide.

A most unusual incident in 1933 catapults Anthony into a search for meaning in his life. He and his lover, Helen Amberley (her last name a variant of the color amber -- a translucent yellow, one of the chrome-yellow hues used in stage lighting to simulate sunlight), sunbathing on the flat roof of Anthony's house, are spattered by the bright red blood of a dog dropped from an airplane. The dried blood quickly turns dull brown, and this distributing baptism leads first Helen and finally Anthony to the realization that their purely physical relationship has no future. They must search for detachment from ego, not detachment from duty. Anthony finds a way to serve others, and in so doing internalizes what he already knows mentally -- the "Unity of mankind, unity of all life, all being even" (417). A mystical vision follows, and Huxley uses imagery of light and dark to describe it. Anthony's mind passes from "stormy light" to "dark peace" -- from "widening darkness into another light" (422). The intensity and profundity of peace grow until

the final consummation, the ultimate light that is the source and substance of all things, source of the darkness, the void, the submarine night of living calm; source finally of the waves and the frenzy of the spray-forgotten now. For now there is only the darkness expanding and deepening, into light; there is only this final peace, this consciousness of being no more separate, this illumination. (423)

In this way *Eyeless in Gaza* emerges as a pivotal novel in which Huxley sums up the movement in his life and in his writing toward mystical vision and union with God using both satire and the illumination of the pure light of the void to mark his progress.

In *After Many a Summer Dies the Swan* (1939), Huxley satirizes Californian excess. Like Miller in *Eyeless in Gaza*, Mr. Propter embodies the Eastern mystical philosophy of Gerald Heard. Although Huxley primarily assigns to Propter the rather static role of lecturer and conscience to the sinful surrounding community, Huxley does write one scene of Propter deep in mystical contemplation which simulates Huxley's own periods of meditation. Propter, an advocate for migrant workers, lives in a white bungalow where he often meditates on a bench under a eucalyptus tree (noted for its healing oil, strength, and shelter) on questions such as "What is man?" and "What is God?" In a scene reminiscent of Gautama Buddha meditating under the Bo tree -- tree of enlightenment or wisdom -- in the Buddhist tradition, Propter "had come to this bench under the eucalyptus tree in order to recollect himself, in order to realize for a moment the existence of that other consciousness . . . that free, pure power greater than his own" (76-77).

He looked again at the mountains, at the pale sky between the leaves, at the soft russet pinks and purples and greys of the eucalyptus trunks; then shut his eyes once more.

"A nothingness surrounded by God, indigent of God, capable of God and filled with God if man so desires." And what is God? . . . For little by little these thoughts and wishes and feelings had settled like a muddy sediment in a jar of water, and as they settled, his vigilance was free to transform itself into a kind of effortless unattached awareness, at once intense and still, alert and passive. . . . The busy nothingness of his being experienced itself as transcended in the felt capacity for peace and purity, for the withdrawal from revulsions and desires, for

the blissful freedom from personality. (77-78)

Even though Huxley introduces Propter's mystical state using colors of the "pale sky" and the "pinks and purples and greys of the eucalyptus trunks," the ecstatic experience itself is described in the language used ecumenically by mystics. In his enthusiasm for the universal language of mystical experience -- especially the Vedantist philosophy promoted by Heard -- Huxley uses less color imagery related to mystical union. However, imagery of color and light reemerges prominently in *Time Must Have a Stop* (1944).

Softer, yet still luminous and transparent colors in *Time Must Have a Stop* signal progress on the journey to the crystal, pure white light of spiritual union with the Divine. The color blue emerges as a passive/aggressive "hound of heaven" spiritual entity. The color is associated not only with the spiritual mystic Bruno Rontini, but also with the mystical presence that will not let Eustace Barnack rest after his death. As Huxley draws his readers deeper into a mystical experience of the clear pure light, the bright gemlike colors recede in favor of a more tranquil yet piercing blue.

In his quest for spiritual synthesis, Huxley offers several spiritual models in various stages of their religious journeys in *Time Must Have a Stop*: Bruno Rontini, the mystic; Eustace Barnack, the spiritual resister; and Sebastian Barnack, the poet in the process of achieving mystical union. Two of these models appear in earlier novels, for example, the mystic depicted by Miller (*Eyeless*) and Propter (*After*) and the searching poet depicted by Calamy (*Those*) and Beavis (*Eyeless*). The spiritual resister, however, who is aware of and troubled by the mystical dimension and yet struggles to maintain his ego and his identity, adds a new dimension to Huxley's characters.

