

Aldous Huxley's
Point Counter Point
- a modernist novel?

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1. **Huxley's Criticism on Modernist Literature**

In his essay *Tragedy and the Whole Truth* Huxley describes the literature of his time as displaying “the Whole Truth, ... the great oceans of irrelevant things, events and thoughts stretching endlessly away in every direction from whatever island point (a character, a story) the author may choose to contemplate”¹. It appears to lack a focus on meaningful statements.

In opposition to these “great oceans of irrelevant things” Huxley would rather like to see issues of major importance to modern society discussed in literature. In his view, literature is philosophy². As the two main fields of appropriate topics Huxley mentions science's recent discoveries and religion and the interaction of these two opponent cultures. Huxley realised he was witnessing one of the greatest shifts in Western thinking since the Renaissance when science took a new position in culture.³ He therefore concludes that “literary artists should engage with science”⁴. Huxley complains that writers lack interest in science while scientists are too restricted to a scientific view to communicate their knowledge to a wider audience: “The men who do feel passionately about abstractions ... are men of science and philosophers, preoccupied with the search for truth and not, like the poet, with the expression and creation of beauty”⁵. In his essay on the *Subject-Matter of Poetry* Huxley expresses his demand for the two academic disciplines to ‘interact’: “If he possessed the requisite sense of language and the impelling desire to express himself in terms of beauty, Einstein could write the most intoxicating lyrics about relativity. ... And if, say, Mr. Yeats understood the Einstein theory, ... he too could give us, out of the Celtic twilight, his lyrics of relativity”⁶. He asks for a “poet-philosopher-man-of-action whose passionate curiosity about facts enabled him to make poetry out of the most unlikely aspects of material life”⁷. The same demand he formulates for narrative fiction. If literature would explore the fields of the new ideas and astonishing facts “with which the new science has endowed the modern world“ and if it would work out an appropriate form for dealing with these new achievements, a “satisfactory artistic method for dealing with abstractions”, then there would be real novelty in it⁸.

It is the objective of this essay to find out as to how far the application of Huxley's own critical views have influenced his style and to what extent Modernist characteristics in topics and stylistic features have been preserved in his novel *Point Counter Point*.

¹ Huxley, *Tragedy and the Whole Truth*, p. 102

² cf. Huxley, *Vulgarity in Literature*, p. 110

³ cf. Deery, p.2

⁴ from Deery, p. 2

⁵ Huxley, *Subject-Matter of Poetry*, p. 92

⁶ Huxley, *Subject-Matter of Poetry*, p. 93

⁷ Huxley, *Subject-Matter of Poetry*, p. 95

2. Modernist Topics and stylistic Features

Most critics have agreed on regarding Modernism as an international and intercultural phenomenon⁹. Zima however points out that although there are certain parallels in architecture and art, Modernism should primarily be seen as a phenomenon of communication, above all in literature and philosophy¹⁰. Modernist literature shows a large variety of diverse literary styles. Yet some features such as the search for reliable values in a fast changing world and new forms for literature, that enable authors to cope with these changes, show a certain dominance in Modernist texts.

2.1 The Problem of Diversity of Modernist Texts

Because of very heterogeneous definitions, giving a concise description of a typical Modernist lyrical style is a tricky business. Nicholls' decision not "to bombard the reader with great names [but] provide a conceptual map of the different Modernist tendencies"¹¹ proves that there is also a wide range of different ideas and styles to be found within the range of literature associated with this period of time.

Zima as well sees Modernism as an in itself heterogeneous intercultural literary period: "Modernismus ist stilistisch heterogen"¹². He continues: "Wenn er [Fokkema] beispielsweise den modernistischen Kode von Autoren wie Thomas Mann, Gide, Proust, Larbaud, Joyce, Aldous Huxley, Virginia Woolf und Pirandello ... zu beschreiben versucht, so erfaßt er zwar wesentliche Textmerkmale, ebnet jedoch die ästhetischen Gegensätze zwischen Gide, Proust, Joyce und Huxley ein, die z.T. unvereinbaren Normen folgen"¹³.

