

Postgraduate English

www.dur.ac.uk/postgraduate.english

ISSN 1756-9761

Issue 42

Autumn 2021

Editors: Vicky Penn and Hannah Voss

‘the Self which underlies [...] separate individuality’: pain and the transcendence of selfhood in the work of Aldous Huxley

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Postgraduate English, Issue 42, Autumn 2021

In the late-Vedic *Upanishads* and the Buddhist *Tripitaka*, bodily existence is *duḥkha* (pain/suffering), which must be confronted and then transcended to achieve a higher state of existence: a new sense of selfhood.¹ Similarly, Christian theology represents pain as something which must be endured without self-pity or denial (as in the book of Job), and which can even bring one closer to the sufferings of Christ through the process of mortification. An awareness of these religious underpinnings is essential in understanding Aldous Huxley's conception of pain and selfhood in relation to his perennial philosophy (the view that all religions hold a spiritual truth).

In *Brave New World* (1932), *Jacob's Hands* (a screen-treatment written with Christopher Isherwood in 1944), and *Time Must Have a Stop* (1944), self-inflicted pain, and the way one reacts to this pain, are shown to drastically affect one's selfhood. What one labels as pain can differ depending on social conditioning and its context: Joanna Bourke argues for defining pain as a 'type of event' which is 'not the injury or noxious stimulus itself but the way we *evaluate* the injury or stimulus'.² Using this definition, I will consider how Huxley's characters evaluate noxious stimuli, and how their evaluative processes affect their notion of self. With reference to Huxley's *The Perennial Philosophy* (1945), the theological contexts of how these characters evaluate self-inflicted pain-events will be foregrounded. For

¹ Paul Younger, 'The Concept of *Duḥkha* and the Indian Religious Tradition', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 37.2 (1969), 141–52.

² Joanna Bourke, *The Story of Pain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 5–8.

Huxley, the ideal goal is to transcend individual selfhood, and pain can serve as a means to this end.

Brave New World: Mortification versus Masochism

Flagellation, the rending of skin with a whip, is present throughout *Brave New World*. It is seen performed in communal rituals in the Savage Reservations — Bernard and Lenina witness one such ritual where a boy allows himself to be whipped while making no sounds of complaint. Instead, the community vocally shares in his pain, as ‘at every blow at first a gasp and then a deep groan went up from the crowd’.³ Later on, during a Beta-Minus geography lesson, a class is shown a video of the self-flagellating ‘*Penitentes* of Acoma’, who ‘beat themselves’ with ‘whips’ while the ‘amplified record of their groans’ is drowned out by the children’s ‘laughter’ (pp. 132–33). These rituals are derived from the Christian doctrine of the mortification of the flesh, where pain is used to combat the sinful nature of the body. In both instances, the mortification is experienced as a communal act: in the former, the boy’s pain is sympathetically experienced by the crowd, and in the latter, the Penitents each whip themselves, but groan together in a chorus of collective experience.

In *The Perennial Philosophy*, Huxley signals towards this aspect of religious experience. Within the chapter on mortification, he references the teachings of the *Maitrayana Upanishad*, stating that ‘right action [...] enables [one] to catch a glimpse of the Self that underlies his separate individuality’ — a Self which is ‘selfless’.⁴ I will use this capitalised ‘Self’ to refer to this new state of being which can be achieved through mortification, where one’s individual selfhood is lessened as one becomes blissfully aware of

³ Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World* (Frogmore, St Albans: Granada Publishing, 1977), p. 97. All further references to *Brave New World* will be taken from this edition.

⁴ Aldous Huxley, *The Perennial Philosophy* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1946), pp. 129–30. All further references to *The Perennial Philosophy* will be taken from this edition.

being a part of a larger spiritual community and body.⁵ Huxley later writes on the Self as the ideal spiritual destination after death in *Time Must Have a Stop*.

A detour into the field of cognitive science and Eastern philosophy can help elucidate this idea of the Self. In his study of consciousness, cognitive science, and Eastern philosophy, Evan Thompson investigates the four states of the self as described in the *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad*: those of 'waking', 'dreaming', 'deep and dreamless sleep', and 'pure awareness'.⁶ Focusing on the third state, that of deep sleep, Thompson writes that in the *Upaniṣads* this state is not an 'oblivion of awareness' but 'a peaceful absorption that offers a foretaste of the lucid bliss belonging to the self-realized consciousness liberated from illusion'.⁷ This 'self-realiz[ation]' brings one closer to the 'lucid bliss' of the Self, the state of being free from worldly and selfish 'illusion'. Thompson notes this understanding as demonstrating a distinction between Western and Eastern Philosophy: while Western philosophy focuses on the 'presence and the absence of consciousness', Eastern philosophy notes the possibility of 'subtle consciousness', where 'all overt thinking and perceiving cease'.⁸ The state of deep sleep maintains a subtle consciousness, allowing one to reach the 'peaceful absorption' of the Self. This subtle consciousness operates on 'deeper levels of phenomenal consciousness', on the level of the experiential and sensory, rather than on the level of thought ('access consciousness').⁹ Thus, experiential pain-events, while seemingly opposite to deep sleep, can allow one to reach this meditative level of subtle consciousness. Pain can overcome one's ability to think and reason, leaving only the phenomenal level at work.

