Lack of Proportion in Antic Hay: Understanding Aldous Huxley’s Early Aesthetic and Social Views

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Lack of Proportion in Antic Hay: Understanding Aldous Huxley's Early Aesthetic and Social Views

by

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Abstract

"Lack of Proportion in Antic Hay: Understanding Aldous Huxley’s Early Aesthetic and Social Views"

The polyphony of ideas expressed in Aldous Huxley’s Antic Hay (1923), and the often fast pace in which these ideas are presented at times veils what is being said, what views are being satirized, as well as which, if any, position Huxley sides with. The novel is filled with many references and allusions to art. Understanding Huxley’s aesthetic and social views in the twenties helps to make sense of the comments about art and society that are both explicitly and implicitly expressed in the novel. Societal changes occurring in England, such as the decline in religious belief, industrial and technological advances and mass culture, the view of art as a symbol of status and wealth, and the drastic changes in art forms and movements, among other things, affected the way art was being produced and the art world/scene in general. Reading the novel along with some of Huxley’s essays and articles written around the same time, as well as reviewing some of the major artistic and literary movements and historical shifts, helps the reader to view the novel as an attempt to criticize the moral decline and the loss of cultural and artistic values in society.

Antic Hay criticizes the loss of values within society and the art world. It is a novel that depicts the unsteadiness and confusion of early twentieth century London and the post World War I society. Huxley also satirizes extremism in art and behavior. If there is one clear message in the novel, it is the call for proportion in art and life. Many early critics, however, thought that Antic Hay was immoral and that it and Huxley
endorsed the extreme, immoral, decadent and irreverent behavior described in the novel. But Huxley is not advocating this behavior he is satirizing it. Huxley, like his granduncle Matthew Arnold before him, was a proponent of art as a means to cultural values and morality.

Huxley's aesthetic taste includes art that is traditional to art that is too experimental, art and literature that has a balance between form and content to that which exclusively focuses on form, art that has an overall humanistic and/or moral influence to art that is rhetorically indifferent and/or an "art for art's sake" approach, and architecture that is proportional to Ruskin's theory of irregularity. But *Antic Hay*’s own lack of structure and unconventional style endangers its function as a vehicle for morality in an Arnoldian sense.

*Antic Hay* is not structurally proportioned, and although it uses traditional techniques and borrows from traditional genres such as satire and the "Peacockian" "novel of ideas," it is not traditional. The lack of structure and the novel’s convoluted style, however, reflect the disjointedness and chaos of twentieth century England. Even though the novel is not a proportioned, organic whole, it stresses the importance of balance in art and life. And although the novel offers no explicit resolution in the end, understanding Huxley’s aesthetic and social views in the 1920s, helps to clarify the novel and Huxley’s overall desire for the return of morality and artistic and social values.
LACK OF PROPORTION IN *ANTIC HAY*: UNDERSTANDING ALDOUS
HUXLEY’S EARLY AESTHETIC AND SOCIAL VIEWS

A THESIS

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
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by

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Introduction

Today Aldous Huxley may be generally remembered for his dystopian novel—*Brave New World* (1932) and some of his later mystical writings like—*Doors of Perception* (1954) which highly influenced the hippie generation. These later writings have often overshadowed his earlier, satirical novels such as *Chrome Yellow* (1921), *Antic Hay* (1923), *Those Barren Leaves* (1925), and *Point Counter Point* (1928). But Huxley’s earlier novels and his many essays and articles shed light on the post First World War era and the changes that were affecting British society and the art world. His ideas concerning the condition of society and art are voiced more clearly in his articles on the visual arts, music, literature, and society than they are in his novels. Many of the ideas expressed in his articles echo the exact sentiments expressed in *Antic Hay.*

However, *Antic Hay*’s structure and style (its satirical tone, fast pace, and influx of ideas), makes it difficult to understand exactly what is being said and what stance is being taken by the author. Therefore, in order to get a better understanding of *Antic Hay* and Huxley’s position on some of the opinions express, it is helpful to refer to some of his nonfiction written around the same time as the novel.

Many critics and scholars have suggested that Huxley, in his early novels, does not take a stand on any one opinion. Because of the barrage of different opinions expressed and the ambivalence of *Antic Hay*—particularly its ending—it is hard to figure out which opinion, if any, belongs to him. But the novel’s ambivalence may be due to Huxley’s own uncertainty about the kind of novelist he wanted to be. This would probably explain the shift from the pessimism and allusiveness of his early fiction to the didactic optimism of his later novels. Taking into account the modernist literary
movement and their rejection of traditional techniques and genres such as realism, one can see why Huxley may have been reluctant to be outright didactic. He may also have wanted the novel’s structure and style to mirror the pessimism, aimlessness and confusion that he satirizes. Reading the novel in conjunction with his essays and articles, however, sheds light on Huxley’s stance on many of the issues raised in Antic Hay and can help readers make sense of the novel.

