Aldous Huxley and the

Eternal Feminine

by Gwen Matheson

In an essay entitled "Mother" (Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow, 1956) Aldous Huxley brought his informed and speculative mind to bear upon the female principle in general:

> . . . the Great Mother had her negative as well as her positive aspects. . . . In India, Kali, the Great Mother is sometimes beneficent, sometimes terrible. She nourishes and she devours; she is serenely beautiful and she is a cannibalistic monster. In her positive aspect, she is simultaneously Nature and Intuition, the creator of spiritual no less than of physical life. She is the Eternal Feminine that leads us up and on, and she is the Eternal Femin-

> ine that leads us down and back. She puts the sweet in "Home Sweet Home," after which she drinks our blood.(1) (Italics are mine.)

This passage can be taken as a commentary on Huxley's own attitude towards women throughout his life as reflected in the female characterizations of his fiction. They exemplify either the positive aspects of "the Great Mother," or more often the negative ones, or very frequently a combination of both.

These interesting creations may be seen as largely the result of certain main influences on the novelist: the attitudes and behaviour of the society that provided his material; that is, upper middle and upper class England, particularly during the turbulent 'twenties and 'thirties, as well as the wider American society that he moved in during the later part of his life; the influence of literature, for Huxley was an English major during his Oxford years, and once remarked that we would not even know how to fall in love if it were not for literature; his knowledge of psychological theories of the day, particularly the works of Freud and Jung; and perhaps most of all, certain private obsessions resulting from conflicts and traumas in the author's emotional life, as revealed in Sybille Bedford's recently published two-volume biography.(2)

Readers of Huxley's fiction will nostalgically call to mind a list of striking although now somewhat dated caricatures appearing both in his short stories and in such works as Crome Yellow, Point Counter Point or Antic Hay--the fascinating vamps and pathetic female masochists, the overwhelming mothers who succeed in destroying the emotional lives of their children, the child-like and incredibly innocent sensualists (as well as those who are not so innocent), and the women whose intellectual or spiritual pretensions are presented satirically.

Huxley was, of course, merely depicting with dramatic exaggeration the behaviour of women as it results from their status in a society clinging to traditional ideas. It is highly doubtful that he was consciously aware that the qualities he attributed to the "Eternal Feminine" (chiefly those of the "down and back" leading variety) might be more the result of this society than of any innate tendencies--and equally doubtful that he could know that his books would be used as a happy hunting ground for female stereotypes in future Women's Studies courses.

There is at the same time a definite evolution in Huxley's portrayals of women which becomes evident during the last part of his writing career. In his last two novels, The Genius and the Goddess (1955) and Island (1962), new types of female characters appear which, although they might not provide so much amusement for the reader, reflect an improved view of feminine capacities.

This change can be related to the developing point of view illustrated in Huxley's writings.

"Passion and reason, self-division's cause" was a favourite quotation of Huxley's from the Elizabethan writer Fulke Greville; and despite his eventual interest in the all-embracing Nirvana of Buddhism, Huxley's thought always remained essentially dualistic. His constant attempts to find some kind of fusion between the ideals of the spirit and the demands of the world and the flesh--as for instance, in Proper Studies (1927) and The Perennial Philosophy (1946)--were reflected in an ambivalent view of sensuality in general and consequently of women. Huxley's dualism is expressed in the psychological conflicts of his fictional heroes which provide the main focus of his novels and in his eventual interest in mysticism as a means of achieving "oneness" or spiritual unity which in turn led to his final utopian social vision in Island.

The double aspect of the Jungian "anima" or female image is, of course, a universal archetype, but the first signs of Aldous Huxley's obsessive concern with it may be found in his early poetry and short stories which constitute the most autobiographical and revealing part of his literary output.

The sonnet-sequence "The Defeat of Youth" in the volume of that name published in 1918 is central to the theme of sexual conflict in Huxley's early verse. In it he employs his favourite Eden imagery in a sentimental Georgian style to describe a young man's state of innocence and idealism until the inevitable "Fall" when

> . . . passion ambushed by the
> aerial shrine
> Comes forth to dance, a hoofed
> obscenity. . . .(3)

It was natural that for Huxley, descendant of the mandarins of Judeo-Christian Western culture, that the darker principle in the universe should be associated with Woman who finds her prototype in Eve. And associated with such an attitude is Huxley's almost Manichaean obsession with evil and his frequent association of sexuality with physical corruption and death.(4)

Limbo, in which Huxley began to concentrate on what was for him the much more congenial medium of prose further elaborates the dualistic motif in the novelette "The Farcical History of Richard Greenow." Here Woman is associated with other qualities to be repressed besides those of sexuality and the "flesh," and the encounter between the autobiographical Huxleyan hero and the threatening female is internalized.