Thompson glosses the fourth state of self in the *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad* as:

⁵ As Huxley's understanding of the 'Self' stems from multiple religions, there is a lack of specificity around the nuances of this state. However, one can gauge that it encompasses a sense of spiritual community, a diminishing of individuality, and a feeling of spiritual unity and bliss.

⁶ Evan Thompson, *Waking, Dreaming, Being: Self and Consciousness in Neuroscience, Meditation, and Philosophy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), pp. 9–10.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 6–7.

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 7–8.

the supreme wakefulness that reveals the true self as the witnessing awareness behind waking, dreaming, and deep sleep. This higher wakefulness is said to bring true freedom, serenity, and bliss.¹⁰

While deep sleep could only gesture towards this idea, the fourth state, that of the true Self, exists 'behind' all other states and grants one supreme 'bliss'. As Huxley stated in *The Perennial Philosophy*, it is 'the Self that underlies [...] separate individuality' (p. 129–30). It is still a 'witnessing awareness': it is not an unconscious state. Instead, it grants one a 'higher wakefulness', a transcendental understanding which Eustace will eventually reject in *Time Must Have a Stop*. John's attempts at mortification strive to reach this state of wakefulness, yet his efforts are ultimately futile.

Huxley's conception of the Self also engages with Christian theology: the use of mortification can also replicate Christ's pain during the crucifixion to reach a transcendental Self. John attempts this replication in *Brave New World*, as he holds his 'arms as though he were on the cross [...] in voluntary crucifixion [...] till he was on the point of fainting from the pain' (p. 195). In the terminology of the haptic, this self-inflicted pain is epitomised in the descriptor '*chiasmatic*', which not only contains the meaning of the skin turning against itself (via Maurice Merleau-Ponty), but also stems from the Greek '*χίασμα*', meaning 'crossing'.¹¹ The term contains the self-inflicted nature of mortification whilst etymologically signalling its replication of Christ's passion, John's 'voluntary crucifixion'. One must however ask: how does the *chiasmatic* nature of John's mortification affect his psychological sense of selfhood?

The term 'mortification' comes from the Latin '*mortificāre*', which translates as 'to put to death' or 'to kill'. The mortification of the flesh is a symbolic act of putting the body (and its desires) to death. John attempts to put the desires of his flesh to death using tools, such as

¹⁰ Thompson, p. 10.

¹¹ See Abbie Garrington, *Haptic Modernism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), pp. 28–29, 53. While Garrington emphasises the 'touching-touched' nature of the *chiasmatic*, my definition uses it to emphasise a 'flogger-flogged' dynamic, as John's mortification is performed with tools rather than through skin-to-skin contact.

a 'whip of knotted cords' (p. 198), and through throwing himself into thorny 'juniper bushes' (p. 200) after envisioning Lenina's 'naked and tangible' (p. 200) body. In the latter example, Huxley states that John 'embraced, not the smooth body of his desires, but an armful of green spikes' (p. 200). Here, John's embrace — a *chiasmatic* act of folding/crossing one's arms around an object — rejects the masturbatory 'smooth' contact of his own desiring 'body'. Instead, he attempts to favour a different kind of *chiasmas*, that of self-mortification, through impaling his arms on 'spikes' (comparable to the piercing nails of crucifixion). The 'body of his desires' could also refer to his vision of Lenina's body, making his mortification a denial of both a desiring body, and a desired body.

John's rejection of his body can be elucidated with reference to Ariel Glucklich's work on the psychology of mortification. Glucklich writes on the 'body-self function' of the 'neuromatrix' (a network of neural loops in the brain) which gives us the 'experience of "owning" our own body'.¹² However, this body-self can be overcome by 'an overload of incoming sensory signals', such as through 'ongoing self-inflicted pain' which would lead to 'a dissociative state'.¹³ This overload would disrupt one's ability to actively think of oneself and one's body, thus acting on a subtle, experiential, and phenomenal level of consciousness (using Thompson's terminology). It has the potential to move one to a meditative state, one which is closer to the underlying Self. John almost manages to reach this state, as he rejects an embrace from his own 'smooth body', placing himself outside his body-self. However, his attempt to reach the spiritual Self is futile, as 'Even through the stab and sting of the juniper needles, his wincing flesh was aware' of his desire for Lenina (p. 201). He does not manage to meditatively escape his conscious thoughts and desires. What John does achieve is an affirmation of his agency over his body through the *chiasmatic* act, an act which Glucklich

¹² Ariel Glucklich, *Sacred Pain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 54–55.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

defines as asserting 'the dominion of [the] ego over lesser bodily subsystems'.¹⁴ John's self-flagellation is his act of agency in the face of the World State, which removes most forms of autonomy through social conditioning and regulatory systems.

One such regulatory system in Huxley's World State is the feelies, audio-visual cinematic apparatuses which replicate and transmit tactile sensations through 'metal knobs' (p. 136). In his work on haptic technologies, David Parisi uses the term 'apparatus' to denote 'both individual scientific machines and a larger, overarching social machinery', as he writes that apparatuses 'configured and constrained their subjects' responses to applied sensory stimuli'.¹⁵ By viewing the feelies as 'apparatuses', one can investigate the way in which they reshape how the denizens of the World State evaluate their pain. In the feelies, the subjects become connoisseurs of all sensations, even noxious stimuli: the kissing of 'stereoscopic lips' leads to the stimulation of the spectators' 'facial erogenous zones' while a head injury ('Thump!'), is felt as 'a twinge through the forehead' (p. 137). The spectators still react to the noxious stimuli as pain as there is a 'chorus of *ow's* and *aie's*' (p. 137), yet their pain has become reconfigured and intermingled with experiences of pleasure. This mixing of pain and pleasure in recreation is also present in the 'Orgy-Porgy' rituals, where sexual pleasure (the orgy) is mixed with 'beating [...] the buttocks in front' (p. 75). In the feelies, these intermingling sensations are localised on the corresponding parts of the body to the films, thus making the spectators both participants and voyeurs of the tactile stimuli — both self and other.

