HUXLEY'S "JUNGLE OF NOISE" IN *POINT COUNTER POINT*

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Abstract

Point Counter Point, Aldous Huxley's experiment with the "musicalisation of fiction" (*PCP* 384, –References to *Point Counter Point* will be abbreviated hereon in *PCP*–) was published in 1928, the end of a decade of post-war trauma, conflicting ideologies, proliferating scientific theories, new technologies and reckless hedonism. These amalgamated aspects found their expression in the novel's cubist montage, contrapuntal orchestration and cynical tone. I argue that, in tandem with the experimental poetry and prose of Huxley's contemporaries, *Point Counter Point* set the tone for a new literary culture on both sides of the Atlantic. This approach accounts for the novel's experimental techniques and design, starting from the "jungle of noise" (65) metaphor.

Keywords: Aldous Huxley, *Point Counter Point*, intellectualism, degeneration, crisis, fragmentation, cacophony.

LA SELVA DE SONIDOS DE HUXLEY EN *POINT COUNTER POINT*

Resumen

Point Counter Point (*Contrapunto*), el experimento de Aldous Huxley con la musicalización de la ficción, se publicó en 1928, al final de la década del trauma postbélico, de las ideologías en conflicto, de las múltiples teorías científicas, las nuevas tecnologías y el hedonismo temerario. Estos aspectos amalgamados encontraron su expresión en el montaje cubista de la novela, su orquestación a contrapunto y tono cínico. Sostengo que, junto a la poesía y la prosa experimental de los autores coetáneos de Huxley, *Point Counter Point* estableció el tono para una nueva cultura literaria en ambos lados del Atlántico. Este trabajo considera la técnica y diseño experimentales de la novela, comenzando por la metáfora de la selva de ruidos.

Palabras clave: Aldoux Huxley, *Point Counter Point*, intelectualismo, degeneración, crisis, fragmentación, cacofonía.

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> A jungle of innumerable trees and dangling creepers –it was in this form that parties always presented themselves to Walter Bidlake's imagination. A jungle of noise; and he was lost in the jungle, he was trying to clear a path for himself through its tangled luxuriance. The people were the roots of the trees and their voices were stems and waving branches and festooned lianas –yes, and the parrots and the chattering monkeys as well.
>
> (*Point Counter Point*, V)

Chapter V in Aldous Huxley's *Point Counter Point* opens with Walter Bidlake, assistant editor of a literary review, visualising parties as a profuse jungle of proliferating shapes and noises. In the context of the novel, which is a large canvas of the British intelligentsia in the 1920s, Walter Bidlake's fancy may read as a metaphor for a culture and civilization with a flamboyant appetite for a lush extravagance of the intellect and a cacophony of voices. Walter's luxuriant exotic image expands into a hyperbole, "the gowths of sound shooting up, through the height of three floors" until they "break clean through the flimsy glass roof that separated them from the outer night" (*PCP* 65). This rich natural entanglement goes "up and up, loaded with orchids and bright cockatoos, up through the perennial mist of London, into the clear moonlight beyond the smoke..., the last thin aerial twigs of noise" (65).

Point Counter Point multiplies not only perspectives, points of view, voices and aspects but also settings. In Chapter VI the reader is taken to India, where Philip and Elinor Quarles attend a party and then drive off in their car through "the sordid suburbs of Bombay" that look ghastly and bone-white under the moon" (96-97). There, under a full moon, Elinor, in a romantic disposition, takes her husband's hand and reminds him of their evenings "in the garden, at Gattenden" (93). Philip replies reluctantly "across gulfs, and in the rather flat and colourless voice of one who answers an importunate telephone" (93). Huxley's novelist, a fictional projection of himself, looks and sounds distant and detached, his only interest lying in matters of the mind, which once caused Elinor to compare him with "a monkey on the superman side of humanity" (100). It is in this later chapter that the jungle image in Chapter V unravels: Philip is one of "the chattering monkeys" (65) in Walter's fancy. The exotic landscape is strange and fantastic in both chapters. In Chapter VI it is countered by the flattening technology of the telephone, the car, and "the wireless across the Atlantic" (97) that Elinor feels is the only means by which Philip loves her. As a matter of fact, the multifarious East and the ideologically and scientifically cacophonous West are not even counterpointed –rather they are superimposed, like pieces in a cubist montage.

