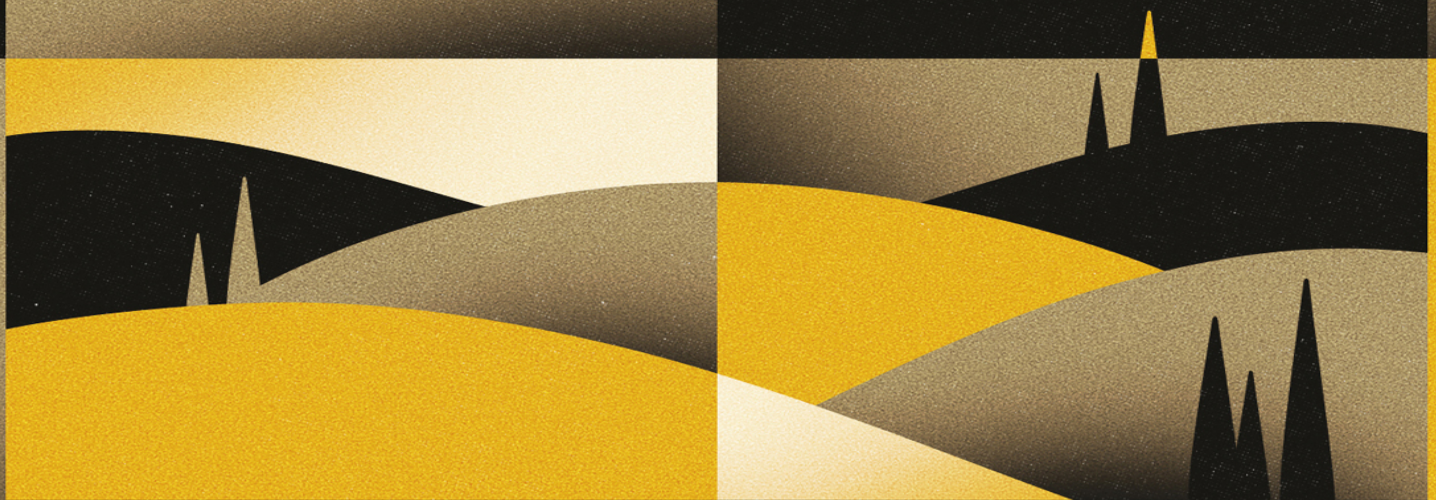


VINTAGE HUXLEY

CROME

YELLOW



VINTAGE

Contents

Cover

About the Book

About the Author

Also by Aldous Huxley

Title Page

Introduction by Malcolm Bradbury

Chapter I

Chapter II

Chapter III

Chapter IV

Chapter V

Chapter VI

Chapter VII

Chapter VIII

Chapter IX

Chapter X

Chapter XI

Chapter XII

Chapter XIII

Chapter XIV

Chapter XV

Chapter XVI

Chapter XVII

Chapter XVIII

Chapter XIX

Chapter XX

Chapter XXI

Chapter XXII

Chapter XXIII

Chapter XXIV

Chapter XXV
Chapter XXVI
Chapter XXVII
Chapter XXVIII
Chapter XXIX
Chapter XXX

Copyright

ABOUT THE BOOK

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY MALCOLM BRADBURY

Denis Stone, a naive young poet, is invited to stay at Crome, a country house renowned for its gatherings of 'bright young things'. His hosts, Henry Wimbush and his exotic wife Priscilla, are joined by a party of colourful guests whose intrigues and opinions ensure Denis's stay is a memorable one. First published in 1921, *Crome Yellow* was Aldous Huxley's much-acclaimed debut novel.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Aldous Huxley came to literary fame in 1921 with his first novel, *Crome Yellow*. With the novels *Antic Hay*, *Those Barren Leaves* and *Point Counter Point*, Huxley quickly established a reputation for bright, brilliant satires that ruthlessly passed judgement on the shortcomings of contemporary society. In later life, exploration of the inner life through mysticism and hallucinogenic drugs dominated Huxley's writing, including his first-person account of experiencing mescaline in *The Doors of Perception*. Aldous Huxley died in 1963.