This voyeuristic quality is emphasised when the 'Feely Corporation's [...] photographer' secretly captures John's mortification, including a 'good close-up of the blood on his back' (pp. 201–02). This capturing and repurposing of John's sacred mortification betrays a modernist anxiety around a gaze which can defile its subject. This anxiety also

¹⁴ Glucklich, p. 98.

¹⁵ David Parisi, *Archaeologies of Touch: Interfacing with Haptics from Electricity to Computing* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2018), pp. 21–22.

manifests in Huxley's early writings on the cinema. In his essay on the first talking pictures, 'Silence is Golden' (1929), Huxley finds the cinematic close-up of the human face disturbing, writing that there is 'no escape' as:

Magnified up to Brobdingnagian proportions, the human countenance smiles its six-foot smile, opens and closes its thirty-two inch eyes, registers soulfulness or grief, libido or whimsicality with every square centimetre of its several roods of pallid mooniness.¹⁶

The gaze of the camera becomes invasive, as it causes real human emotions such as 'soulfulness or grief' to become grotesque in their closeness and size, enveloping the viewer in 'every square centimetre' of the human face. The spectator of cinema is not purely a distanced viewer, but rather an 'embodied, somatically affected spectator', as film critics such as Siegfried Kracauer and Tom Gunning have demonstrated.¹⁷ With cinematic representations of pain, such as the close-up of John's mortification, a sympathetic evocation of the pain experience would be evoked through the grotesque magnification of wounds and tissue damage.

One could argue that the text of *Brave New World* itself enacts a similar voyeurism, with readers becoming spectators of John's flagellation. Joel Rudinow argues that the reading experience itself is 'asymmetrical and intrusive' and thus becomes an act of 'voyeurism', as readers covertly view characters in the most private of acts through the words on the page.¹⁸ As the Feely Corporation photographer captures John's mortification in *Brave New World*, readers also read of the self-flagellation from the perspective of this secret 'hide in the wood' (p. 201), implicating the reader in the act of intrusive voyeurism. Through this evocation of voyeurism, Huxley works to make his readers feel complicit in the World State's commodification of pain and pleasure through the apparatus of the feelies, encouraging

¹⁶ Aldous Huxley, 'Silence is Golden', *Vanity Fair* (July 1929), p. 72.

¹⁷ Laura Frost, 'Huxley's Feelies: The Cinema of Sensation in "Brave New World"', *Twentieth Century Literature*, 52.4 (2006), 443–73 (p. 444).

¹⁸ Joel Rudinow, 'Representing Voyeurism, and the Vacant Point of View', *Philosophy and Literature*, 3.2 (1979), 173–86 (pp. 177–79).

readers to consider the possible effects of cinema in turning human sensations into mindless entertainment.

However, with Huxley's feelies, the tactile is captured along with the visual, an element which the reader can only experience sympathetically. The film of John's mortification becomes '*The Savage of Surrey*', which 'could be seen, heard, and felt in every first-class feely-palace in Western Europe' (p. 202). The triplet of sensory experience emphasises the somatic reactions rather than any kind of cerebral reaction. Huxley's distaste of the 'standardized amusement' ('*Silence is Golden*', p. 72) of the addition of sound to the cinema further extends in the novel, as the tactile also joins the sensorium. Indeed, the World Controller, Mustapha Mond, indicates that the feelies simply 'mean themselves; they mean a lot of agreeable sensations to the audience' (p. 177). The fact that a popular feely can be made which revolves around John's pain further indicates that noxious stimuli are interpreted as 'agreeable sensations', as a mix of both pleasure and pain by the spectators. The feely of pain is perhaps the perfect technological apparatus (using Parisi's term) to inspire mindless sadomasochism: the audio-visual element pleasures sadistic impulses, while the tactile sensations would provoke masochistic tendencies.

Modernist depictions of sadomasochistic behaviours would have been influenced by the work of Sigmund Freud. Huxley references Freud within the novel: the citizens of the World State often invoke 'Our Ford' as a God-like figure (in reference to the industrialist, Henry Ford), but also refer to him as 'Our Freud' (p. 41). In Freud's *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (published in 1905 and translated into English by A. A. Brill in 1910), he argues that 'masochism is nothing more than an extension of sadism turned round upon the subject's own self, which thus, to begin with, takes the place of the sexual object'.¹⁹ This view of masochism as simply an 'extension' of sadism aligns with the apparatus of the feelies, as they

¹⁹ Sigmund Freud, 'Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality', in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume VII (1901–1905)*, trans. by James Strachey, 24 vols (London: Hogarth Press, 1953–74), VII (1953), p. 158.

serve to extend sensations from the viewed object to the spectator. Cognitive philosopher Andy Clark argues for viewing acts of technological extension as a part of how the brain operates, advocating for an 'EXTENDED' view of human cognition, where the mind can become involved in 'loops that promiscuously criss-cross the boundaries of brain, body, and world'.²⁰ In Clark's view, these loops can be created by tools and technologies (such as the feelies) which 'can become quite literally incorporated into the thinking and acting systems that we identify as our minds and bodies', creating an 'extended or enhanced agent'.²¹ The feelies thus *literally* extend the participant's cognitive evaluation of sensation to include the viewed object, making the generated pain physically masochistic as well as sadistic. This creates a cognitive loop, one which reframes how the denizens of the World State view pain, often turning pain-events into a sadomasochistic and orgiastic ritual.