Jerome Meckier argues that Huxley's trip to India, Burma, Malaya, and across the Pacific to America gave him an insight into "humanity's multitudinousness" (1977, 448). That trip was recorded in *Jesting Pilate*, a travelogue published by Chatto and Windus in 1926. With that newly acquired sense of a polymorphous human and natural universe, Huxley set forth the outline of *Point Counter Point*, published two years later. Considering the impact of the manifold cultural experience that Huxley transfers to Philip Quarles in the novel, Meckier states: "If a sense of the world's unparalleled complexity is the hallmark of modernity, India sends Quarles

home a modern novelist" (448). To Meckier's account, it was not only Huxley's crude experience of the world's complexity translated into the figure of Walter's jungle that propelled him to a new level, but also the process of recording it in a book that contributed to the experimental nature of *Point Counter Point*.

In the structure of a novel whose central theme is the sterility of an exaggerated intellectualism that severs the mind from the body and from the soul, Chapter VI is a contrapuntal intervention that reveals the multiple facets of dissonance. Foreshadowed by Walter's image of the uncontrollable overgrowth of jungle on London in Chapter V, the Indian chapter, which immediately follows it in *Point Counter Point*, irradiates the entire novel. India's profusion of colours, odours and noises is the underlying model of the early twentieth century proliferation of scientific theories, clashing ideologies and telescoping images. India's mesmerising force resonates as far as Chapter XXII, where it sets Philip's authorial imagination whirling. If in Chapter V Walter fancies the jungle eating up London and translates the chatter of the society around him into jungle noise, in Chapter XXII Philip associates the contrast between Lucy Tantamount's pale tongue and gums and the scarlet rouge on her lips with "the sacred crocodiles in the palace gardens at Jaipur" showing their "almost white" (*PCP* 383) cavities when fed by the guide with chunks of meat. It is the flash of "all India" echoing through his head "while she's showing... those gruesomely bloodless crocodile's gums and palate" (384) that gives Philip the idea of his experimental technique of "the musicalization of fiction" (384), maybe putting a novelist and then multiplying the novelists in the novel. The cinematic image "all India rushes like a cinema film" (384) is a conflation of India's elemental force and the new technology of the cinema that has the capacity to reduplicate it. Philip sees a great potential in this note of "strangeness and fantasticality" (384) that juxtaposes India's spiritualised multiplicity and Western technological reproducibility in the contrapuntal and cubist montage of the book. Meckier contends that "Quarles and Mr. Sita Ram collide as clumsily in Chapter VI as Lord Edward Tantamount does against Webley in the preceding chapter or Lucy with General Knoyle in the one succeeding" (1977, 455). The effect is that connection is simply not there. Dissonance, disconnection and cacophonic proliferation is everything there is to this world.

Huxley thematised this intellectual relativism in an age when Werner Heisenberg and other scientists of the 1920s were formulating theories based on the uncertainty, or the indeterminacy principle. As Meckier shows, "characters in *Point Counter Point* regularly see each other as foreigners" (1977, 455). Each speaks his or her own language but they do not really communicate. More often than not, they clash, like Illidge and Walter Bidlake in Chapter V. Their conversation starts after Walter selects Illidge's figure from among the society engaged in simultaneous exchanges. Illidge's reply to Walter's introductory question "How's science?" is delivered in a tone of provocative irritation: "Less fashionable than the arts, to judge by this party" (*PCP* 66-67). As the conversation progresses, Illidge's grudge escalates when he maliciously remarks that "the place fairly stinks of art" and then when he sardonically blurts out "I envy you art mongers your success. It makes me really furious when I see some silly, half-witted little writer..." (67) to Walter's

face. The art versus science controversy sparked by Illidge sounds like an echo of Prufrock's "tedious argument / Of insidious intent" leading to "an overwhelming question" one would rather not ask. While Illidge's reproachful retorts may seem to rekindle the old science versus art conundrum, it would probably be close to the mark to see in them the character's cynical understatement of art's cunsumerism in an age Walter Benjamin (2007) called "the age of mechanical reproduction," a state Huxley deplored. In note 13 to his essay, Benjamin inserts an extensive quote from Huxley's *Beyond the Mexique Bay*, a travelogue first published in 1934, six years after the publication of *Point Counter Point*:

> Advances in technology have led ... to vulgarity... Process reproduction and the rotary press have made possible the indefinite multiplication of writing and pictures. Universal education and relatively high wages have created an enormous public who know how to read and can afford to buy reading and pictorial matter. A great industry has been called into existence in order to supply these commodities. Now, artistic talent is a very rare phenomenon; whence it follows ... that, at every epoch and in all countries, most art has been bad. But the proportion of trash in the total artistic output is greater now than at any other period. (qtd. in Benjamin 2007, 247-248)

However, Illidge's antagonism in the conversation with Walter is underpinned by class and ideological antagonism. Illidge knows he looks "undistinguished" and, with a perversity that spares almost no character in *Point Counter Point*, he "remind[s] himself of the unpleasant fact, like a man with an aching tooth, who is for ever fingering the source of his pain, just to make sure it is still painful" (*PCP* 68). This gives him the occasion to bring Webley up with the insulting words "enormous lout" (68) and to bring to the fore the issue of the unfair treatment of "an intellectual of the lower classes" (68) by the European society of the time. Heated by the two stories he tells Walter about how he was once detained by the police in Chesterfield and once searched "from tip to toe" in Genoa just because his face looks "subversive" (68), Illidge grows more and more verbally aggressive towards the rich until he deprecatingly exclaims his disgust, adding that "there's something peculiarly base and ignoble and diseased about the rich" (69). What he means is that money makes them emotionally dry because it "breeds a kind of gangrened insensitiveness" (69).

Illidge's position is typical of his professional and social class but of course it is just one of the many in a world whose roar is money and consumerism. Across the Atlantic, responding to the same roar, F. Scott Fitzgerald's novel *The Great Gatsby* rings with money. Fitzgerald's key characters fabricate their personae and reinvent themselves to perform their roles in a world of glamorous parties and careless consumerism. Through Illidge, Huxley's novel is an ironic counterpoint to Gatsby's American materialism. Keith M. May reads Chapter V in Philip's contrapuntal key when he argues that "Illidge's moralizing hatred of the upper classes is placed beside Walter Bidlake's obsession with Lucy, and Lord Edward's indifference to politics is brought into conflict with Webley's preoccupation with 'saving England'" (1972, 85). Pitted against each other, *The Great Gatsby* and *Point Counter Point* are contrapuntal approaches to western materialism on both sides of the Atlantic: if in Fitzgerald's

American novel money is a lure and a dream, in Huxley's English book it is simply the prerogative of the upper classes. In both novels it is essentially a sham.