Bruno Rontini, a second-hand bookshop owner who basks in a "crystal silence" even in the midst of city noises, has a great compassion for Eustace. Huxley describes Bruno's remarks to Eustace about the freedom of the will to resist spirituality:

People had been able to say no even to Filippo Neri and Francois

de Sales, even to the Christ and the Buddha. As he named them

to himself, the little flame in his heart seemed to expand, as it

were and aspire, until it touched that other light beyond it and within, and for a moment it was still in the timeless intensity of a yearning that was also consummation.(96)

This sparkling "little flame" within Bruno, which expands at the thought of Christ and the Buddha, brings him into contact with the visionary world and stimulates visions of "that other light." He urges Eustace to drop his resistance and experience this same paradoxical yearning/consummation. Because of the energy expended in Bruno's concern for the salvation of others, he always looks physically tired and emaciated; however, there is a peace and gaiety about him, and his eyes are always "blue and bright" (91). When Sebastian meets Bruno he notices "the eyes were blue and very bright. Blue fires in bone-cups" (211). Subsequently, when Sebastian sees Bruno after his ten years of imprisonment, Bruno is very ill, but "the blue bright eyes were full of joy, alive with an intense and yet somehow disinterested tenderness" (253). The blue here is probably related to Christian symbolism, which somewhat arbitrarily has been taken "to represent eternity, faith, fidelity, loyalty, truth and spotless reputation" (Hulme 29).

As Eustace Barnack lies dying on a dark bathroom floor, he has a faint awareness of God or what he always derisively refers to as the Gaseous Vertebrate. This awareness turns into a bright light bringing with it an eternity of joy (125-26). Later, in the Bardo state (that intermediate stage between this world and rebirth into another incarnation), he feels himself in contact with Bruno, and the overpowering light becomes "tenderly blue" (154). Eustace resists the seductive power of the blue light:

Out there, in here, the silence shone with a blue imploring tenderness. But none of that, none of that! The light was always his enemy. Always, whether it was blue or white, pink or pea green. He was shaken by another long, harrowing convulsion of derision.(207)

Eustace will not let himself be fooled by the special color of the light because all light threatens to engulf him. The light's liveliness and transparency lead to the pure white light of the void. Later, "He knew what the light was up to. He knew what that blue tenderness of silence was beseeching him to do" (209). In Eustace's last thoughts from his purgatorial/Bardo Thodol existence, he still resists salvation/reincarnation: "But there was the light again, the shining of the silence. None of that, none of that. Firmly and with decision, he averted his attention" (237).

Huxley introduces Eustace's nephew, Sebastian Barnack, into the novel as a self-centered, baby-faced adolescent who writes poetry. Bruno initiates Sebastian's spiritual journey because the young poet senses the depth of the bookseller's mystical spirituality. When Sebastian goes to see Bruno for the first time after his uncle's death, he notices "a square of sunlight, glowing like a huge ruby on the tiled floor" (211). This combination of color and light provides Bruno with the only luxury he desires. At the end of that visit Bruno advises Sebastian to "Try to be more honest, to think less of himself. To live with people and real events and not so exclusively with words" (227). On the way home, Sebastian composes the last verse recorded in the novel:

Walking on Grape Nuts and imagination

Among recollected crucifixion and these jewels

Of horizontal sunlight. (227)

Through the incandescent brilliance of the "jewels" and the "sunlight," Sebastian, the young poet, begins his long spiritual journey toward salvation and the "world of visions." Eventually he stops writing poetry altogether to devote himself to the completion of Bruno Rontini's philosophical and spiritual writings -- the Minimum Working Hypothesis -- a prototype for Huxley's Perennial Philosophy, published the following year.

Huxley's efforts to maintain his vision were tested in *Ape and Essence* (1948) which reflects Huxley's anguish over World War II and its aftermath. In the frame story a producer looks for the author of a discarded Hollywood movie script. The narrator for this frame story observes the spectacular view as he and the producer drive through the desert:

Out there, on the floor of the desert, there had been a noiseless, but almost explosive transformation. The clouds had shifted and the sun was now shining on the nearest of those abrupt and jagged buttes, which rose so inexplicably, like islands, out of the enormous plain. A moment before they had been black and dead. Now suddenly they came to life between a shadowed foreground and a background of cloudy darkness. They shone as if with their own incandescence. (17-18)

Reflecting Huxley's own mystical experience in his beloved California desert, a scene (or person) which had seemed "black and dead" could suddenly be transformed by the sun bursting through the clouds (or an illumination within the soul). In the midst of war and devastation, Huxley perceived that the land (or human spirit) could suddenly shine with the intensity and brilliance found in the love of God -- a luminous island surrounded by darkness.