Huxley's anxieties around these sadomasochistic tendencies are hinted at in his *Perennial Philosophy*, as he writes:

Mortification has to be carried to the pitch of non-attachment [...] otherwise it merely transfers self-will from one channel to another, not merely without decrease in that total volume of that self-will, but sometimes with an actual increase (p. 115).

Here, Huxley acknowledges that mortification can lead to an 'increase' in 'self-will', in self-centeredness — a comparable self-centredness to that which defines the Freudian masochist. The transferral of this 'self-will from one channel to another' is exactly what happens to John: he transfers from mortification to sadomasochism. We can see this when John is surrounded by voyeurs at the end of the novel. He begins first by 'slashing' Lenina with the whip and then turns it on himself, crying out: 'Oh, the flesh [...] Kill it, kill it!' (p. 205). While John's cry is one of mortification (of killing the desiring 'flesh'), his violence reflects Freud's theory: his sadism is first directed at Lenina and is then directed onto himself as masochism. He

²⁰ Andy Clark, *Supersizing the Mind: Embodiment, Action, and Cognitive Extension* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. xxviii.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

becomes disassociated from his body-self and views it as a sexual object, as 'the flesh' instead of *my* 'flesh'. The voyeurs interpret John's *chaismatic* act as sexual, masturbatory in its self-centredness, using it as the impetus to begin their 'Orgy-Porgy' ritual of pain and pleasure: they are drawn to John as a 'magnetic centre' (p. 205). The denizens of the World State have been trained in the cognitive loop (in Clark's terms) of associating a viewed pain-event as one which also involves the masochistic self. John does not achieve the spiritual Self through mortification: he instead joins in this ritualistic orgy, the 'long-drawn frenzy of sensuality' (p. 205).

Earlier in the novel, the result of the Orgy-Porgy ritual is said to be 'the incarnation of the Greater Being' (p. 75). Similar to the conception of a shared community of sufferers in the Self, this 'Greater Being' groups the participants of the ritualistic orgy into an alternative communal self — one can also compare the shared experience of the 'chorus of *ow*'s and *aié*'s' in the feelies to the 'amplified record of [the Penitents'] groans'.²² However, this 'Greater Being' is bodily, it is an 'incarnation', a return to the flesh. This communal self is not a spiritual Self. This ritual is framed as a kind of religious event, a ritual of 'unanimity and atonement' (p. 205), but its God is not spiritual in nature. It is a God of the carnal, it is 'Our Freud': it is the body as desiring flesh.

In summary: John mortifies, is dissociated from his body-self due to his pain, yet he is unable to reach a spiritual Self. Instead, this disassociation leads to him re-directing his violence towards himself as a masochistic object, finally returning to the bodily and carnal in the 'Greater Being'. John's pain, and how he evaluates it, leads to drastic changes in his sense of selfhood — changes which lead to him becoming complicit in the sexual apparatuses of the World State. His suicide is the ultimate final destruction of his fleshy self.

²² An interesting etymological connection between the orgy and religious communities: the word 'orgy' comes from the Greek '*orgia*', which referred to ecstatic rites whereby mystery cults (such as the cult of Dionysus) engaged in revelry and animal sacrifice. See Madeleine Jost, 'Mystery Cults in Arcadia', in *Greek Mysteries: The Archaeology and Ritual of Ancient Greek Secret Cults*, ed. by Michael B. Cosmopoulos (London: Routledge, 2003), pp. 143–68.

Jacob's Hands: Healing and the Self

In Huxley's view, the unity of the Self is an achievable state, one which is struggled with, and eventually attained, in *Jacob's Hands*. Written in 1944 with Christopher Isherwood, the screen treatment was rejected by Hollywood, but many of its underlying themes are elaborated on in *The Perennial Philosophy*, published the year after. *Jacob's Hands* follows Jacob, a man who discovers that he has healing powers and eventually uses them to help Earl, a man of twenty-three from a wealthy family. Earl suffers from 'a heart ailment, mitral stenosis' which leads to 'painful and alarming attacks'.²³ However, this physical description is paired with Earl's 'capacity for self-pity', as he is 'always thinking and worrying about himself' (p. 58).

This pairing of illness and egoism is present in *The Perennial Philosophy*, as, in reference to the Buddhist concept of *duḥkha* (pain), Huxley writes that 'The capacity to suffer arises where there is imperfection, disunity and separation from an embracing totality' (p. 260). This 'embracing totality' is the desirable state of the Self. In Huxley's view, an 'illness' is symptomatic of 'the urge of a part within an organism for an intensification of its own partial life' (p. 260). With this in mind, Earl's painful heart attacks become symptomatic of a divided self — the metaphor of a heart 'attack' signals towards a heart fighting against the body. We can also see this division in Earl's visions of 'something that peers [...] at him' (p. 64) on the balcony. When Earl has his final heart attack, the figure appears:

From his angle, the curtain seems to form itself into a shrouded, wavering figure [...] Some half-embodied fear gradually assuming a hideous outer form (p. 104).