This story, partly set in the time of the First World War, tells how Richard Greenow, a rather effeminate aesthete studying at Oxford, develops a second personality which is that of a lady

novelist. When he retires for the night after indulging in intellectual discussions and working for the pacifist movement during the day, his feminine alter-ego "Pearl Bellairs" takes over his body and writes sentimental novels and jingoistic articles "To the Girls of England" and on the need to "crush the Hun." Finally, dying in an insane asylum, Dick writes a note willing his body to a hospital for research, but the redoubtable "Pearl," possessing him for the last time, manages to change this to an injunction to "Bury me in a little country churchyard with lovely marble angels."(5)

Under the "farcical" aspect of this fictional description of an "emotional hermaphrodite" there may be discerned an important key to Huxley's subsequent fiction. The "feminine" part of Dick's character is, of course, grossly and unfairly caricatured, but it provides the basis for supposedly "feminine" qualities and their "masculine" opposites in most of Huxley's later character portrayals: the "feminine" element for Huxley is somewhat traditionally regarded as personal, emotional, practical and social, as well as being associated with the pleasures of the flesh and romantic love; the "masculine" on the other hand is impersonal, detached, introverted, intellectual and inclined towards abstraction and contemplation. There are a number of couples in Huxley's novels and short stories who exemplify either one or all aspects of the Greenow-Bellairs dichotomy in varying degrees--Philip Quarles and his wife Elinor in Point Counter Point, for instance. Thus dualism not only contributes to character delineation but also to the structure of the novelist's plots.

"The Farcical History of Richard Greenow" which has a strong autobiographical basis is also an illustration of the author's futile attempt to come to terms with the feminine part of himself--a conflict reflected throughout his later works.

All of Huxley's fiction, in fact, may be regarded as a kind of autobiography --a fact now made even more apparent by Sybille Bedford's massive biography.

Bedford quotes Aldous Huxley's cousin Gervas Huxley as being "the one man to know" that Aldous had no serious love affair or attachment before the First World War due to a Victorian code that made romantic love purely platonic unless one had serious intentions of marriage. However, Gervas also recalled that in the summer of 1913 when Huxley was nineteen he picked up a young woman one evening, an "au pair" girl as he thought, and was later surprised at her "eagerness." (Bedford,Vol.1,57)(It was not widely realized in those days that women could be "eager.") There are indications in Huxley's later writings that this supposedly trifling little incident had a deeper influence on him than anyone realized. Sybille Bedford makes the

claim that the poem "The Defeat of Youth" is about Huxley's overly idealistic older brother Trevenen who committed suicide in 1914 apparently over a tragic love affair with a young woman outside his class. (Bedford, Vol. 1, 46) But at the same time it can, like most of Huxley's other work, be seen as a projection of his own feelings and experience.

The young Aldous's education was then further speeded up in more ways than one through his introduction to Garsington Manor, the country house of Philip and Ottoline Morrell--a kind of high-class "flower child" refuge of that time where pacifism, culture and free love were alternately indulged in by the roster of famous guests. Here he encountered the unorthodox Dorothy Carrington with whom he had what Grover Smith, editor of Huxley's Letters, describes as a "friendship" in the summer of 1916. That this friendship ripened into something else is revealed by a reviewer in a 1971 edition of the Times Literary Supplement who managed to dig up a passage from one of Carrington's letters in which she describes a "nightmare" night with Aldous in 1919 when he kept angrily trying to find her in the bed by "peering with his eyeglass." (Bedford, a good friend of Huxley's, fastidiously leaves this little affair out of her otherwise comprehensive and objective biography.)

Meanwhile, Huxley had also met the beautiful and pure young Belgian refugee, Maria Nys, at Garsington. And, in spite of the fact that her strong-willed mother whisked her away from him and the wicked Garsington influence, he eventually found himself safely married to her only six months after the disastrous Carrington incident.

We can now see how Huxley's double image of Woman, already fostered in his consciousness by the familiar Victorian "virgin-whore" dichotomy as well as his dualistic philosophy, was reinforced by his experiences with two very different types of young women in real life.

Once Aldous had acquired the maternal and wifely Maria, he settled down to writing his first novel Crome Yellow (1921) in which he immortalized Garsington Manor and its famous and infamous goings-on. In this novel the familiar innocence versus experience theme reappeared, this time embodied in the worldly-wise Anne (based on Carrington) and the wide-eyed Mary (most probably Maria).

Maria once asked a question which had often occurred to her when thinking about her marriage to the famous Aldous Huxley: "Why, why in the world did Aldous choose me out of the many prettier, wittier, richer, etc. young girls?" (Bedford, Vol. 1, 95) The obvious answer is that he felt the need of a devoted companion and servant. And that is exactly what she was for a period of thirty-six years, as Bed-

ford's biography so amply testifies. It was part of the Huxley tradition that most of the men felt themselves to have a mission and they usually managed to acquire wives who were willing in turn to make their husbands their mission. However, although many men might dream of this kind of wifely dedication as an ideal they can also feel a certain resentment, conscious or unconscious, when they become its object.

Aldous Huxley was no exception to this. After about four years of wedded bliss and the birth of an only child, Matthew, he began hankering after a very different type of woman, finally falling hopelessly and abjectly in love with Nancy Cunard, a more formidable and colourful successor to Dorothy Carrington.