ALSO BY ALDOUS HUXLEY

Novels

Crome Yellow
Antic Hay
Those Barren Leaves
Brave New World
Eyeless in Gaza
After Many a Summer
Time Must Have a Stop
Ape and Essence
The Genius and the Goddess
Island

Short Stories

Limbo
Mortal Coils
Little Mexican
Two or Three Graces
Brief Candles
The Gioconda Smile
(Collected Short Stories)

Biography

Grey Eminence
The Devils of Loudun

Travel

Along the Road
Jesting Pilate

Beyond the Mexique Bay

Poetry and Drama

The Burning Wheel

Jonah

The Defeat of Youth

Leda

Verses and a Comedy

The Gioconda Smile

Essays and Belles Lettres

On the Margin

Proper Studies

Do What You Will

Music at Night

Texts and Pretexts

The Olive Tree

Ends and Means

The Art of Seeing

The Perennial Philosophy

Science, Liberty and Peace

Themes and Variations

The Doors of Perception

Adonis and the Alphabet

Heaven and Hell

Brave New World Revisited

Literature and Science

The Human Situation

Moksha

For Children

The Crows of Pearblossom

ALDOUS HUXLEY

Crome Yellow

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
Malcolm Bradbury

AND A BIOGRAPHICAL INTRODUCTION BY
David Bradshaw

VINTAGE

INTRODUCTION

BY MALCOLM BRADBURY

Aldous Huxley was still just twenty-seven when he published *Crome Yellow*, his first novel to reach print. It stays the most lighthearted, and in some ways the most purely brilliant, of his early novels – the four books in which, with wit, malice and anxiety, he captured the intellectual, social and emotional flavour of the unhappy Twenties. This was the decade when fiction went modern, pained by the terrible crisis and slaughter of the war, then to be followed by an age of apocalyptic unease, sexual confusion, intellectual doubt, changing gender roles, and an awareness among the young that the age of their elders, which meant not just the Victorian but the Edwardian and Georgian ages, was somehow over and done. It was a time for young voices, for new styles and changed intellectual attitudes, for the self-conscious modern mood itself. Part of that modernity was a spirit of biting and ironic comedy, and some of the best novelists of the Twenties – Wyndham Lewis, Ronald Firbank, Michael Arlen, Evelyn Waugh – expressed their modernity in a sharp and condensed comic spirit that has shaped the fortunes of modern fiction ever since: far more so, perhaps, than the work of writers like James Joyce and Virginia Woolf, who represent the vaster aesthetic experiment of the same decade.

Crome Yellow, which came out in 1921, was a youthful book, and it hit the Twenties themes and spirit early. So it was read with fascination right through the decade, and influenced a good deal of the fiction of that period, not least that of Evelyn Waugh. It was a bitter comedy for a darkened and pessimistic time, a time conscious of its own intellectual

and emotional sterility; but what carries the book along is the lively wit, deep intelligence and vigorous style of its youthful author. Huxley was not descended from one of the great British intellectual clans for nothing. T.H. Huxley, the noted scientist and supporter of scientific evolution, most remembered now for his remark that he would rather be descended from an ape than a bishop, was his grandfather. His father, Leonard, was a writer who also edited the *Cornhill* magazine, and by his marriage united the Huxley with the Arnolds. His brother, Julian, became not only one of the great modern zoologists but the first Director-General of UNESCO. Huxley had a burden of intellectual and moral duties on his shoulders, and the possibility that apes and essence were in conflict, that ideas and actions never quite united, that mind and sexuality were at war with each other, that the transition from the age of religion to the age of modern science might lead not to utopia but universal anarchy, concerned him greatly.

But the gloomy, anti-utopian prophecies that became part of his fiction emerged rather later, in works like *Brave New World* (1932); in his early novels, they are largely mocked or teased. *Crome Yellow* is the young Huxley at his brightest and most buoyant. It's a book about ideas and the things that conflict with them or betray them, and owes a lot to the novels of Thomas Love Peacock, those great comedies of playful ideas. It owes most, though, to the turmoil of opinions that passed through an age of evident intellectual transition, sexual disorientation, moral uncertainty, bored idealism. It shows an unwavering delight in conversation, argument, absurd self-knowledge, the endless play of the intellect, even though it implies that ideas are what betray us. That is what makes it one of the most pleasant and delightful of his always brilliant novels, and a masterwork of the Twenties.