In the next counterpointing chapter emotional insensitiveness is not the outcome of a person being socially and financially privileged but of the mind thinking at one remove from living. This is the case of Philip Quarles, who "in the ordinary daily world of human contacts" is "curiously like a foreigner, uneasily not at home among his fellows, finding it difficult or impossible to enter into communication with any but those who could speak his native intellectual language of ideas" (*PCP* 98). That is what turns his wife Elinor, "born with a gift of intuitive understanding and social ease," into "his dragoman" (98-99). The world of *Point Counter Point* is in very short supply of Elinors and Rampions, and that penury of individuals emotionally fit to survive is the alarming symptom of a serious crisis in which most of the characters dwell. Meckier reads Chapter VI in terms of irreconcilable cultural counterpoints in which "India unmasks Quarles as the archetypally disconnected man, a perpetual alien" (1977, 456). Relating Huxley's view with Forster's Bloomsbury faith in connections posited in *A Passage to India*, a novel published four years before *Point Counter Point*, Meckier deems Huxley's book to be pervaded by the "anti-Bloomsbury theme of missed connections" (457). Meckier's argument sheds light on counterpointed values held by the British intellectuals in the 1920s. However, if one considers the tenuousness of the intercultural connections in Forster's *A Passage to India* and of the connections between the social classes in England and the sexes in *Howards End*, Huxley's philosophy may look not exactly anti-Bloomsbury but maybe just more radically skeptical than Forster's. When confronted with India and with Mr Sita Ram, Philip Quarles is completely inept for connection or sympathy. As far as Elinor is concerned, her role as a "dragoman" connects her with Forster's Mrs. Moore in *A Passage to India* and with Margaret Schlegel, maybe even Ruth Wilcox in *Howards End*, although the success of these women's schemes of connection is rendered problematic by the uncongenial cultural climate. To Meckier's mind, Huxley's skepticism is so poignant that *Point Counter Point* reads as a parody of *A Passage to India*, especially in Chapter VI but also in its other chapters. Even Elinor, who is praised for her emotional intelligence, fails the test: in Meckier's reading, she "fares no better than Philip" (1977, 458). To prove Huxley's anti-Bloomsbury thesis, Meckier adds that in *Point Counter Point* he echoes parodically not only Forster's *A Passage to India* but also Virginia Woolf's 1927 novel *To the Lighthouse*. Both *A Passage* and *To the Lighthouse* have the neat structure of a sonata, with a thesis, an antithesis and a synthesis, a design that makes their Bloomsbury ideal of connection ultimately triumph. Rejecting their view, Meckier shows, Huxley imparts "a cacophonous human fugue of eighteen hundred million parts" to suggest "the multitudinousness of modern life" (460).

If the Illidge-Walter controversy is dominated by Illidge's leftism, the one between Lord Edward Tantamount and Everard Webley in the same chapter focuses upon the future of humanity in a civilization where all political agents, left and right, squander the planet's resources in the name of false causes. Their conversation echoes some environmental and ecological concerns of the British ruralists between the two World Wars. Through Lord Edward, whom Webley considers a "dotty

old lunatic" (*PCP* 75), and especially through Mark Rampion, *Point Counter Point* is a panoramic view of the whole of modern society with its political parties and ideologies, and a rather worrying approach to the state of civilization in the 1920s, in the wake of World War I, when preparations were being made for a new world conflagration. Anticipating the dystopia projected by Huxley two years later and published in 1932, Rampion argues in a conversation with Philip Quarles in Chapter XXIII that all the politicians "want to land us in hell" (391). The tendencies he notices are "industrialism" and "Americanization," and he adds that "they're all equally in a hurry. In the name of science, progress and human happiness! Amen and step on the gas" (391-92).

Mark Rampion, the only mentally and emotionally stable character in the society of *Point Counter Point*, warns the other unbalanced characters of the most terrible aspects of an "industrial civilization" (523), where the human values are alarmingly replaced with professionalised amusements and sterile theories of unstoppable proliferation. In Chapter XXXIV Rampion catalogues the written press, the radio and the cinema as "the fruits of intellectualism," "the result of the systematically organised, professional intellectualism of the last two hundred years" (523) that are responsible for the scientist's "inner psychological degeneration" coupled with "infantilism /.../ and all sorts of madness and primitive reversion" (524). Rampion's worries in *Point Counter Point* materialise grotesquely in the feelies of *Brave New World*, while at the same time his critique of these forms of popular culture harks back to Huxley's own in a 1923 essay titled "Pleasures," where he singles out the cinema as the most negative "fruit," with the most damaging effect of all:

> The horrors of modern "pleasure" arise from the fact that every kind of organized distraction tends to become progressively more and more imbecile ... In place of the old pleasures demanding intelligence and personal initiative, we have vast organizations that provide us with ready-made distractions –distractions which demand from pleasure-seekers no personal participation and no intellectual effort of any sort. To the interminable democracies of the world a million cinemas bring the same balderdash ... Countless audiences soak passively in the tepid bath of nonsense. No mental effort is demanded of them, no participation; they need only sit and keep their eyes open. (2000, 356)