This young woman, a kind of combination of Isadora Duncan and Jane Fonda, has been described variously as a tigress, dragonfly and cheetah--a "fiery and furious angel," in the vanguard of the post-war Twenties. She was in hot rebellion not only against the wealth, class and conventional morality of her shipping line family but later also passionately involved in various anti-Establishment activities of the time, from the French surrealist movement to the Negro cause and the Spanish Civil War. At the time Aldous Huxley became one of the many admirers under her fatal spell. She was a "gay divorcee," pouring most of her energies into poetry and the pursuit of pleasure--although underneath the bright facade still mourning an early love killed in the war. (Bedford, Vol. 1, 135)

Nancy Cunard represented for Huxley not only the infinitely alluring and threatening "flesh" but also everything that was in direct opposition to the domestic devotion and submissiveness of his wife Maria. She played around with the well-known young author for a period, even granting him a brief unsuccessful affair, but soon tiring of this "weak, silent man" as she called him, she would send him home "miserable and ill" to his patiently waiting wife.

During one of these occasions, however, Maria commendably lost her Griselda-like patience and delivered an ultimatum: she would leave England next morning with or without her erring spouse. She packed furiously all night, throwing any left-over articles out the window. And next morning she caught the first train out of England--accompanied by Aldous.

The Cunard affair, according to Bedford, was the only serious infidelity of Huxley's married life, but this by no means precluded numerous lighter escapades. Throughout his life Huxley indulged in brief affairs with many attractive women, often friends of Maria's as well, with "no fixations as to type or age." The really incredible thing (incredible at least to most people) is the fact that Maria undertook the management of these little

distractions, as she did of practically everything else in her famous husband's life. "You can't leave it to Aldous," Bedford quotes her as saying, "he'd make a muddle." (Bedford, Vol. 1, 295)

It appears that the long period of depression from which Huxley suffered while trying to finish Eyeless in Gaza might have been partly overcome by this "cure by affairs." And Bedford, a friend of the Huxleys, makes a point of describing the whole situation as "the aristocratic view of sex." But reading through Huxley's many novels, almost none of which depict a happy sexual relationship, one is left to wonder.

At any rate, throughout most of his life Huxley was apparently never able to forget the Cunard experience. Whether or not he was able to resolve personally the conflicting tendencies that attracted him towards two different types of women, they appear and reappear in nearly all of his fiction. And the autobiographical Huxleyan hero is often depicted as being torn between them--for example, Gumbril Junior between Emily in her rose-covered cottage and the cynical Myra Viveash in Antic Hay, and Walter between the bloodless Marjorie and the tigerish Lucy Tantamount of Point Counter Point.

Although it is doubtful that Huxley's nice, passive and usually frigid female characters are completely based on Maria (she appears in Bedford's biography as much more positive than that), it seems fairly certain that the vamps or sirens have their original inspiration in Nancy Cunard. And yet all of these latter are presented by Huxley in his novels as more or less mere caricatures--according to Bedford, "stylized versions of the familiar Siren figure of the Twenties." Bedford also makes a very interesting comment on Huxley's portrait of Myra Viveash, the one that perhaps is most directly modelled on Nancy, if we are to believe Maria who once wrote that Antic Hay was an "exorcism." She finds it "rather remarkable that Aldous did not even attempt to explore the character of the actual Nancy, that he showed no literary interest in anything that did not lend itself to a generalization." (Bedford, Vol. 1, 144) This observation is not only significant in providing insight into Huxley's satiric method but perhaps also, as we shall see later, in relation to his earlier attitude towards women.

Throughout most of his fiction Huxley's female characters tend to be cast in the role either of victimizer or victim. This victim-victimizer motif is used to illustrate two of the novelist's principal themes--namely, that sensuality detached from emotional involvement can only result in exploitation, and that personal love that is selfish can cause the worst type of domination. The comment of the narrator in the novelette "Two or Three Graces" is interestingly echoed by the analysis of a contemporary observer, Germaine Greer:

> Our life-style contains more thanatos than eros, for egotism, exploitation, deception, obsession and addiction have more place in us than eroticism, joy, generosity and spontaneity.(6)

One of the chief victimizers or "vampires" in the Huxleyan world is the Siren. Her figure tends to become more sinister throughout Huxley's fictional career. She probably appears in her most vicious form as Mary Amberley of Eyeless in Gaza whose cold-blooded tampering with other people's lives for "amusement" leads indirectly to a suicide. In Huxley's later fiction the diabolic Mrs. Thwale of Time Must Have A Stop and the "shameless" Babs of Island are simply further variations on this familiar breed. The Siren or vamp takes many forms but she is most frequently seen as a bored young adventuress of the English leisured class--like the Huxleyan hero, a typical product of the post-war period and also like him in rebellion against a Victorian upbringing.(7)

The female victimizers in Huxley's fiction in the roles of lovers, mothers and generally domineering individuals provide the most dramatic characterizations and are central to the main conflicts. Yet they are out-numbered by female characters in the part of victim.

Huxley created several examples of what are commonly referred to as "nice girls," who invariably are made to suffer in one way or another. They are young women who lead men "on and up" and with whom the major male characters experience romantic and personal love, and sometimes even an exalted state bordering on the mystical. Such a young woman is Joan of Eyeless in Gaza with whom the awkward and inhibited but high-minded Brian (based on Huxley's unfortunate brother Trevenen) falls in love. Later, of course, when Brian, son of the idealistic Mrs. Foxe, finds his love "had crystallized out. . . into specific desires," the ultimately tragic complications begin. Marjorie of Point Counter Point with whom Walter hopes to re-enact "Epispsychidion," as well as martyred Molly of Island, are others of this variety.