The book's feel is original, but its shape is on the surface hardly experimental. A little bit like the kinds of novel that

Mr Scogan firmly and satirically mocks in the second chapter, it follows out the fortunes, experiences, artistic pretensions and romantic disappointments of the solemn and self-conscious young poet Denis Stone – twenty-three and agonizingly conscious of the fact – when he joins a summer house party at Crome, that mellow old manor house, set in its ‘dinted, dimpled, wimpled’ and very sexual landscape. The talkative *crime de la crime* of the modern arts and opinion is gathered there under the patronage of Priscilla and Henry Wimbush; many contemporary ideas are aired, and many stories told. It’s well known that Crome owes a good deal to Garsington Manor near Oxford, the residence of the famous patroness, Lady Ottoline Morrell. Garsington and its flamboyant hostess not surprisingly made their way into a good many of the period’s novels, not least D.H. Lawrence’s *Women in Love*, always to the dismay of the patroness. All this is wonderfully recorded in Miranda Seymour’s *Ottoline Mornll... Life on the Grand Scale* (Hodder, 1992) which portrays Garsington not just as a lively, jealous, sexual hotbed for a consciously self-liberating generation, which included in its numbers Bertrand Russell, D. H. Lawrence, W.B. Yeats, T.S. Eliot, Siegfried Sassoon and most of the Bloomsburies, but also a clearing-house for some of the liveliest and most radical thinking of the day.

Here, from 1916 onwards, the youthful Huxley, tall, shy, partially-sighted (it was his blindness that kept him out of the war), was a regular visitor, finally marrying one of Ottoline’s several protegees. He came to know well the house itself; often sleeping out (like Denis) on the roof, and most of the visitors, who thus provided him with something of the setting and characters for his first novel. It is no doubt relevant that Russell, Mark Gerder, Carrington, Dorothy Brett and the host and hostess themselves provide some hints for his central characters, though this fact was no doubt of more significance, and pain, to the subjects involved than it is to the modern reader. For the fact is that, though there is

personal satire involved, *Crome Yellow*, like any good book, easily transcends all its first stimuli. The characters become unmistakably Huxleyan, just as their world of obsessive ideas becomes the means for the author to analyse a time when chatter does not disguise despair, people live all alone in their own individual worlds of story, and all lives, as Denis comes to see, are parallel straight lines – with Jenny, who is deaf; only ‘a little bit more parallel than most.’

Crome Yellow is a modern comedy, a comedy of fresh, vivid ideas. It has ‘modern’ characters: Mr Scogan, the cynical philosopher, who looks like ‘one of those extinct bird-lizards of the Tertiary’; Gombauld, the modern painter who has been through abstraction and has now come out the other side of it; Mary, the serious virgin with aspirations to sexual release; Anne, the chilly and doll-like heroine; Mr Barbecue-Smith, the prophet-journalist; and the deaf and observant Jenny. They all have their own narratives and views of life to unfold. Meanwhile the modern reveals itself in other ways, as self-consciousness and despair. As Denis observes, ‘In the world of ideas everything was clear; in life all was obscure, embroiled. Was it surprising one was miserable, horribly unhappy?’ Against the spectacle of ideas, art and beauty, is the world of crude life, rutting, farrowing, going to the slaughter. ‘I make up a little story about beauty and pretend that it has something to do with art and goodness,’ Denis tries to explain. ‘I have to say that art is the process by which one reconstructs the divine reality out of chaos. Pleasure is one of the mystical roads to union with the infinite – the ecstasies of drinking, dancing, love-making. As for women, I am perpetually assuring myself that they’re the broad highway to divinity. And to think I’m only just beginning to see through the silliness of the whole thing!’ There is the pervasive sexual unease, always an important Huxley theme; there is the eternal split between ideals and actualities; and there are the comic intimations of apocalypse, as when at the village church the

iron-faced Mr Bodiham rebukes and warns his careless parishioners on behalf of the coming Armageddon, whose signs are clear, though the outcome is somehow strangely delayed.

‘Living modernly’s living quickly,’ Lucy Tantamount will explain later in Huxley’s fourth novel, *Point Counter Point* (1928), in which he further elaborated his theme and his world. ‘You can’t cart a wagonload of ideas and romanticisms around with you these days. When you travel by airplane, you must leave your heavy baggage behind. The good old-fashioned soul was all right when people lived slowly. But it’s too ponderous nowadays.’ Huxley’s modern world is one where ideas are adrift, the old soul is dying, and everything – as Calamy says in *Those Barren Leaves* (1925) – ‘is perfectly provisional and temporary’. For all that, Huxley has not quite done with the old soul or become fully convinced by the new cynicism, even though at the time his novels were generally thought cynical. Denis’ romanticism may be disappointed, but it is touching, as is Mary’s desire for sexual completeness and Gombauld’s for a true aesthetic emotion. There is even something moving about the satirical tales cunningly planted in the story to entertain the characters, and us; the narrative of Sir Hercules Occam, the perfectly-formed dwarf who builds his perfect dwarf estate until all is destroyed by a full-sized heir; the tale of the Misses Lapith, who eat nothing and seem only to live on air; the strange tales of Knockespotch, that early magical realist ‘I am tired of seeing the human mind bogged in a social plenum; I prefer to paint it in a vacuum, freely and sportively bombinating’), whose work neither the characters nor unfortunately we ourselves get to read; and Mr Scogan’s troubled scientific prophecies of the future, another form of ‘sportive combination’.