This 'half-embodied' fear seems representative of Earl's fear of pain and death, the approaching end of his life. In her study of pain, Bourke writes that 'The most common-metaphor in pain-speech reifies pain as an independent entity', which means that it can 'be

²³ Aldous Huxley and Christopher Isherwood, *Jacob's Hands* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 1998), p. 58. All further references to *Jacob's Hands* will be taken from this edition.

fought while leaving the “self” intact’.²⁴ Thus, Earl imagines his pain into another entity in order to maintain the illusion of being whole, refusing to conceive of it as originating from himself.

Despite Huxley's earlier distaste of cinema, the cinematic medium would also emphasise Earl's psychology (if the screen-treatment were filmed), literally reifying the pain into a visible ‘outer form’. However, while the voyeurism of John's mortification in *Brave New World* was focused on a close-up of his wounds, this cinematic representation in *Jacob's Hands* is symbolic, a figure of pain rather than a grotesque wound designed to shock and titillate. Huxley ensures that he uses the cinematic medium not merely as a sensorium which only means the agreeable sensations it generates (in the words of Mustapha Mond), but rather as a cerebral form which can explore the psychological and spiritual significance of pain.

While Earl conceives of his pain as separate to maintain the illusion of a whole self, his suffering originates from his own imperfection. The fact that his ailment is spiritual and psychological in origin is indicated by the timing of his attacks. Both of his relapses (the final one leading to his death) occur after betraying Jacob by becoming romantically involved with his lover, Sharon. It seems that his heart-pains are attacks of conscience, especially as the dynamic between Earl and Jacob is so often one of religious confession: during the final attack Earl tries to confess his sin, stating ‘I've got to tell you’, and asking Jacob to ‘Forgive me’ (p. 106). Furthermore, Jacob's healing ability enables him to see the root of Earl's pain, as he notes that Earl is ‘choking himself’, he is ‘gripping [him]self so hard that the blood can't pass through’ (p. 63). Jacob's metaphor places Earl's touch, his grasp, as the cause of his mitral stenosis. Considering Huxley's view of illness being caused by a lack of unity, Jacob's descriptions of Earl signal that his heart-attacks are self-inflicted, caused by his conscience fighting against him. Like with John in *Brave New World*, Earl's pain is self-

²⁴ Bourke, p.60.

inflicted, in penance for immoral and carnal acts. Yet, Earl's pain is not mortification — it is not consciously performed. It is instead symptomatic of a broken and imperfect self.

The nuances of Jacob's powers of observation and healing give us a clearer view of how Earl eventually achieves a spiritual Self. Jacob's healing does not stem from himself; he states: 'It's not anything *I* do [...] I can feel it, going out through my hands' (p. 20). The notion of Jacob's healing as a passive flowing energy, travelling 'through' his touch, is similar to Huxley's representation of the 'selfless' healer in *The Perennial Philosophy*, who can act as a 'channel through which grace is able to pass' (p. 265). The transferability of 'grace' (virtue from God in Christian theology) indicates that Jacob's healing touch does not only heal physical injuries and pain, but also heals spiritual maladies, such as Earl's inability to unify into a Self. Jacob's healing relates to the Christian laying on of hands, but the 'slow, rhythmical movements' (p. 6) of his hands also reflect the manipulation of spiritual energies in Reiki healing and modern mysticism. Huxley's friendship with the modern mystical healer, Juddu Krishnamurti, signals a contemporary inspiration for Jacob's powers.²⁵ Earl's final words reflect this spiritual healing, as he tells Jacob: 'You cured me of being afraid' (p. 107). Jacob takes away Earl's fear of his pain as an entity, providing him with the self-knowledge needed to understand that he can just 'Let it go', as he is the one who is 'holding it there' (p. 105).

Once Earl accepts that he is causing his own pain subconsciously, as penance for his sins, he can release himself and come to terms with his own faults. Earl's final state before death is 'calm and radiant' (p. 106). While Huxley and Isherwood do not specifically elaborate on Earl's spiritual destination in the text, the adjective 'radiant' signals both inner joy and a spiritual energy emanating from him. Earl has finally reached a spiritual unity

²⁵ See Laura Archera Huxley, 'To Heal or not to Heal', in *Jacob's Hands* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 1998), pp. Xxxiii–xxxvi.

comparable to the desirable Self, one which shows a meditative peace, reaching the sense of underlying bliss.

Time Must Have a Stop: Pain, the Self, and the Afterlife

While the destination of the Self is only gestured towards in *Jacob's Hands*, in *Time Must Have a Stop* Huxley considers how to achieve the Self and its spiritual state after death. *Time Must Have a Stop* is one of Huxley's most overtly religious works of fiction: Huxley confessed that it was the novel which most successfully integrated 'the essay element with the fictional element'.²⁶ While many critics such as Peter Bowering and Donald Watt tend to divide Huxley's writings into a simplistic narrative of pre- and post-conversion (the conversion being one to mysticism and perennialism), Sally A. Paulsell argues that his later novels are actually 'a continuation of his search for theological idealism'.²⁷ Indeed, in this novel one can see the same concern with pain and pleasure that was present in *Brave New World*.

