

# REVIEW AND COMMENT

## Samson as Symbol

EYELESS IN GAZA, by Aldous Huxley.  
Harper and Brothers. \$2.50.

ALDOUS HUXLEY, despite his reputation for wit and sophistication, has always been as serious a truthseeker as his grandfather and as implacable a moralist as the greater Huxley's contemporaries. Obviously he could not be satisfied forever with brilliant attacks on false values; sooner or later he had to make the enunciation of what he regarded as true values his chief concern. Foreshadowed in *Point Counter Point*, his adoption of the role of preceptor and prophet began with *Brave New World*. *Eyeless in Gaza* is a further revelation of prophetic doctrine.

*Brave New World* was an irritating book. No one could deny that its picture of a utopia of mechanical perfection, mass thinking, and universal boredom was amusing as well as disgusting. What irritated the reader was that Huxley drew this picture with the express purpose of discouraging attempts at social improvement. On the title page he quoted from Nicholas Berdyaev: "Utopias are realizable. Life marches towards utopias. And perhaps a new age is beginning, an age in which the intellectuals and the cultivated class will dream of ways of avoiding utopias and returning to a non-utopian society, less 'perfect' and more free." The duty of the intellectual, it appeared, is to try to check all efforts at creating an ordered society lest the horrors of *Brave New World* result. Even if the dangers had not been largely imaginary, one would still have objected to Huxley's emphasis: he said nothing about trying to bring the social improvements without incurring the dangers; rather than take any risks, he would simply preserve the *status quo*. More than that, he loudly insisted on the right to suffer. That Aldous Huxley might have his make-believe sufferings, the millions and millions of the exploited were to be kept in the real and indescribable miseries of the capitalist system. The egoism of this thesis could not fail to sicken a sensitive reader.

*Eyeless in Gaza* proceeds a step beyond *Brave New World*, and therefore deserves close scrutiny. Looking at it as a novel, one is strongly reminded that Mr. Huxley is an essayist. One of the favorable things to be said about his novels is that they contain his best essays, but good essays do not make good novels, and perhaps Mr. Huxley's novels, as novels, are not very good. Each has a central figure that is obviously autobiographical and quite persuasive. The other characters, even when they are as memorable as Rampon, Burlap, Illidge, or Spandrell, are close

to being caricatures. There is something slightly synthetic about Huxley's novels, and one of the symptoms is the shameless way in which he plagiarizes himself, using again and again types, scenes and situations that please him. Of course he is very skillful in concealing the weaknesses of his creative powers, but one feels that he is a first-rate essayist who has raised himself by his own bootstraps to the level of novelist, and done an extraordinarily good job at it.

Perhaps that is why he is seldom satisfied to tell a straightforward story in a straightforward way, why he resorts to technical ingenuities in construction that distract the reader's attention from lapses in his understanding of character. *Eyeless in Gaza*, for example, moves erratically in time as *Point Counter Point* does in space. One episode is in 1933, the next in 1902, the next in 1934, the next in 1912, and so on throughout the book. The theory of this procedure is suggested when the leading character, Anthony Beavis, is reminded by kissing his mistress of playing in a chalk-pit twenty years before. "Somewhere in the mind," he says to himself, "a lunatic shuffled a pack of snapshots and dealt them out at random, shuffled once more and dealt them out in different order, again and again, indefinitely. There was no chronology. The idiot remembered no distinction between before and after. The pit was as real and vivid as the gallery. That ten years separated flints from Gauguins was a fact, not given, but discoverable only on second thoughts by the calculating intellect. The thirty-five years of his conscious life made themselves immediately known to him as a chaos—a pack of snapshots in the hands of a lunatic."

This is the theory: chronology is unreal, and Huxley will have none of it. I doubt that the theory is sound, and I am sure that his method of presentation does not reflect the movement of the human mind—as, for example, Proust's method of presentation does. All the device does, it seems to me, is to lend to the novel an element of novelty that amuses a lively intellect. It is rather fun because you always know what is going to happen, and you take pleasure in figuring out the course of events. Moreover, the method permits the author to arrive almost simultaneously at a series of climaxes that were considerably separated in time, juxtaposing crucial events in Anthony Beavis's life and enabling you to compare them. But these, after all, are minor advantages, and one wonders why Huxley thought they were worth the effort involved for author and reader.