In fact, ‘sportive combination’ provides the real form of the book. It’s an abundance of different tale-types, intellectual narratives, grotesque stories, skilful parodies in

verse and prose, virtuoso performances. The spirit of the unread Knockespotch, who believes in 'extraordinary adventures and still more extraordinary speculations', in whose work 'an immense erudition and an immense fancy go hand in hand', is plainly the spirit of Huxley's own novel. It's a combinative game, a mixed bag of styles and mannerisms. The comic novel of ideas is one of the treasures of British fiction, not always sufficiently appreciated. *Crome Yellow* is one of the modern classics, which is why, well after its time, it can go on being read with complete delight and pleasure.

ALDOUS HUXLEY (1894-1963)

On 26 July 1894, near Godalming in Surrey, Aldous Leonard Huxley was born into a family which had only recently become synonymous with the intellectual aristocracy. Huxley's grandfather, Thomas Henry Huxley, had earned notoriety as 'Darwin's bulldog' and fame as a populariser of science, just as his own probing and controversial works were destined to outrage and exhilarate readers and non-readers alike in the following century. Aldous Huxley's mother was a niece of the poet and essayist Matthew Arnold, and he was a nephew of the redoubtable Mrs Humphry Ward, doyenne of late-Victorian novelists. This inheritance, combining the scientific and the literary in a blend which was to become characteristic of his vision as a writer, was both a source of great pride and a burden to Huxley in his formative years. Much was expected of him.

Three traumatic events left their mark on the young Huxley. In 1908 his mother died of cancer, and this led to the effective break-up of the family home. Two years later, while a schoolboy at Eton, Huxley contracted an eye infection which made him almost completely blind for a time and severely impaired his vision for the rest of his life. The suicide of his brother Trevenen in August 1914 robbed Huxley of the person to whom he felt closest. Over twenty years later, in *Eyeless in Gaza* (1936), Huxley's treatment of the death of the main character's mother and his embodiment of 'Trev' in the novel as the vulnerable Brian Foxe give some indication of the indelible pain which these tragic occurrences left in their wake. To a considerable degree, they account for the darkness, pungency and cynicism which feature so prominently in Huxley's work throughout the inter-war period.

Within months of achieving a First in English Language and Literature at Balliol College, Oxford in 1916, Huxley published *The Burning Wheel*. Huxley's first collection of verse, and the three which followed it, *Jonah* (1917), *The Defeat of Youth* (1918) and *Leda* (1920), reveal his indebtedness to French symbolism and *fin de siècle* aestheticism. Also discernible, however, beneath the poetry's triste and ironic patina, is a concern with the inward world of the spirit which anticipates Huxley's later absorption in mysticism. These volumes of poetry were the first of over fifty separate works of fiction, drama, verse, criticism, biography, travel and speculative writing which Huxley was to produce during the course of his life.

Unfit for military service, Huxley worked as a farm labourer at Lady Ottoline Morrell's Garsington Manor after he left Oxford. Here he met not only D.H. Lawrence, Bertrand Russell, Clive Bell, Mark Gertler and other Bloomsbury figures, but also a Belgian refugee, Maria Nys, whom he married in 1919. By then Huxley was working for the *Athenaeum* magazine under the adroit editorship of Middleton Murry. Soon after he became the first British editor of *House and Garden*, worked for *Vogue* and contributed musical criticism to the *Weekly Westminster Gazette* in the early 1920s.