Additional to the heterogeneity within Modernist fiction, 'pre-' and postmodernist concepts interfere. Nicholls remarks that "the beginnings of modernism, like its endings, are largely indeterminate"¹⁴. In recent criticism the borderlines of styles preceding and following the Modernist period seem to be transitional. In fact, the best known work of one of the most central Modernist writers, James Joyce's *Ulysses*, has been described by McHale as a hybrid text featuring both Modernist as well as Postmodernist characteristics: "Split roughly down the middle, its first half has long served as a norm for *High Modernist* poetics, while only recently have we begun to regard its second half as normatively postmodernist"¹⁵. This means that even further new concepts would have to be considered. According to Zima, one example of such interfering concepts would be the loss of unity of single characters

⁸ cf. Huxley, *Subject-Matter of Poetry*, p. 94

⁹ cf. Zima, p. 240

¹⁰ cf. Zima, p. 241

¹¹ Nicholls, p.1

¹² cf. Zima, p. 256

¹³ Zima, p.231

¹⁴ Nicholls, p.1

¹⁵ McHale, p.10

as a central feature of postmodernist fiction: “das Subjekt lebt und gedeiht in der postmodernen Kultur, obwohl es etwas fragmentierter ist als bisher“¹⁶.

2.2 Common Features of Modernist Literature

Besides all diversity in Modernist fiction some dominant ideas and stylistic features can be found. J. Quinones and Brian McHale aim to see Modernism as a noetic system in which certain questions and statements play a central role¹⁷. McHale tries to construct a catalogue of such questions and issues¹⁸, some of which will be examined under 2.1 and 2.2. Leon Surettes’ examinations focusing on Anglo-American Modernist authors such as Ezra Pound, T.S.Eliot and W. B. Yeats concludes that the questions raised are mainly of a metaphysic and epistemological nature: “Der Modernismus war ... dem metaphysischen und epistemologischen Absolutismus verpflichtet“¹⁹.

Zima relates this to the Modernists’ affection for metaphysics: „Modernistische Literatur treibt die Kritik der Metaphysik (Subjekt, Begrifflichkeit, Wahrheit) auf die Spitze, Modernismus ist als spätmoderne Selbstkritik der Moderne zu sehen“²⁰. Modernists oppose the reality of the individual to the modern development towards indifference. Zima stresses the importance of Modernist criticism: “Modernisierung ohne moderne und modernistische Kritik [führt zu] Modernisierung in der Indifferenz“²¹.

In the general destabilisation of the individual self as consequence of dealing with these epistemological questions Deery as well sees a feature common to many Modernist texts²².

To a certain extent, social criticism is expressed in critical utopian Modernist writing. Here, Zima finds a further common feature: “Dem Modernismus wird ... durch das Aufbegehren seiner Autoren gegen die bürgerliche Gesellschaftsordnung ... eine Einheit zu Teil, die im gemeinsamen Nenner der universalistisch fundierten Gesellschaftskritik zum Ausdruck kommt“²³. He links Modernist criticism to utopian influences: “das kritisch-utopische Moment, das die Affinität zwischen Modernismus und Kritischer Theorie erklärt“²⁴. In this context Nicholls names Futurism as one central feature of Modernist literature, referring to “the translation of politics into style“²⁵ when Modernism has emerged from aestheticism and symbolism.

¹⁶ Zima, p.236

¹⁷ cf. Zima, p. 237

¹⁸ cf. Zima, p.253

¹⁹ Surette, p.286

²⁰ cf. Zima, p.224

²¹ Zima, p. 225

²² cf. Deery, 33

²³ Zima, p. 256

²⁴ Zima, p. 256

²⁵ Nicholls, p. vii

To find a new style, many Modernist authors have utilised new forms of narration like the *stream of consciousness*, breaking with the traditional form of the anecdote. Occasionally, with these experiments the form of a novel seems to be of a higher interest than its actual content.

2.2.1 The Loss of Orientation as a dominant Topic

Modernist literature often reflects on a crisis of the conscious subject due to a loss of orientation regarding the values of modern society. Zima talks of the “Bewußtsein von einer Krise des individuellen und kollektiven Subjekts”²⁶. The subject raises the questions *Who am I?* and *Who are we?*²⁷ as a starting point to endeavour the complex question *How are we to live in this world?*. Further epistemologically orientated problems are raised: *How can I interpret this world? What can I know? Who knows the answer, and how reliable is their knowledge? Where are the borders of what is perceivable?* These epistemological questions then lead on to more general ontological questions like *What kind of world is this that we live in?* and *What should be done in this world?*²⁸.