One of the familiar patterns in Huxley's fiction occurs when the hero turns from this respectable but rather passive and sexually deficient type of woman to a more emotionally detached affair, usually with her direct opposite, the vamp. From there he either proceeds to permanent disillusionment, as is the case with Gumbril Junior and Walter, or he turns towards mystical conversion under the guidance of a male guru. The well-known scene in Eyeless in Gaza when the dog falls from an aeroplane "like a sign from heaven," bringing a bloody interruption to the private little "Eden" of Anthony and Helen as they indulge in some "irresponsible sensuality" is an example of

the kind of event that speeds up the Huxleyan hero's "conversion."

As is often the case in the depiction of psychologically disturbed male characters in twentieth-century Western literature, much of the blame is attributed to their mothers. Mother in her dual aspect is the chief object of Huxley's ambivalence in his feminine portrayals: "She puts the sweet in Home Sweet Home, after which she drinks our blood." There are a number of possessive mothers who star in the role of Destroyer with a vampire-like intensity.

Although highly emotional, these mothers are also usually idealistic and even saintly; their domination is subtle rather than obvious and hence more sinister: ". . . there are wonderful possessive mothers of only sons, whom they baby into chronic infantility," writes Huxley in Tomorrow and Tomorrow (1956) and ". . . there are wonderful, sweet old vampires who go on feeding, into their eighties, on the blood of an enslaved daughter." (Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow, 177) The husbands of these women are usually dead, absent or in some way ineffective and the intense attachment they inspire in their sons leads to the young men's later disillusionment and trauma when confronted with another woman. A number of Huxley's heroes or important male characters are endowed with such mothers.(8)

Huxley's portrayals of mothers are among the harshest in his fiction, showing very little indication, either social or psychological, of how they got to be that way--as is the case with most of the other portraits in his female rogue's gallery.

Woman as Mother is often associated with Woman as Lover, constituting a strong Oedipal theme. The novel that perhaps presents this theme and dualistic aspect of woman most emphatically is Those Barren Leaves in the section entitled "The Autobiography of Francis Chelifer."

A more comic and explicit treatment of the Oedipal situation occurs in After Many a Summer (1939) in which Huxley is indulging in one of his little spoofs of Freudian psychology. A central male character, Jeremy Pordage, is a scholarly middle-aged bachelor, who lives with his mother and visits two prostitutes every second Friday to indulge in "Infinite squalor in a little room." He and his mother gaily defend their mother-worshipper son-cannibal relationship through reference to Freud or what Huxley describes as "justification by psycho-analysis--the modern substitute for justification by faith:"

> 'We blood-sucking matriarchs!' Mrs. Pordage used to say of herself--in the presence of the Rector, what was more. Or else it was into Lady Fredegond's ear-trumpet that she proclaimed her innocence. 'Old Jocastas like me, with a middle-aged son in the house.'(9)

Another object of Huxley's earlier attacks besides Freudianism were spiritual aspirations, either serious as in the case of the saintly mothers or superficial as for instance in Priscilla Wimbush's dabblings in Theosophy in Crome Yellow--a rather ironical fact considering his own later course in life.

A variation on the Siren theme is what Fanning in "After the Fireworks" (Brief Candles, 1930) refers to as "spiritual adventuresses." Fanning, the cynical and sophisticated novelist, describes this interesting species to a friend, maintaining that he prefers "the good old-fashioned vamp," because "At least one knew where one stood with her." The "spiritual adventuress," on the other hand, wants "Higher Things," and for these she needs a "Higher Person." And Fanning complains bitterly about how his position as writer has often cast him in this role:

> In the past they could have gone to religion--fastened themselves on the nearest priest (that's what the priest was there for), or sucked the spiritual blood of some saint. Nowadays they've got no professional victims; only a few charlatans and swamis and higher-thought-mongers. Or alternatively the artists. Yes, the artists. They find our souls particularly juicy.(10)

Closely related to the parasitic spiritual adventuresses are what Huxley defines as the "bovaryzers" (after the heroine of Flaubert's novel), and he frequently portrays one and the same characters as belonging to both categories. "Bovarism" is described in connection with the influence of literature in one of Huxley's essays entitled "Education" (Ends and Means, 1937) as the capacity of all human beings for "playing a part other than that which heredity and circumstances seem to have assigned to them."(11) Although Huxley admits that imitation can be "good as well as bad," a few of his most amusing caricatures have been of women with spiritual or erotic pretensions, intent on playing a role. Perhaps the most memorable bovaryzer and spiritual adventuress in Huxley's fiction is the tragi-comic Mrs. Aldwinkle of Those Barren Leaves, the middle-aged English lady who plays hostess in an Italian palace and believes in passion, "passionately."

One of the most amusing and yet tragic examples of a woman as both victim and "bovaryzer" occurs in the long short story "Two or Three Graces" in a volume with that title. Attempting to escape from her daughter-pupil relationship with her dull husband Peddley, she graduates with the help of the Pygmalion-playing narrator to the modern pastime of adultery, and finds two successive volunteers, Rodney and Kingham, who are only too willing to continue her education. "For even in love, Huxley writes, "Grace saw herself in the part and saw herself, inevitably, in terms of her

lover. Her Rodneyisms disappeared and were replaced by Kinghamisms."(12) Eventually abandoned by the bored Kingham she is portrayed as a victim not only of particular individuals, but also of a society that relegates women to a child-like role.