Limbo (1920), a collection of short stories, preceded the appearance of *Crome Yellow* in 1921, the novel with which Huxley first made his name as a writer. Inspired by, among others, Thomas Love Peacock, Norman Douglas and Anatole France, Huxley's first novel incorporated many incidents from his sojourn at Garsington as well as mischievous portraits of its chatelaine and his fellow guests. More blatantly still, *Crome Yellow* is an iconoclastic tilt at the Victorian and Edwardian mores which had resulted in the First World War and its terrible aftermath. For all its comic bravura, which won acclaim from writers such as Scott Fitzgerald and Max Beerbohm, *Crome Yellow* may be read,

along with Lytton Strachey's *Eminent Victorians* (1918) and Huxley's second novel *Antic Hay* (1923), as an expression of the pervasive mood of disenchantment in the early 1920s. Huxley told his father that *Antic Hay* was 'written by a member of what I may call the war-generation for others of his kind,. He went on to say that it was intended to reflect 'the life and opinions of an age which has seen the violent disruption of almost all the standards, conventions and values current in the previous epoch'.

Even as a schoolboy Huxley had been an avid browser among the volumes of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, and it did not take long for him to acquire a reputation for arcane eclecticism. Moreover, as his prestige as a debunker and an emancipator grew, so Huxley was condemned more roundly by critics of the old guard, such as James Douglas of the *Daily Express*, who denounced the explicit discussion of sex and free thought in his fiction. *Antic hay* was burned in Cairo, and in the ensuing years many of Huxley's books were censored, censored or banned at one time or another. Conversely, it was the openness, wit, effortless learning and apparent insouciance of Huxley's early work which proved such an appetising concoction for novelists as diverse as Evelyn Waugh, William Faulkner, Anthony Powell and Barbara Pym. Angus Wilson called Huxley 'the god of my adolescence'.

From 1923 onwards Huxley lived abroad more or less permanently, first near Florence and then, between 1930 and 1937, at Sanary on the Côte d'Azur. In *Along the Road* (1925), subtitled 'Notes and Essays of a Tourist', Huxley offered a lively and engaging account of the places and works of art he had taken in since his arrival in Italy, and both the title story of his third collection of tales, *Little Mexican* (1924), and his third novel, *Those Barren Leaves* (1925), are set in that country. According to Huxley, the theme of *Those Barret Leaves* is 'the undercutting of everything by a sort of despairing scepticism and then the

undercutting of that by mysticism'. For W.B. Yeats, *Those Barren Leaves* heralded the return of philosophy to the English novel, but it was with his fourth novel, *Point Counter Point* (1928), that Huxley cemented his reputation with the reading public as a thought-provoking writer of fiction. *Point Counter Point* is Huxley's first true 'novel of ideas', the type of fiction with which he has become most closely identified. He once explained that his aim as a novelist was 'to arrive, technically, at a perfect fusion of the novel and the essay', arguing that the novel should be like a holdall, bursting with opinion and arresting ideas. This privileging of content over form was one of the many things he had in common with H.G. Wells; it was anathema to the likes of Virginia Woolf. Huxley was fascinated by the fact that 'the same person is simultaneously a mass of atoms, a physiology, a mind, an object with a shape that can be painted, a cog in the economic machine, a voter, a lover etc', and one of his key aims in *Point Counter Point* was to offer this multi-faceted view of his principal characters.

Huxley's more sombre mood in the late 1920s was epitomised by *Proper Studies* (1927), the most important of the four volumes of essays he published during the decade, and the one in which he first set himself unequivocally against what he regarded as the vulgarity and perversity of mass civilisation. Between September 1925 and June 1926 Huxley had travelled via India to the United States, and it was this visit to America which made him so pessimistic about the cultural future of Europe. He recounted his experiences in *Festing Pilate* (1926). 'The thing which is happening in America is a revaluation of values,' Huxley wrote, 'a radical alteration (for the worse) of established standards', and it was soon after visiting the United States that Huxley conceived the idea of writing a satire on what he had encountered. *Brave New World* (1932) may be read as Huxley's contribution to the widespread fear of Americanisation which had been current in Europe since the

mid-nineteenth century, but this humorous, disturbing and curiously ambivalent novel offers much more than straightforward travesty. Similarly, although *Brave New World* has become, with Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, one of the twin pillars of the anti-utopian tradition in literature and a byword for all that is most repellent and 'nightmarish' in the world to come, it was written with Huxley's gaze very much on the crisis-torn present of Britain in 1931. When placed alongside *Brief Candles* (1930), a well-received collection of short stories, *Music at Night* (1931), a typically energetic and wide-ranging volume of essays, and *Texts and Pretexts* (1932), a verse anthology with commentaries designed to show that even in the highly-charged political atmosphere of the early 1930s 'they also serve who only bother their heads about art', Huxley's polygonal appeal as a novelist, thinker and pundit is brought home. In 1934 he published *Beyond the Mexique Bay*, an account of his travels in the Caribbean and Central America, and in 1936, *Eyeless in Gaza*. Stimulated by his conversion to pacifism in November 1935, Huxley's sixth novel imbricates the fears, foibles, prejudices and dissensions of the age with a fictionalisation of his own history. A commitment to questions which are essentially religious, rather than political or philosophical, is evident in Huxley's work for the first time.