The method's weakness is suggested by the

fact that the reader, in order to think about the book at all, has to stop and make a chronological reconstruction of the events. So reconstructed, this series of episodes in the life of Anthony Beavis is easily summarized. The son of an arid philologist, he lost his mother when he was eleven. In school and college he fell alternately under the influence of his bullying, snobbish, conventional schoolmates and of an idealistic, high-principled boy called Brian Foxe. After graduation, he had an affair with an older woman, Mary Amberley, who encouraged the pose of cynicism. Her influence helped him to hurt Brian Foxe, hurt him to such an extent that his friend committed suicide. Later Anthony dignified his cynicism into a *Weltanschauung*, making it the basis of a career as sociologist. Still later, while carrying on his career and his philandering, he was shocked by a sudden break with his mistress, Helen, the daughter of the now ruined Mary Amberley. This led to his going with a friend to Mexico, where he met Dr. Miller, the man who changed his life.

Though less startling than either *Antic Hay* or *Point Counter Point*, *Eyeless in Gaza* does portray, and often with stinging sharpness, elements of emptiness and decay in contemporary civilization. We feel the incurable triviality of Anthony's father, the grasping sentimentality of Mrs. Foxe, the gruesome irresponsibility of Mary Amberley, the total impotence of Hugh Ledwidge, the painful pride of Mark Staithe. But the breakdown of capitalist civilization is most clearly reflected, as one would expect, in Anthony Beavis. Three things emphasize Anthony's failure: Brian Foxe's suicide, the collapse of his relationship with Helen, and the futility of his sociology. They are related, for all three grow out of the defects of his character. In condemning these defects of character, Huxley is condemning not only Anthony's past but his own as well. "He himself, Anthony went on to think, he himself had chosen to regard the whole process as either pointless or a practical joke. Yes, chosen. For it had been an act of the will. If it were all nonsense or a joke, then he was at liberty to read his books and exercise his talents for sarcastic comment; there was no reason why he shouldn't sleep with any presentable woman who was ready to sleep with him. If it weren't nonsense, if there were some significance, then he could no longer live irresponsibly. There were duties towards himself and others and the nature of things. Duties with whose fulfillment the sleeping and the indiscriminate reading and the habit of detached irony would interfere. He had chosen to think it nonsense, and nonsense for more than twenty years the thing had seemed to be."

Huxley thus clearly recognizes that cyni-

cism is a defense, not merely of a state of mind, but of actual concrete privileges. He sees that, if one believes the future is hopeless, it is because one does not want to do the things and make the sacrifices that would substitute good for evil. So far, he registers a clear intellectual advance. But when he comes to consider how evil can be overcome, he shows how far he still is from clarity of thought. He examines the two traditional methods of overcoming evil, social reconstruction, which means Communism, and individual reconstruction, which means religion. He rejects the former and accepts the latter.

His examination of Communism, at least so far as this novel is concerned, is both superficial and unfair. The statement that Mark Staithes is a Communist is a libel on the Communist Party of Great Britain. Helen is no more representative. Only Giesebrecht, the German refugee, is a conceivable Communist, and he scarcely figures in the story. It is safe to say that Huxley does not know Communists, and it is doubtful if he knows Communism. The converted Anthony makes three points against Communism. First, he raises the usual objection about ends justifying means, as if it were ever possible to judge means apart from ends. Second, he says that Communism rests on hatred, forgetting that it is capitalism that creates hatred, and that Communism, at its worst, harnesses hatred to constructive ends and, at its best, gives men understanding enough to transcend it. Finally, he argues that it is a fallacy to assume that better social conditions make better people.

This last point is vital. Rejecting Communism, Huxley is forced to adopt the position that progress can come only through changes in the individual's heart, soul, mind, personality—whatever you want to call it. How convincing, one first asks, does he make the actual visualization of this process in the novel? In Mexico Anthony meets Dr. Miller. Miller appears on the scene with his mouth full of phrases reminiscent of both Bernarr Macfadden and Frank Buchman. Here, one thinks, is the perfect opportunity for Huxley's satire. But no, to our amazement, Huxley takes Miller perfectly seriously, and asks us to. This blather about constipation and right posture and vegetarianism and love and peace succeeded, we are asked to believe, in changing the life of Anthony Beavis. It might almost be the perfect Huxleyan joke.

And we can say little more for the presentation of Miller's ideas in Anthony's journal, which is scattered through the book. If you love people, they will love you, and, if they love you, they will be better people, and war and exploitation will vanish. All this is justified on the basis of what seems old-fashioned Emersonian transcendentalism, decorated with a few figures of speech from modern science.