These uncertainties over such existential questions often make the characters show a loss of orientation. Especially in the English Modernist literature many examples can be found, such as the vanity of all life, being overshadowed by the future death, in Yeats’ *Waste Land*, the chaotic and fragmented odyssey of Joyce’s *Ulysses* or Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs Dalloway* finding herself with no occupation or goals in the middle of her life.

Stevenson remarks that “Modernist fiction ... often ends in openness and uncertainty. ... Faced with this unresolvable turbulence in the actual social world, Modernist fiction’s endings are often forced to move altogether beyond it”²⁹.

As one source of disorientation Quinones sees diversity as a major Modernist topic. He speaks of the “Modernist capacity to exploit and develop the virtues of cosmopolitanism, diversity and fragmentation”³⁰. Deery speaks of the destabilisation of the self: “Modernist characters tend to be isolated, fragmented and conscious of limitations. They puzzle themselves as well as each other.”³¹

In concrete, this loss of orientation is expressed in different ways by the various Modernist authors. This shows for example in the contrast between a partially mystified and alienated world in the works of Joyce and Yeates as opposed to the deliberate staging of daily life action in the novels of Woolf or Aldous Huxley.

²⁶ Zima, p. 253

²⁷ cf. Zima, p. 253

²⁸ cf. Zima, p. 239

²⁹ Stevenson, p. 152

³⁰ Quinones, p.27

³¹ Deery, p. 33

2.2.2 *Breaking the Rules of Narration*

While modern (opposed to modernist) fiction generally follows the coherence of an anecdote, Modernist literature often proves to challenge traditional narrative syntax. Zima speaks of the “Kritik an der narrativen Syntax an der anekdotischen Erzählung“³². In Modernist fiction the reader is often puzzled over the question *Who is talking?*³³. As a further problem of Modernist narration Zima asks “Welchen Herrschaftsanspruch erhebt der Erzähler?”³⁴. The reader experiences the lack of any reliable source of information. Deery as well mentions that in Modernist texts “narrators are no longer reliable, no observer, in fact, is privileged“³⁵.

The most prominent form is the *stream of consciousness* technique where the natural linear string of events is interrupted by a chain of associations, often individual memories in a character’s mind, triggered by a certain event of the main plot. Referring to this non-linear experience, *Stevenson* expands on the dramatisation of time in Modernist literature, he mentions that „movement into time as vision, time in the mind rather than time on the clock or in the world, is visible throughout Modernist novels“³⁶.

Above all others, the works of Joyce and Woolf show a high affinity to the *stream of consciousness* approach. For example, In Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway* the reader experiences the actual time passing very slowly. The whole novel only covers one day. Constant flash-backs give insights to the development of relations between the main characters. Often it is trivial events like a plane cruising over London or the passing by of an important person’s car that cause the characters to follow long chains of associations.

In the starting sequence of James Joyce’s *A Portrait of the young Artist* the reader is introduced to the main character’s early youth through a chain of memories that seem to be of a rather chaotic choice. In fact, they start with the father and then in several steps proceed to the wider environment. Further events of his youth are referred to, such as the breaking of taboos is suggested by the young *Stephen* hiding under the table, a rebellion against his family is hinted at by his reluctance for an apology and the announced punishment (the eagles coming to pull out his eyes). The technique here proves very effective and artistic at the same time.

It has to be said, however, that these High Modernist texts are extremely difficult to read. The reader gets the impression that the actual content of what he reads is of little interest while the overall form of the specific piece of literature is what is being celebrated. This idea of *form over content* has therefore often been criticised.

³² Zima, p. 253

³³ cf. Zima, p. 253

³⁴ cf. Zima, p. 253

³⁵ cf. Deery, p. 33

³⁶ cf. Stevenson, p. 152

3. Dominant stylistic Elements of Point Counter Point

The characters introduced in *Point Counter Point* are often sarcastic and show a loss of orientation. In order to place a meta-discussion on his literary concept Huxley integrates a novelist character into his novel, who reflects on the idea of writing a novel using the contrapuntal views, thoughts, memories and associations of different characters, brought to the reader by techniques similar to the stream of consciousness, to construct a multi-perspective view. Finally, the different characters' main function is to describe different aspects in an ongoing discourse elaborating various ideas concerning life in the contemporary society.