Ape and Essence, the fantasy of nightmare existence following a thermonuclear holocaust, describes scavenging barbarians digging up California's famous cemetery plots in the ruins of suburban Los Angeles to plunder the expensively appointed caskets. The narrator describes the way the world used to look: "The sea, the bright planet, the boundless crystal of the sky -- surely you remember them!" (38). War has produced "the black serrated shape of a rocky island" (38), "stagnant plague-fog," and "a wreath of pus-colored vapor" (53).

The hero of the movie script, botanist Dr. Alfred Poole, is called "Stagnant Poole" (55) by his students and colleagues because he has not lived up to his potential. "It is as though he lived behind plate glass, could see and be seen, but never establish contact" (55). When he does make contact with another captive he finds love, and dares to plan an escape from the baboons who control them. Images of color and light relating to mystical vision persist in this satire through the mystical poetry of Shelley, a volume of whose poems Poole rescued from the furnace in much the same way that this script has been rescued.

Shelley's poetry reveals to the two lovers (who have set themselves free) the meaning of the soul:

An image of some bright Eternity,

A shadow of some golden dream; a Splendor

Leaving the third sphere pilotless; a tender

Reflection of the eternal Moon of Love.(164)

After escaping from their captors, Poole quotes Shelley again:

That Light whose smile kindles the Universe ...

Burns bright or dim, as each are mirrors of

The fire for which all thirst, now beams on me

Consuming the last clouds of cold mortality.(204)

Sitting beside the grave of their dramatist creator, these two people -- an island in the midst of chaos -- dare to believe in the "Light."

Huxley wrote his next novelette, *The Genius and the Goddess* (1955), during the months of his wife's failing health; she died only four months after the book was finished. Although Huxley confided that he modeled the goddess, Katy, after Frieda Lawrence and her symbiotic relationship with her genius husband, D. H. Lawrence (Letters 831), Huxley's fatalistic attitude in the novel about the senselessness of suffering mirrors his personal sorrow. Spiritual grace found in the mystical imagery of light and color in this work combines with animal grace and human grace to form "The Unknown Quantity" needed to know oneself.

The narrator, John Rivers, explains:

"At one end of the spectrum it's pure spirit, it's the Clear Light of

the Void; and at the other end it's instinct, it's health, it's the

perfect functioning of an organism that's infallible so long as we

don't interfere with it; and somewhere between the two extremes

is what St. Paul called `Christ' the divine made human."(99)

Although Rivers gains spiritual insight from his experiences, ultimately the novel gives little hope for most of us to be open to all three aspects of the same underlying mystery.

Emerging from this latest dark night of the soul at a deeper level of mystical experience, Huxley wrote a Utopian novel in which he explored principles expressed in The Perennial Philosophy, such as the potential for all human beings to be identified with the Godhead and the beneficence of humility rather than ego. Here, instead of an island made up of two people escaping the chaos of life in the fable Ape and Essence, a whole society joins together on the pathway to inner mystical vision. Huxley's philosophical teaching, paramount in Island (1962), harmonizes with the writer's colorful descriptive passages which suggest the world of visions. All of nature on the island of Pala has an intensity of hue, an iridescent, glowing quality which leads to the visionary world in each of us. For instance, a flock of pigeons fly "green-winged and coral-billed, their breasts changing color in the light like mother-of-pearl" (23). Even the children have gemlike qualities: a little Palanese girl "wore a full crimson skirt . . . in the sunlight her skin glowed like pale copper flush with rose" (8). This idyllic place and its people, although subject to the sins and diseases of the world, have progressed a long way toward unity with the Divine.

Huxley's lifelong interest in art and its ability to bring divine order to one's life reaches its apex in Island. A guest in Pala, Will Farnaby, visits a meditation room where he beholds a landscape painting by a Palanese artist. Like Caravaggio's painting, the light transports:

"What clouds!" said Will. "And the light!"