Although most of Huxley's central male characters are nothing if not intellectual or "cerebrotonic," there are no serious portraits of women who could be included in this category previous to The Genius and the Goddess nor do any of the Huxleyan women, in any but Huxley's final novel Island, indulge in a spiritual quest for illumination or the establishment of a philosophy.(13) It is true that Miss Thriplow the novelist in Those Barren Leaves and Molly D'Exergillod, that "athlete of the tongue," in Point Counter Point are endowed with considerable intellect, but both of them are presented in an extremely satirical light.

The lively Miss Thriplow is unique not only in being that rare bird, a Huxleyan female with brains, but also in being at the same time a supreme bovarist or role-player as well as something of a Siren and a "spiritual adventuress." The roles which she has mastered to suit each male with whom she comes in contact range from that of "a salamander, sporting gaily among the flames" to "a primrose by the river's brim" to "the serious young female novelist."(14) But her lover Calamy, after indulging in a sometimes stormy and sometimes bored affair, leaves his aging hostess Mrs. Aldwinkle and Miss Thriplow and goes off with a typical attitude of male superiority to contemplate in the mountains. Miss Thirplow is saddened but far from desolate, for after all she is a writer and she has taken care to make notes of every detail of her love affair to insure that Calamy is "safely laid down in pickle, waiting to be consumed whenever she should be short of fictional provisions." (Those Barren Leaves, 303) Thus even a female character sharing the same profession as Huxley himself is portrayed by him as being primarily just another spider-like devouring female.

To sum up, then, Huxley presented his women chiefly in relation to sex and to men; and in some books, such as Time Must Have a Stop, there is no feminine character who can be respected for herself.

It might be objected that as a writer who was primarily a satirist Huxley would not be expected to dwell on the more admirable traits of women, and that he uses an ironical double vision in his treatment of most of his characters of both sexes, with the exception of some of the Huxleyan heroes. This observation, however, cannot really be applied. The faults and foibles of Huxley's male characters are more varied, because they are considered as "human" or universal--for example, hypocrisy, snobbery, timidity, and many others. But most of the shortcomings of the female characters are comparatively

stereotyped, because they are frequently associated with the sex of the individual--in other words, they are "feminine" faults or weaknesses. And the female characters who are objects of the novelist's keenest satirical attacks are those who show signs of too much spirit or aggressiveness, in other words who have gone dangerously beyond "feminine" confines towards "masculine" prerogatives.

During the eventful last decade of Huxley's life, however, he published two novels which indicate significant new points of view and in which dramatic changes in his female characterizations occur.

The Genius and the Goddess (1955) and Island (1962) appeared long after the turning-point in Huxley's literary career marked by Brave New World, after his conversion to Oriental mysticism as recorded in Eyeless in Gaza published in 1936, and after his move to the U.S.A. in 1937. The utopian Island is to quite an extent a record of many of the self-improvement attempts he had increasingly indulged in, some successful and most controversial, ranging from the Bates method to improve eyesight to the experiments with mescalin and LSD.

The Genius and the Goddess was written mainly during the summer of Huxley's sixty-first birthday in 1954 while he was travelling and lecturing in the Near East and Europe. In it the central female character of the "goddess" appears as the most attractive of Huxley's feminine creations, presented with complete sympathy and no trace of satire. The magnificent "pagan" Katy Maartens is described as having "the body of a strong young matron," "the face of a goddess disguised as a healthy peasant girl," and along with all that, a well-trained mind.(15) But her life is far from satisfactory for she is united in a symbiotic marriage to a combination of "foetus, genius, half-wit and hungry lover," the famous scientist Henry Maartens whose specialty is work on the A-Bomb.

Katy, who was modelled according to Huxley on D.H. Lawrence's wife Frieda, is a pagan in the sense that Huxley's character Fanning in "After the Fireworks" imagined the Etruscans and Homeric Greeks to be before Plato and later Judaism and Christianity had brought about the "Great Split" between spirit and matter, associating one with goodness and the other with sin. (Brief Candles, 156) But her young lover Rivers (modelled possibly on Huxley's brother Trev), thanks to his Lutheran mother's influence is a "divided soul," tormented by conscience. For him the extra-marital affair with Katy cannot bring about a reconciliation in the old flesh-spirit dichotomy, even though the relationship is deeply personal as well as sensual. Rivers' qualms which are referred to by his paramour as "Sunday School twaddle" seem to be justified by fate in the form of the gruesome tragedy.

But Huxley means this to be something other than just a moralistic little tale condemning the sin of adultery and the death of Katy may be seen as a symbol of the failure of Huxley's earlier Lawrentian philosophy of "life-worship" which he later abandoned for the "one-pointedness" of neo-Buddhism.

Although Huxley had previously created a minor female character based on Frieda Lawrence in Point Counter Point, his portrait of Katy stands unique in his fiction to that date. Biographical research may again provide interesting clues to the improvement in Huxley's view of the feminine.