3.1 Huxley's disoriented Characters

The ideas expressed in Huxley's novels generally turn on notions of crisis³⁷. The very Modernist idea of a loss of consistent values is featured in many novels of Huxley. Their characters are often in confusion about what values they should stand in for and how they should behave in the resulting critical situation. An example would be Calamy's remark in *Those Barren Leaves* about "the sense that everything's perfectly provisional and temporary ... the feeling that nothing ... is really save"³⁸.

The disorientation shown mirrors genuine concerns of society in the early 20th century. Bradbury finds that "though Huxley's novels were regarded as indifferent and cynical, the underlying pain, anxiety and humanism were real enough"³⁹. In contemporary criticism the characters have therefore been perceived as "slightly monstrous"⁴⁰, "speculating about life, railing against it, wounding and wearying one another"⁴¹. They have been described as "men, weary of living, sated with experience yet irritable with nervous desires, immensely intelligent yet puzzling over the utility of the simplest acts [... as] you find them in all the really modern plays and novels"⁴².

In *Point Counter Point* characters deal with this situation of disorientation in different ways. The field ranges from those seeking for appropriate values for a prosperous and decent society over those following pseudo values such as the aspiration for fame and material wealth to those who have given up on any conventional standards and pursue a life in decadence.

Some characters do apply a critical view on the contemporary society. For example, *Illidge* complains about the loss of social bounds amongst the richer part of society. He expands on his thesis that the rich have no real neighbours⁴³.

³⁷ cf. Bradbury, p.197

³⁸ taken from Bradbury, p. 197

³⁹ Bradbury, p.198

⁴⁰ Kronenberger, p. 165

⁴¹ cf. Kronenberger, p. 164

⁴² Canby, p. 166

⁴³ cf. Huxley, *Point Counter Point*, p. 53

Rampion has even lost the believe in civilisation. For him “civilisation is harmony and completeness”⁴⁴. The separation of religion and science has left him with the impression of a barbarian society without apparent values: “Christianity made us barbarians of the soul, and now science is making us barbarians of the intellect”⁴⁵. He sees the recent development of separation as a disease, “the disease of modern man”⁴⁶. He claims that “it’s Jesus’s and Newton’s and Henry Ford’s disease. Between them, the three have pretty well killed us. Ripped the life out of our bodies and stuffed us with hatred”⁴⁷. The three persons here appear to stand for their cultural field, with Henry Ford symbolising industrialisation as the latest achievement of science.

The writer *Philip Quarles* is left puzzled over a more personal question, he finds himself unable to communicate in a real life situation: “in the ordinary daily world of human contacts he was 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”⁴⁸. This problem leaves the intellectual virtually unable to participate in social life.

Some of the characters that appear to be accepted members of the decent society unconsciously aspire to lower values that function as a substitute to fill the lack of genuine ideals. The painter *John Bidlake*, for example, sees fame as the thing most urgent to be achieved in life. He constantly tries to draw attention to his works, above all the ‘Bathers’, a painting which appears as a reminder of his love for women and the sexuality he lives. Also many women attending *Lady Edwards* party seem to take the opportunity and seek for recognition through more or less witty and elegant small talk with the various prominent guests. Another example for the substitution of ideals would be *Burlap’s* greed for money and material wealth.

Walter Bidlake, however, leads a life of double standards. Tired of a decent home life with his wife *Majorie* he escapes into an affair with *Lucy Tantamount*, seeking to satisfy his lust for sexual excitement. He knows and worries about the double moral he applies, yet he seems too attracted by her unpredictable action, often breaking with the code of decency, to fight her influence on his now unhappy marriage. He stays split between these two realities, as shown in his thoughts when leaving for the party: “He was free. Free from recollection and anticipation. Free ... to refuse to admit the existence of past or future. ... Free - but the boast was idle; he went on remembering. Escape was not so easy a matter ... His crime had been a

⁴⁴ Huxley, *Point Counter Point*, p. 103

⁴⁵ Huxley, *Point Counter Point*, p. 103

⁴⁶ Huxley, *Point Counter Point*, p. 117

⁴⁷ Huxley, *Point Counter Point*, p. 117

⁴⁸ Huxley, *Point Counter Point*, p. 76

fraud as well as a murder”⁴⁹.