One cannot fail to notice how Rampion's diction in the novel echoes Huxley's in the essay, and this shows how keen Huxley was on alerting his contemporaries to the stakes and perils of the new technologies both in his fiction and non-fiction writings of the 1920s. In a 1925 essay "Where Are Movies Moving?" Huxley likens the combined effect of darkness in the cinema theatre and "the monotonous music" to "a kind of hypnotic state" (2000, 176) similar to that induced by drugs. In "Huxley's Feelies: The Cinema of Sensation in *Brave New World*" Laura Frost argues that Huxley denounced the intoxicating impact of talkies upon body and mind, and she contends that "far from being a technological advancement, cinema is symptomatic of cultural degeneration, and the introduction of sound was a particularly alarming development because of its implications for bodily pleasure" (2006, 447).

In the same conversation with Spandrell, Quarles and Burlap at Sbisa's, Rampion, challenged by Burlap, launches into a tirade about what he argues to be the contemporary scientists' "non-human truth" (*PCP* 524) whose "faint notion of the universe" (524) appears as "if looked at through non-human eyes" (524). Rampion claims that the most recent theories "do really seem to have got a little way outside humanity" (524). Rampion's tirade is a vitalist's plea for "the relevant human truth" that "is something you discover by living" (525). His constant case for striking a balance between body and mind, which in his view is seriously upset by the intellectualism of the present, stands in sharp contrast with the cacophonic "jungle of noise" (65) produced by science and technology, which in their turn yield the obnoxious "fruits" of modern entertainment.

Rampion's metaphor of "the fruits of intellectualism" (*PCP* 523) ties in with Walter's "jungle of noise" and both translate an eerie sense that the modernity of the 1920s is an overgrowth of intellectualism, the most serious and alarming disease of those times. In *The Waste Land* T.S. Eliot visualises the post-war scenario as a "dead land" and wonders "What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow / Out of this stony rubbish?" Side by side, Eliot's and Huxley's visions of the same decade amount to cacophony, disconnectedness and fragmentation. Rampion laments the "decaying fragments" (526) and *The Waste Land* is "a heap of broken images." In Peter Bowering's account, "The attack on intellectualism in *Point Counter Point* is largely embodied in the figure of Philip Quarles, the deliberately autobiographical character whom Rampion considers 'an intellectual-aesthetic pervert'" (1968, 85). Thus, the unpalatable critique in the novel focuses upon Huxley's fictional alias, which absorbs "all the vices of cerebration" (Bowering 1968, 86) and becomes an almost caricatural incarnation of the artist's "impersonality," a concept developed by T.S. Eliot in his 1919 essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent." Ironically, Philip finds his match in Molly d'Exergillod, the cerebral conversationist, and the effect is hilarious: "Conscious and civilized, he had been defeated by someone even more civilized than himself. The justice was poetic. But what a warning! Parodies and caricatures are the most penetrating of criticisms. In Molly he perceived a kind of Max Beerbohm version of himself. The spectacle was alarming" (431).

What Huxley, T.S. Eliot, Joyce, Pound, Kafka, Proust, Cummings, Auden, Lawrence, Virginia Woolf and F. Scott Fitzgerald did was to take the scattered pieces of the world before the Great War and paste them into their montages, where they would show their incongruities. Paul Fussell accounts for this radically new literary culture of the 1920s:

> Indeed, the literary scene [of the 1920s] is hard to imagine. There was no *Waste Land*, with its rats' alleys, dull canals, and dead men who have lost their bones: it would take four years of trench warfare to bring these to consciousness. There was no *Ulysses*, no *Mauberly*, no *Cantos*, no Kafka, no Proust, no Waugh, no Auden, no Huxley, no Cummings, no *Women in Love* or *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. There was no "Valley of Ashes" in *The Great Gatsby*. One read Hardy and Kipling and Conrad and frequented worlds of traditional moral action delineated in traditional moral language. (2000, 23)