There was, for instance, his acquaintance during his excursions into mystical lore with the lives of great female saints and mystics, such as St. Teresa, Julian of Norwich, and Catherine of Siena. Huxley had, in fact, begun plans in 1946 for a historical novel on the latter (never completed) describing her as ". . . that extraordinary woman St. Catherine, rushing about and bawling out the Pope."(16)

Also during the summer when Huxley was writing The Genius and the Goddess he and Maria had renewed their previously casual acquaintance with Laura Archera, the dynamic 35-year-old Italian woman, who was eventually to be Aldous's second wife. According to Laura in her biography of Huxley's last years This Timeless Moment, their friendship became more intimate at that time and there is even a suggestion from Sybille Bedford that the then ailing Maria had a private interview with Laura during which she approved of her as a successor. (Bedford, Vol. 2, 173) She could well have provided not only some of the inspiration for Huxley's "goddess" but also for young Rivers' future wife, the spiritual healer Helen who never actually appears in the story.

The most important fact in Huxley's life that summer, whether he realized it or not, was Maria's fatal illness with cancer. That he seemed completely unaware of her approaching end, either through choice or in reality, is evident from the accounts of those who knew him at that time. In fact, as Maria dwindled Aldous waxed, undergoing a "change" in Bedford's words which brought to mind images of "sleek herds in serene countrysides." (Bedford, Vol. 2, 171)

Finally Maria died in February of 1955, the year of the publication of The Genius and the Goddess, after long years of incredible strain managing to be everything to a half-blind, globe-trotting writer who was one of the most active and experimental minds of this century. Bedford reports that Maria had once expressed some regret at never having developed an interest of her own, instead of devoting herself "body and soul" to Aldous's talent. (She was actually in many ways more truly intelligent than her celebrated spouse, a fact that he willingly acknowledged.)

And the summer before her death is described as Maria's "tragic summer."

But she maintained her dedicated role to the very end, managing to keep up an appearance of health while at the same time probably hastening her death by worrying about how Huxley would manage without her. "It would be wrong of me to die before Aldous," she once said, "I should have failed in my duty to him." (Bedford, Vol. 2, 166)

She need not have worried. About a year after she entered into her well-earned rest, aided by Aldous's quotations from the Tibetan Book of the Dead, her bereaved spouse dried his tears and married Laura Archera in a drive-in wedding chapel in Arizona. Aldous spoke of his bereavement as an "amputation," indicating perhaps more accurately than he realized that his wife had been just an appendage; and he once said that everything that he learned about being human was thanks to her, which was probably also quite true. (Bedford, Vol. 2, 189) He did truly mourn her in his own way but it was part of his philosophy that life must go on. (He faced his own death a few years later, also from cancer, with the same mixture of indifference and courage.)

It is at least to Huxley's credit that he was determined after Maria's death not to be looked after again in the way that she had looked after him. And in marrying Laura Archera he got his wish. This vivacious concert violinist and film-producer turned psycho-therapist was very much the career woman with a life of her own. (She had some of the qualities of Nancy Cunard but was at the same time a much more stable and mature personality.) There were many times, when she was writing her own book, seeing her clients and running about the country to give talks, that she left Aldous very much to himself even when he was ill. It might be considered significant that Aldous was completely devoted to Laura and that she made the greatest contribution to the happiness of his last years. The summer following his marriage to Laura, Huxley began the writing of his controversial last novel Island (published 1962) which he dedicated to her.

The plot of Island runs briefly as follows: Will Farnaby, a cynical journalist suffering from guilt feelings about the death of this devoted but frigid wife Molly to whom he had been unfaithful with a nymphomaniac named Babs, is shipwrecked and washed up onto the shores of the "Forbidden Island" of Pala, where he encounters a remarkable society combining the best of both modern science and the spiritual disciplines of Mahayana and Tantrik Buddhism. He becomes involved in a conspiracy to take over the island for its oil resources. His co-conspirators are Colonel Dipa, the military leader of a neighbouring industrialised island, and the Rani, Queen Mother of Pala, a kind of Madam Blavatsky and a representative of "false

spirituality." But he finally confesses his involvement to Susila, an enlightened Palanese widow with whom he has become emotionally involved and who acts as his private "goddess of wisdom." In the controversial final chapter Will receives a mystical vision of Reality under Susila's supervision with the aid of "moksha" described as a "reality-revealing" drug used for religious and therapeutic purposes. He has also attained to the "wholeness of reconciliation with this utopian woman who is the final solution to his personal, sexual and metaphysical problems. At this moment, however, Colonel Dipa and the Rani's homosexual son, his protegee, take over Pala and bring about the end of a relatively utopian state.