Bradbury talks of “desires for primitivism, the products of an age of lost ideals and universal boredom in which barbarism and Freudian libido become solutions to an intellectual sterility”⁵⁰. This resignation mainly affects the younger generation with the exception of the faithless *John Bidlake*. As *Lucy Tantamount* rightly observes: “He’s been infected by the cynicism of the younger generation, I suppose. We’re dangerous company”⁵¹. *Mrs. Betterton* adds that “nowadays young people are bored and world-weary before they come of age”⁵².

Lucy stands out almost like an icon of this generation. Her rejection of the world of her parents’ generation is expressed in her comment on the party guests: “There’s nothing I hate more than the noise of cultured, respectable, eminent people, like these creatures”⁵³. She tries to lead her life according to a negative print of the values associated with the “respectable” world, above all drinking, decadent talk and free sexual pleasure. As a result, she has as Huxley puts it a “fondness for the deliberate social blunder”⁵⁴. There are numerous references to the fact that she stands as a representative of a whole lost generation produced by the failing of the former generations, as it is suggested in *Illidge’s* description of *Lucy* as “the consummate flower of this charming civilisation of ours”⁵⁵.

To live this unsociable behaviour she needs the company of others approving of it. She is filled with a “chronic dread of solitude”⁵⁶ and the demand that people should do exactly what she wants. For this fear of being left without any confirmation of her decadent life style she influences her friends, above all the alcoholic *Spandrell* who is described by *Rampion* as “a permanent adolescent ... not being able to live, because he’s too busy thinking about death and God and truth and mysticism and all the rest of it”⁵⁷. Like *Lucy*, *Spandrell* has left the value system his parents’ generation promoted, renouncing a proper employment, what makes his father see him as “a waster, an idler; drinking and drabbing; making his mother miserable ... disgracing the family name”⁵⁸.

Throughout the novel the characters are often presented in a cynical and satirical way. The satirical comment is either communicated through other characters like when *Burlap* opposes to *Molly’s* account on her appreciation of the airiness of a fairy-like elemental that she “might as well envy a balloon”⁵⁹, or through Huxley’s

⁴⁹ Huxley, *Point Counter Point*, p. 7

⁵⁰ Bradbury, p.197

⁵¹ Huxley, *Point Counter Point*, p. 47

⁵² Huxley, *Point Counter Point*, p. 48

⁵³ Huxley, *Point Counter Point*, p. 84

⁵⁴ Huxley, *Point Counter Point*, p. 82

⁵⁵ Huxley, *Point Counter Point*, p. 54

⁵⁶ cf. Huxley, *Point Counter Point*, p. 132

⁵⁷ Huxley, *Point Counter Point*, p. 133

⁵⁸ Huxley, *Point Counter Point*, p. 82

⁵⁹ cf. Huxley, *Point Counter Point*, p. 87

narration, for example the constant report of *Weaver's* cough of self satisfaction⁶⁰. The way Huxley presents his extreme characters can already be seen as a form of criticism. From Huxley's biting cynicism Bennett concludes that "the author ... hates and despises his characters"⁶¹.

3.2 The Novelist as a Novel's Character

Bradbury mentions the two most outstanding elements introduced in *Point Counter Point* in a brief comment as "a novel of ideas about writing a novel of ideas"⁶². In chapter 6 Huxley introduces the novelist character *Philip Quarles* having dinner with his wife *Elinor* and an Indian friend in Bombay. He appears as an introverted personality unable to communicate with the world that surrounds him, who can only express himself through his writing.

This novelist then reflects on the plans for one of his novels explaining the idea of putting a novelist in the novel: „He [the novelist] justifies aesthetic generalizations [and] experiment. Specimens of his work may illustrate other possible ways of telling a story"⁶³. Moreover, Quarles suggests an ongoing boxing of novelists' stories into another novelist's story: "Why draw a line at one novelist inside your novel?"⁶⁴ What *Quarles* plans is of course exactly what Huxley himself had done. Bradbury concludes that therefore Huxley's books "are nothing if not self-conscious"⁶⁵.

So the novelist character displays Huxley's very own views on writing a novel. This becomes even more obvious when he starts designing the main thesis for Huxley's concept of a *Novel of Ideas* as discussed later under 3.4.