The "traditional moral action" and "traditional moral language" are shattered to pieces in *Point Counter Point* by a society of perverts and intellectual maniacs. Spandrell is their epitome, and his perversely staged suicide is preceded by a futile demonstration "of God's existence and the superiority of Jesus's morality" (*PCP* 563) made to Rampion, who will not allow his vitalist self to be persuaded by music's "most perfect spiritual abstraction from reality" (565). Spandrell's heaven lasts so long as the gramophone, a fairly recent technological invention, plays Beethoven's Lydian melody from the *heilige Danksgeasang*. On his way to Rampion's place, Spandrell walks along the Thames "whistling to himself over and over again the opening phrases" (562) of the melody. His perception of the reality around him is that the modern city of London is filthy and grim. When the violins stop playing, "what then?" he asks himself, and the implacable answer is "Garbage and stupidity, the pitiless drought" (562), an echo of *The Waste Land*. When the demonstration is almost over, "the revelation of heaven" (567) is short-circuited by "a deafening explosion, a shout, another explosion and another" (567). "The jungle of noise" (65) has its momentum, it is followed by silence, then the music fades into "still and blissful convalescence" (568) until there is "no more music; only the scratching of the needle on the revolving disc" (568). Ironically, the last drop of life in Spandrell's dying body is concentrated in the mechanical gesture of his hands, which open and shut several times, "scratching the boards" (567) like the needle of the gramophone on the rotating disc. It is not his death that concludes the scene but his dying, an agony of no significance and of no consequence, the last futile act of his life, a "mockery" (567) Rampion read in "the lines" (567) of his face a few seconds before the noise of the pistol was heard.

Huxley's metaphor of "the jungle of noise" (65) resonates throughout *Point Counter Point*, a novel of "failures and fragments" (Woolf 1924, 22) and of sounds of "breaking and falling, crashing and destruction" that Virginia Woolf could hear "all round us, in poems and novels and biographies, even in newspaper articles and essays" (20). Four years before the publication of *Point Counter Point*, Woolf sensed and captured the violence of this cultural roar in her own essay "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown" and she accounted for it as "the prevailing sound of the Georgian age" (20). In what she declared to be a "sanguine" (21) state of mind, Woolf pleaded for the necessity that "the very foundations and rules of literary society" (21) be destroyed so that Joyce could "breathe" even if that may take a smashing of windows. Woolf also heard the sound in T.S. Eliot's poetry, and at the same time she exclaimed: "But how intolerant he is of the old usages and politeness of socity –respect for the weak, consideration for the dull!" (21). The Edwardian Arnold Bennett, Woolf's targeted point of her counterpoint in the essay, reviewed Huxley's novel on a note of complaint: "The book is almost, if not quite, wholly destructive. It is a very formidable and uncompromising attack on the society which it depicts, and there are few or no implications which might pass for constructive criticism. The ground is littered with the shapeless rubble of demolished images. Never was ruin so ruthlessly accomplished". ([1929] 1975, 174-175)

For all these Georgian writers, the source of the roar was a strong sense that the very foundations of European civilization at large were undergoing a serious moral,