Susila MacPhail, the supreme end-product of the Palanese mating of East and West, is a far cry from Lenina of Brave New World (1932) and Loola of Ape and Essence (1948), although her function in Huxley's final utopia is similar to theirs in those preceding anti-utopias. Modelled to quite an extent on Laura, she has much in common with the hero Will, except for his cynicism which is the result of his damaging non-Palanese background and his relationship with his parents. She too is an intellectual "ectomorphic" type--a teacher and a poet who can compose mystical Buddhist verse when required. This fully drawn portrait of Susila as one of Huxley's spiritually enlightened preachers, is unique in his fiction.(17) It is relevant that the "left-handed" variety of Tantrik Buddhism is that chiefly practised by the Palanese, since it is this type along with Shaktism that attaches greater importance to the feminine principle in the universe, and co consequently to erotic mysticism and matriarchal elements--hence Kali, the "Great Mother."(18) In espousing Tantrik Buddhism which stresses the reconciliation of opposites so that "Samsara" and "Nirvana" (time and eternity) become one, Huxley is returning to his early theory that the Etruscans and Homeric Greeks lived in a world before the "Great Split." This is what Northrop Frye would describe as the "Social Contract" aspect of Huxley's utopianism. (19) Some commentators believe this early society to have been matriarchal--Jacques Heurgeon, for instance, in Daily Life of the Etruscans.(21) Likewise Gerald Heard who was a strong influence in Huxley's mystical interests developed the theory that the "primeval Golden Age of Man" was matriarchal and that humanity must return to a similar stage but on a different level. (In the same way Susila, although sharing some of the attractive qualities of the "pagan" Katy, also transcends her.) Therefore, it could be said that from Huxley's early admiration for the Etruscans to his later Tantrik period he was in search of the "Eternal Feminine" as a solution not only to his own problems but to those of a society where, as the great Canadian Suffragist Nellie McClung once observed, there is "too

much masculinity and not enough humanity."

A synthesis of the saintly mother, the sensual female, and the enlightened teacher, Susila could also have connotations of the "Great Mother" in Shivaism or Tantrik Buddhism, who had frightening strength and at the same time the benevolence of the life-giving instinct. Huxley has always used Eden imagery to symbolize a state of wholeness and harmony, an escape from dualism, and Susila is presented as a kind of Eve who not only gives the knowledge of good and evil but of a state of Enlightenment transcending both.(22)

But as Susila symbolizes the aspect of the "Eternal Feminine" that leads "on and up" in Island, Babs and the Rani, the two who play the familiar victimizing roles of Siren and overpowering mother, perhaps the only memorable characterizations in the story, are there to lead "down and back." That the Rani, that fierce portrait of Mother as Destroyer, should appear in the novel that contains the idealized mother figure Susila who plays the role of Creator for Will, the protagonist, is a final demonstration of that ambivalence towards the feminine that Huxley could apparently never completely overcome, in spite of his increasingly enlightened views and mellowed attitude.

The character of Susila represents the last and highest stage in the evolution of Huxley's female characterizations, combining in herself supposedly "masculine" and "feminine" qualities such as intellect and emotion and spiritual as well as practical qualities. She is the final resolution of the Richard Greenow-Pearl Bellairs dichotomy.

Yet she is somehow one-dimensional and serves mainly as a mouth-piece of Huxley's own utopian theories. In this respect she resembles the male characters in Huxley's novels who are also mouth-pieces of the author's ideas--the inhuman preachers who range all the way from Rampion of Point Counter Point to the Old Rajah of Island. Huxley was never able to create a major female character who was intellectually aware, spiritually enlightened and yet believably human, as he at least attempted to do with several of his major male characters. None of his novels has a female protagonist.

One explanation might be found in Huxley's essay entitled "D.H. Lawrence" (The Olive Tree, 1936) where he approves of one of Lawrence's statements to a fellow-writer that he (Huxley) might well have applied to himself:

> So that after all in your work women seem not to have existence, save they are the projections of the men. . . . It's the positivity of women you seem to deny--make them sort of instrumental.(23)

A character that is still in many ways a projection, as Susila is in relation to Will, would have to be one-sided and greatly exaggerated in order to be

interesting. For instance, Susila in the "good angel" role is less striking than Babs as Will's "bad angel."

Also as a product of utopia, like most of the other Palanese paragons, Susila differs basically from Will, the visitor and outsider, in not being subject to major conflicts in ideals and points of view. And in this twentieth-century period of the anti-utopia and mock utopia there is a common feeling that the true utopia is by its nature less interesting and more lacking in artistic tension and literary merit than such works as Huxley's Brave New World or Orwell's 1984. The principle of synthesis or compromise, no matter how admirable it might be, tends not to be so dramatic as the presentation of extremes, just as the old Rajah observes that without "dualism" there could be no good literature and with it there could be no good life. (Island, 179)

The question of why Huxley chose to put his ideal female character in a utopian novel could be viewed cynically as being a sign that he was unable to conceive of a really superior female in any other setting. But Huxley made the point that his Pala is not utopian in the sense of being unrealistic but is rather his idea of how humanity might really be able to solve some of its problems. It is not set in the far distant future but in the world as it is in its more or less present state.

The other question as to why the advanced Susila should appear in a novel that is considered by many to be one of Huxley's least successful from the literary point of view might also be answered by Huxley himself. He held the view, controversial as it may seem to some, that the happy life in a virtuous society need not coincide with great achievements in literature or art. The art given most prominence in Pala, in fact, is that of landscape painting. And Will makes the sarcastic comment that after Colonel Dipa has taken over there will probably be a "Golden Age of literature and theology." We can also be sure that under Colonel Dipa's military regime the traditionally utopian equality of women would be suppressed as well as most of the other aspects of a more ideal society.