3.3 Stream of Consciousness as Part of the Counterpoint Technique

According to Deery, Huxley's narratives show "a kind of contained randomness, an 'elegant chaos'"⁶⁶. Characters and events are presented to the reader through various different perspectives. There is "no privileged observer"⁶⁷ who the reader could rely on, a feature often found in Modernist fiction.

It is this artificial combination of different perspectives which allows the reader as an individual to go beyond the ordinary bounds of a character's subjective perspective to get a wider picture of a situation. Huxley explains the approach of a contrapuntal technique in *Point Counter Point* through the writer character *Philip*

⁶⁰ cf. Huxley, *Point Counter Point*, p. 123 ff.

⁶¹ cf. Bennett, p. 175

⁶² Bradbury, p.196

⁶³ Huxley, *Point Counter Point*, p. 296

⁶⁴ Huxley, *Point Counter Point*, p. 296 f.

⁶⁵ Bradbury, p.197

⁶⁶ Deery, p. 31

⁶⁷ cf. Deery, p. 33

Quarles: “A novelist modulates by reduplicating situations and characters”⁶⁸. In an earlier sequence he suggests that “the artist should ‘counterpoint’ different strata as ‘a new way of looking at things’”⁶⁹. In this respect, Glicksberg finds an apparent analogy to the physical theory of relativity and claims that Huxley has applied this theory to the art of fiction since people and events in the time-space continuum are viewed from strikingly different experimental perspectives⁷⁰. Deery however refers to the musical notion where counterpoint is a means of interweaving and juxtaposing different tunes played simultaneously. The combination and interchanging of the different narrative lines in *Point Counter Point* resemble the arrangement of the different tunes in a piece of music composed to the conventions of a counterpoint. Literature can, however, never truly achieve a contrapuntal simultaneity and therefore has to imitate it by frequent switching between situations and perspectives as applied in *Point Counter Point*.

To reach this aim of a multi-perspective Huxley often uses techniques similar to the *stream of consciousness* device, one of the central Modernist techniques. Taking the frame action of *Lady Tantamount’s* party as a starting point, the reader gets introduced to the guests’ thoughts and views on other guests from where transition to further anecdotes of their lives are being constructed. The main parallel to the *stream of consciousness* is, that we experience the scenes described through the eyes and the mind of the character in question. These insertions to the main plot range from brief thoughts to descriptive accounts of the length of a whole chapter.

At the very start of the novel *Walter Bidlake* and his fiancé *Marjorie* plainly argue about what time she can expect him to return home. Through the thoughts of the two characters the reader gets to know what the argument is really about: *Walter* longing to betray her for some amusement with the much more exciting *Lucy Tantamount* and *Marjorie* sensing the near breakdown of their once happy marriage. An example of a less obvious association would be the image evoked in *Quarles’s* mind by *Lucy Tantamount’s* pale gums: “She laughed, opening her mouth - and her tongue and gums were so much paler than the paint on her lips that they seemed ... quite bloodless and white by contrast. And then, without transition, I was standing in front of those sacred crocodiles in the palace gardens at Jaipur”⁷¹, and he goes on comparing the crocodiles mouths to that of *Lucy Tantamount*.

A longer association is *Walter Bidlake’s* memory of the old *Mr. Wetherington* who his mother used to look after, which is triggered when he sees an old man on the underground for who he feels the same dislike. The anecdote is placed as a flashback within the main plot starting with the phrase: “And suddenly he was nine

⁶⁸ Huxley, *Point Counter Point*, p. 296

⁶⁹ Huxley, *Point Counter Point*, p. 265

⁷⁰ cf. Deery, p. 31

⁷¹ Huxley, *Point Counter Point*, p. 295

years old walking with his mother ...”⁷².

Chapter 3 ends with *Lady Edward* briefly asking for the time of *Elinor* and *Philip Quarles*’ return from India. *John Bidlake* answers “telegraphically, ... too busy thinking of the caviar”⁷³. Despite the remarkably brief link a whole chapter follows, reflecting the thoughts of *Elinor* and *Philip Quarles* in India (chapter 4). Within this inserted narration typical features of the contrapuntal approach show up again. With the switching between *Elinor*’s and *Quarles*’ thoughts on their relationship it is the reader only who understands the situation as a whole. Once again, no reliable narrator can be found at this point of the story.