spiritual, ideological and political crisis, which resulted in a pervasive intellectual pessimism. The models of a mathematically designed universe developed by Newton, the optimistic belief underpinning the eighteenth-century Enlightenment tenet that progress is linear, and the Cartesian notion that knowledge is cumulative had been thoroughly shaken. Those models entered a stage of decline in the late nineteenth century when an incipient modernism started to take shape. In the first decades of the twentieth century their plinth was shattered by the Great War. Rampion's diagnosis of "inner psychological degeneration" (*PCP* 524) is surely an echo of a societal disease analysed by Oswald Spengler in *The Decline of the West*, a book published in the aftermath of the Great War, between 1918 and 1922. In the same tormented decade when World War I was scarring European society mentally and physically, the rational humanist idea of progress was thrown into serious question by T.E. Hulme's essay collection *Speculations* published posthumously in 1924, where Hulme was developing Nietzche's ideas that humanity will always be prone to wrongdoing. In his poem "The Second Coming" written in 1919, first printed in *The Dial* in 1920 and then included in the collection *Michael Robartes and the Dancer*, Yeats translated the Christian imagery of the Second Advent or Parousia from the *Gospels*, from the *Book of Revelation*, and from other biblical texts into an Apocalypse of Europe's post-war present. Yeats's vision, like Spengler's and Giambatista Vico's before him, is that the historical ages are cyclical. The Irish poet visualised them as "gyres," i. e. twisting cones, and "The Second Coming" is a metaphor for what Yeats thought was the end of a historical gyre and the uncertain origin of another. The apocalyptic atmosphere of the poem has been invoked by many who consider it to be symbolic of the chaos, fragmentation and indeterminacy embedded in the *Zeitgeist*. The epigraph Huxley chose for *Point Counter Point* consists in six lines from Fulke Greville's "Chorus Sacerdotum," of which the last two are "What meaneth nature by these diverse laws, / Passion and reason, self-division cause?" Greville was an Elizabethan poet with whose sense of dualism Huxley probably wished to connect his own. The religious freight of this sense of dualism in Greville's poetry also permeates Yeats's poem, though in 1920 the chances of redemption are questionable. In an alternative scenario, the first stanza of Yeats's "The Second Coming" might be, alongside Greville's lines, a fitting epigraph to *Point Counter Point*:

> Turning and turning in the widening gyre
> The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
> Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
> Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
> The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
> The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
> The best lack all conviction, while the worst
> Are full of passionate intensity.

Robert S. Baker looks into what he calls "the painful dualities of human experience" (103) in *Point Counter Point*, arguing that its characters tackle "a broad range of subjects, including religion, aesthetics, science, psychology, history, and politics" (102-3). Though no particular character seems to be at the nub of the story

or of the polemics in the novel, one feels that Rampion's balanced stance towards all these issues is as close to a deferred centrality as possible. Baker's insightful approach to Huxley's sense of modern history in *Point Counter Point* singles out Rampion's "vision of history as an erratic cycle of alternating 'peaks and declines' (291)" (103), which is so much in the spirit of Yeats's "gyres." Apart from this vision of history shared by Rampion and Quarles, Baker also sees in Huxley's novel "[t]he idea of an instinctive tendency towards entropic mechanism" (109) that runs through "the plot-lines involving Illidge, Webley, Lucy Tantamount, and especially Spandrell" (109). Indeed, the world of *Point Counter Point* is one of various and serious forms of entropic disorder in a closed system. Spandrell, called by Baker a "Sadean nihilist, who overshadows the others, insinuating himself into the lives of fascist and communist alike as the death-intoxicated presiding spirit of a 'collapsing' culture" (*PCP* 126), opposes Rampion not only verbally but also mentally. Thus, Spandrell becomes the embodiment of what Rampion deems to be the disease of their culture –"inner psychological degeneration" (524), a notion Rampion must have taken from Max Nordau's *Degeneration*, where Oscar Wilde epitomised the phenomenon described in the book.

Writing a conclusion to the analysis of a novel that breathes the air of indeterminacy typical of its times may sound preposterous. *Point Counter Point* is a limbo of proliferating ideas. For Woolf's "Georgians," the age also brought about a crisis of meaning that applied both to history, which for them was no longer governed by rules of progress, and to their own writing, rendered by Huxley in the contrapuntal style and cubist design of *Point Counter Point*, where ideas, opinions and situations are perceived simultaneously from the clashing angles of the characters' viewpoints. Rampion's arguments are of no consequence, Spandrell's death is pointless, Burlap's duplicity is never resolved. When he argues that the novel is plotless, Alexender Henderson does not mean that "there is no action" (1964, 42) in *Point Counter Point*. On the contrary, Henderson admits that "[t]here is a good deal of violent action" (42) and "[t]he form of he book, the pattern, is obtained by weaving together, generally with ironic effect, variations on one or two themes which the different sets of characters represent" (42-43). The novel ends irresolutely, ingloriously and anticlimactically, after exhausting the polemical zest of its characters, with Burlap in the tub. "Of such is the Kingdom of Heaven" (*PCP* 569), the novel's last line, is an inverted promise of transcendence, a mockery of faith, which is absolutely lost on all its characters.

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