The protagonist of *Time*, Sebastian, is a student who visits his hedonistic uncle Eustace in Florence. When Bruno, a saintly bookseller, meets Sebastian with his uncle for the first time, he muses on 'The arrows of the lusts which this beauty would evoke and would permit its owner to satisfy'.²⁸ Bruno sees Sebastian's 'beauty' as a target for lusts and sexual pleasures. While these lusts would be evaluated as pleasurable by Sebastian, Bruno represents these pleasures as metaphorical 'arrows', as having the capacity to cause damage equivalent to piercing wounds. These arrows (and Sebastian's name) also allude to Saint Sebastian, as Eustace's house contains 'a small fourteenth-century painting of young men with bobbed hair

²⁶ Quoted in George Wickes and Ray Frazer, 'Aldous Huxley: The Art of Fiction', *Paris Review*, 24 (1960), p. 64.

²⁷ Sally A. Paulsell, 'Color and Light: Huxley's Pathway to a Spiritual Reality', *Twentieth Century Literature*, 41.1 (1995), 81–107 (p. 81). Also see Peter Bowering, *Aldous Huxley: A Study of the Major Novels* (London: The Athlone Press, 1968); and Donald Watt, *Aldous Huxley: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge, 1975).

²⁸ Aldous Huxley, *Time Must Have a Stop* (London: Vintage Penguin Random House, 1953), p. 108. All further references to *Time Must Have a Stop* will be taken from this edition.

and cod-pieces, shooting arrows at a St. Sebastian attached to a flowering apple tree' (p. 114). As the painting has homoerotic undertones with penetrating 'arrows' and 'young men with bobbed hair' (reinforced by Bruno's earlier equation of arrows with 'lusts'), the painting displays a saintly endurance of both pain (the literal arrows) and pleasure (the symbolic arrows). This suggests that a saint might evaluate excesses of pleasure as a kind of pain-event, as something to resist in order to overcome the self and the body.

As the novel progresses, Sebastian comes to this realisation, as he describes his sexual encounter with Veronica Thwale as 'the delicate gluttony of soft lips that would suddenly give way to teeth and pointed nails' (p. 223).²⁹ While looking back on the experience, he also comes up with the phrase: 'Twin cannibals in bedlam' (pp. 223, 237, 240). This evocation of tissue damage and cannibalism works two ways. Firstly, it characterises Thwale and Sebastian as experiencing sadomasochistic pleasure from pain-events during their intercourse (similarly to the denizens of *Brave New World*), yet also places this tendency as a sign of mental illness, as belonging in 'bedlam'. Secondly, Sebastian's retrospective disgust at the experience conversely indicates that he is starting to view excesses of pleasure as pain-events, as having the capacity to cause damage to his bodily and spiritual existence. Only by resisting excesses of pleasure, by evaluating pleasures as possible pain-events (such as 'arrows' or 'pointed nails'), can Huxley's characters reach the desirable state of the Self.

We see this struggle around the Self most explicitly, however, in the epicurean character of Eustace. Before Eustace can approach (and eventually reject) the state of the Self, he first must confront both pain and death. After a particularly hedonistic day, Eustace notices a 'pain' in his heart, yet he immediately dismisses it as 'Heartburn' (p. 130). The pain only grows as 'suddenly the pain was like a red-hot poker boring through his chest' (p. 132). The simile again evokes the 'red-hot' sensation of burning (like the term 'Heartburn') yet

²⁹ There is a tempting connection here between 'pointed nails' and crucifixion, but this is likely coincidental.

also brings in ideas of perforation with the 'poker boring'. These images forge an allusive connection to the iconography of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, a famous symbol originating from 'Margaret Mary Alacoque', a seventeenth-century French nun who saw a vision of Jesus who then 'disclosed to [her] his most loving and most admirable heart'.³⁰ Iconography of the Sacred Heart typically links to the 'suffering of Christ's crucifixion', including images such as a crown of thorns or a piercing lance, as well as commonly being surrounded by 'flames' symbolising divine love.³¹ Eustace's heart is both symbolically pieced and burnt, and throughout the novel hearts are connected to these divine symbols, with Mrs Ockham feeling 'a sword in her heart' (p. 1) in the opening of the novel, and Bruno often feeling the 'little flame' of divine love 'in his heart' (p. 104). Ironically, one of Eustace's final thoughts before his death even invokes 'Christ! Christ!' (p. 133) as a curse. In this sense, one could argue that Eustace's heart-attack is *chiasmatic* in nature, being simultaneously self-inflicted (stemming from a divided self like Earl), while also symbolically replicating elements of Christ's crucifixion.

While Earl's heart-attacks are attacks of conscience, Eustace's attack is connected more explicitly to his abuse of his body — a divided and incomplete self in a different sense. Before the attack, Eustace repeatedly ignores the advice of his 'doctors' (p. 64), choosing to indulge in 'cigars' (p. 64) and 'brandy' (p. 126) regardless of his declining health. In *The Perennial Philosophy*, Huxley argues that the intensification of 'selfhood through gluttony' can cause organs such as the 'heart' to assert 'their partial selfhood in a kind of declaration of independence from the organism as a whole', causing degeneration and 'suffering' (p. 263). For Huxley, the degenerating organ is analogous to 'the same way the human individual asserts his own partial selfhood from his neighbours, from Nature and from God' (p. 263). The pain of Eustace's heart simultaneously signals towards his selfish and gluttonous

³⁰ David Morgan, 'The Visual Piety of the Sacred Heart', *Material Religion*, 13.2 (2017), 233–36 (pp. 233–34).