Another inserted narration is the introduction to how the *Rampions* got to know each other (chapter 9). Again, the sequence is linked with the main action, it is placed just after *Lucy Tantamount* and *Walter Bidlake* have joined the couple sitting amongst friends in a restaurant. This time, the link is explained explicitly: “Mary shut her eyes and thought of the time when she and Rampion had been young”⁷⁴. With this construction *Mary Rampion* seems to be the reliable narrator of this anecdote. However, she is not. As well as her own thoughts and impressions, those of *Mark Rampion* are communicated to the reader. Here, with the contrapuntal theory at work again, the juxtaposition of two representatives of different social classes becomes visible. While *Mark Rampion* is born as the son of a poor family, his wife *Mary* never had to care for material needs. The different circumstances of their upbringing have influenced the way they see the world. One example would be their disagreement on the question whether it is suitable and decent to spend a whole morning in bed not doing any work at all.

One has to say that, while the use of different associations to embed inserts to the main narration resembles the stream of consciousness passages in *Woolfe*’s or *Joyce*’s novels, the transitions between thoughts and memories within the ‘stream’ often follow a traditional anecdotal sequence. Moreover, it appears that the different ideas are of a central interest. Rather than just inventing a new literary style, Huxley sees in his multi-perspective approach a means for a new way of discourse in a multi-disciplinary cultural situation: it offers “a way of coping with and representing increasingly specialized and distinct views of reality”⁷⁵. As Stevenson remarks, the fractured and contrasted narratives of *Point Counter Point* “reproduce the fragmented, discontinuous aspect of contemporary history”⁷⁶. Once again this is represented by the character *Quarles* when he dreams of looking at reality “with religious eyes, scientific eyes, economic eyes”⁷⁷.

⁷² Huxley, *Point Counter Point*, p. 13

⁷³ Huxley, *Point Counter Point*, p. 67

⁷⁴ Huxley, *Point Counter Point*, p. 96

⁷⁵ Deery, p. 31

⁷⁶ cf. Stevenson, p. 152

⁷⁷ Huxley, *Point Counter Point*, p. 266

3.4 *The Novel of Ideas*

The writer character *Quarles* reflects on a concept for the book he writes for the Times. He talks of the musicalization of fiction, relating to diverse variations on one plain theme: “In sets of variations the process is carried a step further. ... The whole range of thought and feeling, yet all in organic relation to a ridiculous little waltz tune”⁷⁸. He then develops a way to transfer this idea to the structure of a novel: “Get this into a novel. How? ... All you need is a sufficiency of characters and parallel, contrapuntal plots”⁷⁹.

Through his novelist character, who names this concept the *Novel of Ideas*, Huxley gives a definition of how a novel of ideas is supposed to work: “Novel of ideas. The character of each personage must be implied ... in the ideas of which he is the mouthpiece.” This is exactly what Huxley does. The event of Lady Tantamount’s party as such might be compared to a “ridiculous little waltz tune“ while as the ideas expressed by different characters sometimes go well beyond the average party talk.

Although it has been criticised that over the ideas Huxley loses the motivation to invent original characters, that he is “far too interested in ideas for such creativeness”⁸⁰, others have acknowledged that with inventing this new technique Huxley has “equipped the novel with a brain”⁸¹.

Quarles describes the problem of “transforming a detached intellectual scepticism into a way of harmonious all-round living”⁸². Huxley justifies the challenge with the fact that once this goal has been accomplished, the fictionally embodied idea appears much more understandable, it is “different from, and much more alive than, the ‘same’ idea in the abstract”⁸³.

According to *Quarles*’s concept “the novelist can assume the god-like creative privilege and simply elect to consider the events of the story in their various aspects - emotional, scientific, economic, religious, metaphysical, etc.”⁸⁴. In *Point Counter Point* Huxley chose both the characters and the ideas reflected in their utterances to revolve around a discourse on science and art. Occasionally the current situation of a division of these two cultural branches is being criticised alongside the division of the working class and a decadent upper middle class.