The final problem as to why Huxley should depict such advanced views as the equality of women in a novel that also advocates the extremely dubious practice of taking drugs for religious purposes can only be answered by the well-known truth that people can be right-headed and wrong-headed at the same time.

Still the fact that Huxley could in his last novel even make the attempt to create a central female character completely different from any of the stock presentations of her predecessors confirms the description he once gave of himself as "an old codger, rampant,

but still learning."(24) And with regard to his insight into the "woman question," as far back as 1924 Huxley put in the mouth of one of his characters an analysis that might satisfy many of the most ardent of contemporary feminists:

> The physicists talk of deriving energy from the atom: they would be more profitably employed nearer home--in discovering some way of tapping those enormous stores of vital energy which accumulate in unemployed women of sanguine temperament and which, in the present imperfect state of social and scientific organization, vent themselves in ways that are generally so deplorable. . . . (25)

Perhaps some day this "imperfect state" may be succeeded by a stage when we can take the advice that Huxley once gave:

> Generalizing about woman is like indicting a Nation--an amusing pastime, but very unlikely to be productive either of truth or utility.(26)

NOTES

1. Aldous Huxley, Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1952), 180. This book is published in England under the title Adonis and the Alphabet.

2. Sybille Bedford, Aldous Huxley: A Biography, Vol. 1 (1894-1939) and Vol. 2 (1939-1963) (London: Chatto & Windus, 1973 and 1974). All subsequent references to either of these two volumes will be indicated in brackets in the text.

3. Aldous Huxley, "The Defeat of Youth," The Collected Poetry of Aldous Huxley, ed. Donald Watt (London: Chatto and Windus, 1971), 47.

4. The double image of the saintly "virgin" and her opposite the "whore" is interestingly documented by S. Marcus in The Other Victorians (1964) and traced historically and anthropologically by such critics as H.R. Hays in his study, The Dangerous Sex (1964).

5. Aldous Huxley, Limbo (London, 1929), 115.

6. Germaine Greer, The Female Eunuch (London, 1970), 148.

7. Yet this type suffers, according to Huxley, from a particular form of punishment. Writing in Texts and Pretexts (1932), he comments upon the "vamp" as follows:
"Those sirens who amuse themselves by vivisecting their lovers are generally of a frigid temperament, or if not frigid, are yet exasperatedly incapable of finding any entire, annihilating satisfaction." (New York, 1962), 119.

8. Biographical material about Huxley's relationship with his own mother reveals only that this superior woman to whom he was devoted died tragically from cancer when he was fourteen. His relationship with his colourful and aggressive mother-in-law Madame Nys was very ambivalent.

9. Aldous Huxley, After Many a Summer (Penguin Books, 1959), 157. First published by Chatto & Windus in 1939.

10. Aldous Huxley, Brief Candles (Penguin Books, 1965), 127. First published by Chatto & Windus in 1930.

11. Aldous Huxley, Ends and Means (London: Chatto & Windus, 1937), 206.

12. Aldous Huxley, Two or Three Graces (London: Chatto & Windus, 1926), 131.

13. Marjorie of Point Counter Point might be said to have attained a somewhat mystical state, but Huxley makes it clear that this is as much due to the mental condition caused by her pregnancy as to the guidance of the saintly Rachel Quarles.

14. Aldous Huxley, Those Barren Leaves (Penguin Books, 1955), 49. First published by Chatto & Windus in 1925.

15. Aldous Huxley, The Genius and the Goddess (London: Chatto & Windus, 1955), 39.

16. H. Breit, "Talk With Aldous Huxley," New York Times Book Review, 1950, 28.

17. The utopia has usually in greater or lesser degree included as one of its principles the equality of women. This was a concept not at all new to Huxley, on the intellectual level at least, as he had once postulated that a more ideal society would have to be based on monogamy, pre-marital chastity, and legal equality of women. This was as a result of being inspired by J.D. Unwin's Sex and Culture. He refers to Unwin in a 1937 letter to J.B. Priestley (Letters of Aldous Huxley, ed. Grover Smith, London, 1969, p. 430), and references to this writer occur in several places in his works.

18. My sources of information here are Edward Conze's Buddhism, Its Essence and Development (London, 1951), a study which has been described by Huxley himself as "admirable." I have also referred to "The Influence of Hindu and Buddhist Thought on Aldous Huxley" (a doctoral thesis written at Stanford University by N.K. Pandey in 1964).

19. Northrop Frye, "Varieties of Literary Utopias," Utopias and Utopian Thought, ed. Frank E. Manuel (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967), 25.

20. Jacques Heurgeon in Daily Life of the Etruscans (New York, 1964) writes as follows: "The feminism of the Etruscan civilization, strange as it may seem to us, is not an Etruscan phenomenon, but is a survival of an ancient and worldwide modus vivendi" (p.86).

21. Richard V. Chase, "The Huxley-Heard Paradise," Partisan Review, X (March-April, 1943), 143-58.

22. Aldous Huxley, The Olive Tree (London, 1936), 205. Huxley also accused Joseph Conrad of the inability to identify with the opposite sex.

23. "Some Important Fall Authors Speak for Themselves," New York Herald Tribune, 12.

24. Aldous Huxley, Little Mexican (London, 1924), 280.

25. Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow, 150.