³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 233–35.

existence, his distance from the unity of the Self, and his degenerative spiritual state in conflict with the passion of Christ. His heart rebels against his body just as he tries to assert his own partial existence as an individual self.

However, once Eustace dies, he is confronted with a vision of the Self and must come to terms with his partial existence. This vision manifests itself as a 'light' in 'the void of all sensation' (p. 137). Peter Bowering notes that Huxley's description of the afterlife is based on the stages in the *Bardo Thödol* (commonly called *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* in the West), and that this 'light' is:

what the Mahayana Buddhists call the Dharma-Kāya, or the Clear Light of the Void. This is symbolic of the purest and highest state of spiritual being which Huxley identifies with the divine Ground or immanent Godhead of the Christian mystics.³²

The first stage of the *Bardo Thödol*, the 'Chikhai Bardo', involves a confrontation with this divine presence, and the dead subject must decide whether to join this light to unite into the 'spiritual consciousness' of the underlying Self.³³ However, Eustace's spirit finds 'pain' in the light, as it brings 'the agonizing knowledge that there was no such right as a right to separate existence, that his clotted and disintegrated absence was shameful and must be denied, must be annihilated' (p. 140). In order to join the unity of the Self in the light, Eustace must deny his partial and individual selfhood, must 'annihilate' his past self through painful purgation. In the afterlife, this self-naughting is evaluated as a painful process by Eustace, despite the absence of a bodily nerve system. The spirit undergoes an 'intolerable anguish' (p. 139), one not of physical noxious stimuli, but instead a vaguely characterised pain of spiritual transformation and purgation.

Thompson notes this vague characterisation of pain in the Tibetan Buddhist afterlife, noting that it operates on the level of 'metaphor and symbolism' rather than a literal physical

³² Peter Bowering, *Aldous Huxley: A Study of the Major Novels* (London: The Athlone Press, 1968), p. 167.

³³ *Ibid.*

account of bodily pain (as one does not have a sensory body once dead).³⁴ Yet, Huxley's account of the afterlife still places emphasis on Eustace's evaluation of this experience as a pain-event: even while this pain does not stem from physical noxious stimuli, Eustace's evaluation defines the experience as a pain-event (via Bourke's conception). Eustace realises that this pain and annihilation would make room 'for the beauty, the knowledge, the bliss' (p. 156) of the Self, of being unified with all spirits into one divine being. David S. Miall notes that experiences of sublimity in the face of beauty are often connected to the idea of self-'annihilation' in literary languages, partially justifying why Huxley chooses to emphasise the visual element and the 'beauty' of this light.³⁵ Eustace chooses to reject this purging pain and light, instead trying to retain his partial existence and moving on to the next stage of the *Bardo Thödol*.

Instead of embracing the painful light, Eustace attempts to regain his individual selfhood — as a spirit, initially the 'awareness knew only itself' (p. 136), but after rejecting the light in the Chikhai Bardo stage he remembers himself to be 'Eustace Barnack' (p. 141). This signals that he is entering the second stage of the *Bardo Thödol*, the 'Chönyid Bardo', where the dead person sees 'karmic visions and hallucinations' of their 'worldly life'.³⁶ At first these visions are of his worldly pleasures, as 'To escape from the pain he turned once more towards the parting of the dressing-gown, towards the fondlings and the dandlings, the cigar and the laughter' (p. 168). Instead of confronting the 'pain' of knowing and then annihilating his selfhood, he instead fixates on memories of his last day, with the 'parting of the dressing-gown' referring back to a sexual encounter, and the 'cigar and the laughter' signalling towards his indulgences and frivolity.

³⁴ Thompson, p. 290.

³⁵ David S. Miall, 'Annihilation of Self: The Cognitive Challenge of the Sublime', in *Cognitive Literary Science: Dialogues between Literature and Cognition*, ed. by M. Burke and E. T. Troscianko (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), pp. 55–71.

³⁶ Bowering, p. 167, 170.

Eustace also takes temporary refuge from the painful divine light through inhabiting a body, as a local medium (Mrs Byfleet) summons him to multiple séances.³⁷ During the first séance, Eustace welcomes the return of all 'sensations' as he possesses the medium, even thinking on 'how delightful even lumbago could be, even this obscure and unfamiliar belly-ache' (p. 177). Eustace finds pleasure in bodily aches, the 'obscure and unfamiliar' new sensations which he approaches as a connoisseur of a sensuous existence. Instead of enduring pain selflessly, or using it to mortify the body, Eustace re-evaluates it into a kind of pleasure, similarly to the spectators of the feelies in *Brave New World*. In the second séance, Eustace finds that the 'feeling of being in a body was an effective barrier against [the light's] encroachments. Behind his sensations he was safe from any compulsion to know himself as he was known' (p. 258). Here, the body is a 'barrier' to the Self, and sensations become spatialised into something to hide 'Behind'. Eustace's attempts to possess another's body and to conjure up sensory memories are merely ways to deny self-knowledge and avoid joining the divine light.