While literature is the form of art most dominant in the novel, views on other forms of art are also displayed. Stevenson finds a range of artistic concerns, and of artists and writers, appearing in the novel⁸⁵. Examples would be the discussion of the

⁷⁸ Huxley, *Point Counter Point*, p. 296

⁷⁹ Huxley, *Point Counter Point*, p. 296

⁸⁰ cf. Canby, p. 167

⁸¹ cf. Matthew

⁸² cf. Huxley, *Point Counter Point*, p. 320

⁸³ from Canby, p. 166

⁸⁴ Huxley, *Point Counter Point*, p. 296

⁸⁵ cf. Stevenson, p.156

'Bathers' by the painter character *John Bidlake* or *Lord Edward's* appreciation of Bach's Suite in B minor as it is being played on *Lady Edward's* party.

Huxley claims that "literature is also philosophy, is also science. In terms of beauty it enunciates truth"⁸⁶. Huxley reckons the combination of literature with new ideas and scientific discoveries will lead to a „world of relationships, [a] borderland between "subjective" and "objective"⁸⁷. His character *Rampion* expresses this idea, when he criticises scientists for seeking for a "non-human truth"⁸⁸ and he promotes the balance of the Greek between lunacy and sanity⁸⁹. As one of the last civilised men *Rampion* describes the poet William Blake, who "managed to include and harmonize everything"⁹⁰.

For Huxley literature is probably the only way to explore this world of relationships. According to his concept many references to science and scientists can be found throughout the novel. Most obvious is the staging of scientist *Lord Edward* and his assistant *Illidge* manipulating newts in their laboratory. With *Lord Edward's* appreciation of music⁹¹ Huxley demonstrates the combination of the disciplines. Moreover, there are many scientific references implanted in a not scientific content. An example would be the description of the clock ticking in *Beatrice Gilray's* room: "The clock ticked. The moving instant which, according to Sir Isaac Newton, separates the infinite past from the infinite future advanced inexorably through the dimension of time. Or, if Aristotle was right, a little more of the possible was every instant made real; the present stood still and drew into itself the future, as a man might suck for ever at an unending piece of macaroni"⁹².

In combination with irony and satire the ideas expressed often show criticism on the contemporary Western society. Kronenberger remarks that the aim of *Point Counter Point* is not idle "amusement for the sophisticated, but a grasping of the intellectual Zeitgeist and a biting criticism of it"⁹³. Or as Canby puts it in a more critical way "a social document, ... a study, miscalled a novel"⁹⁴.

⁸⁶ Huxley, *Vulgarity in Literature*, p. 110

⁸⁷ Huxley, *Vulgarity in Literature*, p. 110

⁸⁸ Huxley, *Point Counter Point*, p. 404

⁸⁹ cf. Huxley, *Point Counter Point*, p. 116

⁹⁰ Huxley, *Point Counter Point*, p. 103

⁹¹ cf. Huxley, *Point Counter Point*, p. 33

⁹² Huxley, *Point Counter Point*, p. 126

⁹³ cf. Kronenberger, p. 165

⁹⁴ cf. Canby, p. 166

4. Huxley's *Point Counter Point* introduces a modified Modernist Style

The novel *Point Counter Point* features stylistic devices typical to Modernist fiction, such as disorientated characters or the use of a *stream of consciousness*-like technique as a narrative device.

Not in the least, however, does Huxley use features he had criticised, above all the idea of a superiority of form over content. Unlike the 'Great Modernists', Huxley does not completely break with a traditional style. He applies Modernist techniques, but, in contrast to *Joyce*, *Woolf* and others he pursues his very own concept of literature: the *Novel of Ideas*.

Huxley is not interested in the literary form of the novel as such. For him, it is rather a vehicle to transport his ideas and his criticism on the contemporary society and its apparent development. While he is truly a Modernist in his ideas of a mundane, decadent society, his ideas about changing the situation by tackling the appalling intellectual sterility through an intense debate of issues he considers to be of major importance to mankind are new.

He develops new techniques to fulfil his objectives of introducing a strong social criticism and therefore putting an emphasis on the content of his novels promoting an enlightened but yet creative society, able to integrate the asset of the three main cultural fields of science, religion and art, with the most apparent outcomes being the *Novel of Ideas* and the self-staging of a novelist.

By omitting certain Modernist stylistic devices and introducing others, Huxley has managed to modify the Modernist stylistic repertoire, creating yet another style to be considered for the great diversity of Modernist literature.

5. Literature

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