"The light," Vijaya elaborated, "of the last hour before dusk.

It's just stopped raining and the sun has come out again, brighter

than ever. Bright with the preternatural brightness of slanting

light under a ceiling of cloud, the last, doomed, afternoon

brightness that stipples every surface it touches and deepens every shadow." . . . And between dark and dark was the blaze of young rice, or the red heat of plowed earth, the incandescence of naked limestone, the sumptuous darks and diamond glitter of evergreen foliage. (186)

Will's host sees the painting as "a manifestation of Mind with a large M" (185) and as "a genuinely religious image" (186). landscapes are religious because they remind us who we are, they compel us "to perform an act of self-knowing," and they reflect distance which "reminds us that there are mental spaces inside our skulls as enormous as the spaces out there":

"Mysteries of darkness; but the darkness teems with life.

Apocalypses of light; and the light shines out as brightly from the flimsy little houses as from the trees, the grass, the blue spaces between the clouds. We do our best to disprove the fact, but a fact it remains; man is as divine as nature, as infinite as the void." (187)

Thus, in *Island* Huxley creates a society in which the highest visionary experience is possible; one can move beyond brilliant colors to the transcending Clear Light. For instance, as Lakshmi, a deeply religious woman, moves closer to death, her daughter-in-law, Susila, reminds her of the occasion when she was a little girl of eight and first saw the Clear Light:

"An orange butterfly on a leaf, opening and shutting its wings in the sunshine -- and suddenly there was the Clear Light of pure Suchness blazing through it, like another sun."

Much brighter than the sun," Lakshmi whispered. "But much gentler. You can look into the Clear Light and not be blinded. And now remember it. A butterfly on a green leaf, opening and shutting its wings -- and it's the Buddha Nature totally present, it's the Clear Light outshining the sun." (265)

This mystical vision is not limited to selected people on Pala. Only those persons on the island who are deeply involved in evil fail "to discover their Buddha Nature" (244). As Donald Watt reminds us in his discussion of Huxley's symbolic use of the word "island," people are isolated, like islands, only on the surface of their routine lives; "they are nevertheless united, like islands, beneath the uneasy, oceanic flux.... They are joined in a unitive psychic land which, for Huxley, is the mystical "Divine Ground" ("Vision" 177). Only those who know nothing experientially of a divine vision -- like the Fordians (the citizens in Brave New Worlds whose hygienic lives are controlled by advanced scientific and behaviorist methods), John Barnack, Jo Stoyte, Murugan, or Colonel Dipa -- are truly isolated from themselves, from other people, and from the inner world. Sebastian Barnack, for instance, gains the capacity to love other people while on his quest for mystical union with the "pure light of the void."

Just as Sebastian no longer needs to write poetry, the Palanese in Island who are nearing the end of their spiritual journeys no longer need color for an awareness of the visionary world. Huxley defines the "prayer of quiet" as "the prayer of waiting upon the Lord in a state of alert passivity and permitting the deepest elements within the mind to come to the surface" (Human 203). Complementing this definition, Huxley writes in "Natural History of Visions":

In these highest forms of vision ["prayer of quiet"], the light is undifferentiated; it is what in Buddhist literature is called the "pure light of the void." It is an immense white light of

extraordinary power. (Human 227)

The "pure light," analogous to silence or the "prayer of quiet," represents direct experience of the divine. For Huxley, the beauty of the lively transparency of brilliantly lighted color leads us closer and closer to the internal visionary world and unity with the Ground of All Being.

Huxley parallels Lakshmi's death scene in *Island* with his own experience of his wife Maria's death. Again the light and the divine become one:

"In the desert and, later under hypnosis, all Maria's visionary and mystical experiences had been associated with light.... Light had been the element in which her spirit had lived, and it was therefore to light that all my words referred. I would begin by reminding her of the desert she had loved so much, of the vast crystalline silence . . . of the snow-covered mountains at whose feet we had lived. . . . And I would ask her to look at these lights of her beloved desert and to realize that they were not merely symbols, but actual expression of the divine nature; an expression of Pure Being, an expression of the peace that passeth all understanding . . . an expression of the love which is at the heart of things, at the core, along with peace and joy and being, of every human mind. . . . I would urge her to advance into those lights." (Bedford II 185-86)

Using hypnosis or psychedelic drugs (what the Palanese call mokshamedicine), Huxley believed he enhanced the enlightenment of the mystical experience by

diminishing the human ego. (6)

Huxley makes clear, however, that the mystical experience often begins before a person is consciously aware of the phenomenon. Just as the dying Lakshmi remembers first seeing the Clear Light when she was eight years old, she also remembers a view from the old Shiva temple above the High Altitude station which looks out over the sea. Susila gently guides the dying woman's thoughts:

"Blue, green, purple-and the shadows of the clouds were like ink. And the clouds themselves -- snow, lead, charcoal, satin. And while we were looking, you asked a question. Do you remember, Lakshmi?"