When Huxley left Europe for the United States in April 1937 he was at the height of his fame as a novelist and the Peace Pledge Union's leading celebrity. Ironically, he was by now far more concerned with the virtues of non-attachment, anarchism, decentralisation and mystical salvation than with the failings of contemporary society, the role of pacifism in national politics or the art of fiction. If Huxley had been intent on exposing the meaninglessness of life in the 1920s, from the mid-1930s he was preoccupied with seeking the meaning of existence. *Ends and Means* (1937), in which Huxley tried 'to relate the problems of domestic and

international politics, of war and economics, of education, religion and ethics, to a theory of the ultimate nature of reality', signalled his departure for the higher ground of mystical enlightenment where he would remain encamped for the rest of his life.

It was to lecture on the issues which dominate *Ends and Means* that Huxley and his friend and guru Gerald Heard had travelled to the United States. Huxley had every intention of returning to Europe, but his wife's, need to live in a hot, dry climate on health grounds and the lucrative prospect of writing for the movies contrived to keep the Huxleys in America until it was too unsafe to return. Huxley's reaction to Hollywood and its cult of youth finds mordant expression in *After Many a Summer* (1939), the story of a Citizen Kane-like character's life of grandiose illusion. The materialist excesses of Jo Stoyte are counterpointed by the ascetic convictions of Propter, a modern-day anchorite modelled on Heard. Huxley and Hollywood were not compatible, and his failure to write a popular play in the inter-war years was mirrored in his largely unsuccessful efforts to write for the movies. Walt Disney's widely reported rejection of Huxley's synopsis of *Alice in Wonderland* on the grounds that he 'could only understand every third word' was symptomatic of Huxley's problem. His natural bent was for the leisurely and allusive development of an idea; above all else the movie moguls demanded pacey dialogue. His disenchantment with the world of the film studios is evident in the opening pages of *Ape and Essence* (1948), Huxley's ghastly and graphic projection of Los Angeles as a ruinous, sprawling ossuary in the aftermath of the atomic Third World War. While the threat of global nuclear conflict has receded for the present, Huxley's discussion of the rapid deforestation, pollution and other acts of ecological 'imbecility' which preceded the self-inflicted apocalypse he describes in the novel, is still chillingly topical.

Huxley spent most of the war years in a small house at Llano in the Mojave Desert in Southern California. In 1926 he had dismissed meditation as 'the doze's first cousin', but it was to a life of quietistic contemplation that Huxley now devoted himself. This phase of his career resulted in the excellent *Grey Eminence* (1941), a biography of Father Joseph, adviser to Cardinal Richelieu; *Time Must Have a stop* (1944), a novel set in Florence in 1929 in which, to borrow Huxley's words, 'a piece of the *Comédie Humaine*... modulates into a version of the *Divina Commedia*'; and *The Perennial Philosophy* (1945), a profoundly influential anthology of excerpts and commentaries illustrating what Huxley called 'the highest common factor of all the higher religions'. He went on to say with typical humour and humility, 'The greatest merit of the book is that about forty per cent of it is not by me, but by a lot of saints, many of whom were also men of genius.' *The Devils of Loudun*, a compelling psychological study of sexual hysteria in seventeenth-century France, which was subsequently turned into a successful film, appeared in 1952. In the same way that Huxley's astringent social satires caught the mood of the 1920s, so, in the years during and following the Second World War and the enormity of the Jewish Holocaust, his personal concern with spiritual and ethical matters and his consternation at the accelerating arms race, reflected both the tone and unease of the zeitgeist.

Huxley also acquired new readers through his support of the marginal and unconventional, and his detractors, hitherto exercised by what they saw as his immorality or preachiness, began to pour scorn on his alleged faddism. In 1942 he published *The Art of Seeing*, a passionate defence of the Bates method of eye training which aroused a storm of protest from the optometrist lobby. Even more outrageous, for many, was his suggestion in *The Doors of Perception* (1954) and its sequel, *Heaven and Hell* (1956), that mescaline and lysergic acid were 'drugs of unique