As he has failed to reach the Self, Eustace moves into the third stage of the *Bardo Thödol*, the 'Sidpa Bardo', where his spirit is prepared for 'reincarnation'.³⁸ He sees the 'uterine darkness' (p. 258) of his new body, yet also starts to have visions of the future. These visions of his new life are full of pain and suffering, as he views the death of his future mother as she is run over by one of a procession of 'huge lorries' (p. 260) while fleeing German soldiers. Eustace feels clearly the 'agony of that grief and terror' of his future self as this grieving 'child': he feels these emotions 'not as his, but mine' (p. 261). Failing to reach the Self, Eustace is fated to return to the 'feel of the flesh' (p. 261), a new incarnation which, this time, is full of pain rather than hedonistic indulgence. Despite the divine 'light' returning

³⁷ For a study of modernist writing's debt to popular spiritualism and mediumship see Helen Sword, *Ghostwriting Modernism* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2002), pp. 76–102.

³⁸ Bowering, p. 167.

once more to offer a final chance, Eustace 'avert[s] his attention' (p. 261), choosing sensation over the Self.

While Eustace is unable to attain the Self, his nephew, Sebastian, focuses on his own spiritual improvement in the epilogue to the novel. Through the tutelage of Bruno, the saintly bookseller, Sebastian learns the importance of transcending one's selfhood. Initially, Sebastian desires to 'submit to some great pain or humiliation' to atone for his sins, but Bruno dismisses Sebastian, stating that there 'is only one effectively redemptive sacrifice [...] the sacrifice of self-will to make room for the knowledge of God' (p. 282). Bruno recognises that Sebastian's desire for a 'great pain' stems from a partially self-serving desire to be 'heroic', like a 'Joan of Arc' figure: for Sebastian, pain would not work to mortify his body, but would instead lead to him becoming 'bored and resentful' (p. 282). Bruno recognises that mortification can lead to a transferral of self-will, just as happens with John in *Brave New World*. The sacrifice of 'self-will' can be struggled towards, however, through the use of perennial philosophy.

Bruno himself is a bookseller of diverse theological texts, and Sebastian works on his own philosophy with 'Fifty or sixty pages of random notes, jotted down at intervals during the last few months' (p. 273), which compose a large part of the epilogue. Sections of these notes in the epilogue are remarkably similar to the ideas in *The Perennial Philosophy*, and critics such as Paulsell note that it reads like a 'prototype' of the later text.³⁹ Charles M. Holmes reflects that *The Perennial Philosophy* is a text 'for Sebastian, who needs a set of principles to live'.⁴⁰ These notes reinforce the spiritual ideas behind the text, emphasising the importance of 'mortification and self-transcending awareness' (p. 289), while also connecting these ideas to perennial contexts. For both Bruno and Sebastian, perennial philosophy brings them closer to the Self. As Bruno names religious figures such as 'Filippo Neri', 'Christ', and

³⁹ Paulsell, p. 100.

⁴⁰ Charles M. Holmes, *Aldous Huxley and the Way to Reality* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1970), p. 141.

'Buddha', the 'little flame in his heart seemed to expand [...] until it touched that other light beyond it and within' (p. 104). Simply by naming these perennial figures, Bruno can reach beyond himself to the 'other light' of the Self which Eustace rejected. Before his death, Bruno even becomes a 'thin transparent shell, enclosing something incommensurably other than himself' (p. 305), his body fading away as he learns to transcend his selfhood and bodily existence.

Sebastian also achieves a state close to the Self on 'Christmas Eve', as he reaches:

[a] silence of intellect, silence of will, silence even of hidden and subconscious cravings. Then a passage through these silences into the intensely active tranquillity of the living and eternal Silence (p. 294).

These silences each negate a different aspect of Sebastian's psychological sense of self, yet this negation works as a 'passage', a route to the 'living and eternal Silence', the state of divine self-negation that is the Self. Sebastian was only able to reach this stage through his writings on perennial philosophy and his contemplation of his own spiritual life, which he previously neglected in favour of hedonism. By representing the successful spiritual development of Sebastian through perennial philosophy, Huxley also reveals his hopes for himself and his readership. Just as Sebastian writes his notes for himself and others to read and learn from, Huxley publishes *The Perennial Philosophy* with the aim of teaching the necessity of mortification and self-negation to achieve spiritual bliss and unity in the Self.

In Huxley's view, selfhood must be transcended in order to become spiritually fulfilled. While not always effective in helping one reach the Self, experiences of pain can cause significant changes in one's selfhood. Through focusing on his works with pain in mind, we gain a sense of how Huxley's characters evaluate their selfhood in relation to the physical, the psychological, and the spiritual. In *Brave New World*, *Jacob's Hands*, and *Time Must Have a Stop*, pain is often a penalty and a symptom of sensual and moral transgression. The pains of John, Earl, and Eustace are repercussions for sensual desires which they aim to consciously,

subconsciously, or not at all keep repressed. Only through accepting their pain and by eliminating their individual selfhood and bodily desires can Huxley's sufferers gain spiritual fulfilment and unity in the Self. Whether it is achieved through a mortifying whip, healing hands, or perennial philosophy, the Self must be struggled towards. By focusing on the fleshy and the sensual in his works, Huxley integrates his spiritualism into a form where the struggle to *transcend* the flesh is foregrounded.

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