"You mean, about the Clear Light?"

"About the Clear Light," Susila confirmed. "Why do people speak of Mind in terms of Light? Is it because they've seen the sunshine and found it so beautiful that it seems only natural to identify the Buddha Nature with the clearest of all possible Clear Lights? Or do they find the sunshine beautiful because, consciously or unconsciously, they've been having revelations of Mind in the form of Light ever since they were born?" (Island 264)

Huxley may have been thinking of his own life and his own "revelations of Mind in the form of Light ever since [he was] born." Remember that Aldous's brother Julian recognized at age twelve that five-year-old Aldous lived on a different level of being and continued to do so all of his life. Huxley's mystical attachment to color and light -- ranging from bright jewel colors to the clear

light of mystical union -- encompassed his forty-seven years as a writer. As early as 1922, his use of color and light in *Crome Yellow* connects with his explorations into mysticism. His spiritual quest materializes not only through the light which blinds and transforms Saul on the road to Damascus, but also through his symbolic use of color, light, and form in examining the relative merits of Western and Eastern religions. By 1925 Calamy's hope for mystical illumination emerges as a dominant theme in *Those Barren Leaves*. Poetry such as "The Yellow Mustard" conjoins color and light with inner faith in 1931. One year later in *Brave New World* Helmholtz Watson seeks mystical union in the silence of the island on which he is exiled, foreshadowing Huxley's utopian *Island* with its bright colors and transcendent *Clear Light* -- the unity of all things. Aptly, that color of light can be produced by blending all the tints in the spectrum; thus, light is a symbol of the union of every virtue (Hulme 20). Huxley's intense focus in his writing on the high mystical quality of color and light as a link with the pure light of the void permeated his life. For Huxley, everyone who sees beauty in the light is on the path to mystical experience -- just at different stages of the journey.

NOTES

- (1) Elizabeth Bowen in 1936 stated that Huxley was "preaching a new asceticism: if he presses the point further he will not be popular" (148). Orville Prescott in 1944 wrote, "In recent years Mr. Huxley has seen visions and become a convert to a private mystic faith. His last three or four books have been contrite attempts to live down his earlier ones. Unfortunately, though spiritually elevated, they have been dull and mediocre." C. E. M. Joad in 1946 stated, "If a choice must be made, the unregenerate Huxley of sixteen years ago seems to be infinitely preferable to the sour-faced moralist of today."
- (2) Evelyn Underhill has a chapter (380-412) explaining "the dark night of the soul" in its many manifestations. She concludes that all these types of 'darkness' with their accompanying and overwhelming sensations of impotence and distress, are common in the lives of the mystics" (393; cited in *Abingdon* 512).
- (3) "I am and, for as long as I can remember, I always have been a poor visualizer. Words, even the pregnant words of poets, do not evoke pictures in my mind" (*Doors* 15). Huxley makes similar statements in letters and other personal Writing.

(4) The "obscene / Brown ordure" (possibly elephant excrement) parallels Huxley's frequent mentions of "mud" representing a limitation of vision. In his last novel, *Island*, however, a succulent plant, symbolic of enlightenment, grows out of the mud (108).

(5) Von Helmholtz was first cited as one of several possible sources for Helmholtz Watson's name by Meckier. He writes, "Watson's name is a meaningful amalgam that links the thoughts of Freud, Brucker, and Herman Von Helmholtz with Pavlov and the practices of the American behaviorist John Broadus Watson." No mention is made, however, of Helmholtz's *Treatise on Physiological Optics*, ed. James P. C. Southall, 3 vols. Trans. 1909. New York: Dover, 1962.

(6) Zaehner argues that Huxley recants the position that the psychedelic experience is identical to mystical experience. He claims that Huxley in the last days of his life came to see the psychedelic experience as a form of self-worship (108-09).

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