Impossible as it is to discuss adequately at this point the relative merits of social and individual reconstruction, it may be pointed out that three thousand years of preaching

the latter has accomplished singularly little. Social reconstruction, however, has worked. Huxley pokes fun at the Webbs for believing that more tractors will make better persons, but the Webbs have actually seen, in the U.S.S.R., that social reconstruction does mean individual reconstruction. We have, moreover, far more evidence than the relatively brief experience of the Soviet Union can give. All through history social conditions have changed, and the changes have altered human beings. There are no other terms in which one can understand history. What Communism does is to use the knowledge that comes from history so that man can cooperate with social forces in shaping his own destiny.

It is necessary to deal thus flatly with Huxley's ideas because they are all that matters very much. As a novel, as a picture of human beings and a particular society, *Eyeless in Gaza* is inferior to *Point Counter Point*. As a sample of Huxley's thinking, it marks an advance over the earlier novel be-

cause it shows that he is now seriously concerned with the problem of making a better world. But on the other hand, the methods of reconstruction he proposes seem to me quite demonstrably wrong.

His title comes from *Samson Agonistes*:

Promise was that I  
Should Israel from Philistian yoke deliver;  
Ask for this great deliverer now, and find him  
Eyeless in Gaza at the mill with slaves,  
Himself in bonds under Philistian yoke;  
Yet stay, let me not rashly call in doubt  
Divine Prediction; what if all foretold  
Had been fulfilled but through mine own default,  
Whom have I to complain of but myself?

Yet Samson, it may be remembered, fulfilled the prophecy and delivered Israel, not by converting the Philistines to some mystical doctrine of love and peace, but by pulling down the temple on their heads. It was a crude method, but it redeemed Samson's self-respect, and it did dispose of the Philistines.

GRANVILLE HICKS.

## American Oligarchs

*RULERS OF AMERICA, A study of Finance Capital, by Anna Rochester. International Publishers, \$2.50. (A Book Union Selection.)*

MORE than a year ago, in the tiny town of Gallup, New Mexico, two coal-miners were murdered by deputy-sheriffs, and 40 other miners and their wives charged with the murder of the local sheriff who was shot by the same deputies. This was part of the basic struggle of the American workers for unionism and the right to live. It was the task of the labor movement to defend those forty miners from the electric chair.

In the course of performing this task it was necessary to find out who was back of this murder; who, through definite policies of cold brutality to protect profits, had ordered it.

At that time there was no such volume as *Rulers of America*. We went to the Labor Research Association, which sponsors this book, for information. It came through, and the answer was, briefly: from the Gallup-American Coal Company to Kennecott Copper, to the House of Morgan. Those were the financial links of the murder. A financial investment by the House of Morgan in Cuba or in China may be the monument erected by finance capital to the murder of Solomon Esquibel and Ignacio Velarde, coal miners, and to three other Gallup union men who are now in the New Mexico penitentiary for a murder committed by a hired man of Gamercoco. And the monument to the murder of a half-dozen or a hundred Cuban or Chinese workers is just as likely as not to be a new horse in the private stables of a member of the Morgan or Rockefeller family, or a half-dozen new machine-guns mounted on the walls of the General Electric plant at

Schenectady (Morgan-controlled). That is finance capital.

Until now, there has been no single volume which enlarged the spotlight to illuminate Lenin's analysis of imperialism in terms of a study of the structure of United States imperialism, in terms of the cold realities of *who rules America*, and *how*. Anna Rochester's *Rulers of America* provides this study, and it is a major contribution to the arsenal of progress.

Supposing that you are not a coal-miner; not even a worker of any kind; supposing you consider yourself (for the sake of argument) purely a consumer, and a small one at that. When you enter your apartment at night and snap the light switch, you pay tribute, in cash, to Mr. Morgan. Even if it so happens that because of non-payment of your bill to the electric light company (the depression has had a definite effect on your consumer's income whatever its source may be) the current (wherever you live Mr. Morgan has an interest in "your" public utility) has been turned off during the day in your absence—Mr. Morgan or one of his lieutenants still draws his profit. You are wearing out the switch itself, turning it on and off a half dozen times to make sure, and the switch will eventually have to be replaced with another, also manufactured by a firm controlled by the House of Morgan.

Then, if you can't pay your electricity bill, you may decide to use kerosene lamps. The profit is merely switched to the House of Rockefeller, which squeezes profit out of the difference between the wages its companies pay and the price you pay for fuel for your oil-lamps, or to one of his cutthroat competitors—who may even perhaps be Mr. Morgan. But Mr. Rockefeller's profits don't depend on that. Don't forget that you use