It becomes clear, after analyzing and comparing Huxley’s fiction with his nonfiction, that he condemns the lack of standards and morality of the day. Although many early critics dismissed Antic Hay and its author as being decadent and immoral because of the novel’s content and unconventional style, Huxley is actually decrying the loss of values within society. This loss of values is attributed to and also reflected by the empty rhetoric and the lack of substance that art had acquired under the guise of modernism and the vulgarity of mass culture.1 Huxley’s stance in the twenties was that empty and vulgar art reflects a shallow and vulgar society and vice versa. Huxley blames this on the increase in industrial development, scientific and technological advances, lack of talent, the leisured classes, desire to be fashionable, and mass culture, as well as the First World War, which as Jerome Meckier suggests, “in Huxley’s opinion, was the final step in the gradual breakdown of nineteenth-century ideals” (Meckier 26). But most importantly, Huxley criticizes the inability to practice the concept of harmony both in

1 Aldous Huxley: The Critical Heritage edited by Donald Watt, is a compilation of reviews of Huxley’s work at the time of their publication. The reviews of Antic Hay were rather mixed, but most called it “obscene” and “highly immoral.” It “was burnt in Cairo...and banned in the Irish Free State.” Many critics feared the influence that it could have on its readers. “James Douglas added vehemently that if Antic Hay ‘escapes uncastigated and unpillored the effect upon English fiction will be disastrous” (9).

In a letter to his father he wrote in defense of the novel: “I will only point out that it is a book written by a member of what I may call the war-generation for others of his kind; and it is intended to reflect—fantastically, of course, but none the less faithfully—the life and opinions of an age which has seen the violent disruption of almost all the standards, conventions and values current in the previous epoch” (9).
one's personal life and in art. In *Antic Hay* and many of his essays, Huxley calls for proportion in art and life. Fittingly, *Antic Hay* also satirizes disproportionate and excessive people.

*Antic Hay* follows the erratic lives of an eclectic group of friends, all unstable and disproportionate. Gumbril Junior, who wants to be like his wealthy leisured friends Mercaptan and Mrs. Viveash, decides to leave a rather secure position as a schoolmaster to pursue commercial success with his invention of pneumatic pants. The irony in this is that during this time of upheavals, commercial success was probably more probable and profitable than teaching. The two artists in the novel are Lypiatt, the struggling and self-absorbed artist and Gumbril Senior, the idealistic architect who hates being commissioned to build structures that he does not even consider architecture in its purist sense. Both Lypiatt and Gumbril Senior are extremely idealistic and out of place in twentieth century London and consequently failures. Lypiatt's problem is that his ideal and theory of art does not correlate with his talent and natural abilities. Gumbril Senior's problem is that his ideal and definition of architecture does not correlate with society's view of architecture. Shearwater the physiologist is another example of a disproportionate character. He is so engulfed in the scientific and rational that he fails to be passionate and emotional. All characters are different and voice different views, some of which Huxley himself shares, but all are extreme examples of certain characteristics that Huxley satirizes. Huxley calls for proportion and harmony; this is why the word "proportion" continues to appear throughout the novel.

The characters go from one seemingly meaningless experience to another. All the while they are talking about important social, religious, artistic and literary issues; the
importance and meaning of these conversations become blurred by the vast number of ideas expressed and the often rapid way they are presented. The constant flow of thoughts, dialogue, and action in *Antic Hay*, however, mimics the topsy-turvy world that the characters live in. It becomes clear after delving into the novel that nothing is stationary, neither the plot, nor the novel’s pace, nor the society that Huxley satirizes. What is clear, however, is that the novel’s structure and style mirrors the fast paced society that was quickly losing its foundation.

By the end of the novel (after Lypiatt’s self-realization and Gumbril Senior’s sale, which symbolizes surrender to commercialism), the discussion of art ends; it is overshadowed by science and anatomical experimentation. This is symbolic of the danger that art and society encounter when art and life are viewed in a cold, rational, and disproportionate way. A purely formalistic approach can also be seen as symbolic of a cold, rational and disproportionate art form, for in Huxley’s opinion, content is as important as form. This becomes even more pronounced when one considers his stance on the purpose of art. As expressed in his many articles and essays, he encouraged art and literature that produce morality and endorse cultural values.

Huxley’s later fiction is optimistically didactic but the pessimistic and evasive tone behind the comedy of his early novels also calls for societal changes. Many early critics viewed him as an iconoclast and anti-traditionalist. His style and subject matter may seem anti-traditional but he is not endorsing the behavior depicted in the novel—he is criticizing it. What may seem to be a critique of old standards and moral values is actually a call towards it since in his view, modern society had lost its sense of substance due to an increase in industrial development, mass culture, and the effects of the First
World War. Huxley felt that art should be a vehicle for expressing a positive message, one that is humanistic and that inspires human greatness. He felt that this kind of art was extremely important in a time when things were rapidly changing for the worse. Art, like society, was losing its value and Huxley (in many ways a “high-brow,”) put some of the blame on the proliferation of “bad art.” Some of the factors that Huxley thought contributed to this increase will be presented throughout this paper.

Societal changes are often a result of changes in religious and artistic attitudes and vice versa. Since Antic Hay begins with Gumbril Junior’s theological speculations and his thoughts on art, the first section of this paper will begin by analyzing the concepts of art and religion, their place in society, as well as their effects on society and on its people. It is intended to work as an introduction to some of the changes occurring in twentieth century London.

The second section focuses on specific art movements, and their historical changes. This historical review will help to better place Antic Hay in its historical context and help to better understand some of the characters and their opinions about art as expressed in the novel. It will also reveal, in some instances, Huxley’s views on some traditional art movements as well as more experimental movements such as Dadaism. In the third section, Lypiatt, the artist in the novel, will be analyzed. Huxley, as we will see, shares a lot of Lypiatt’s opinions and concerns about art. However, Huxley also criticizes Lypiatt’s lack of talent and excessive idealism. Although he is better suited to work as a second-rate artist, Lypiatt insists on being a first-rate artist.

Gumbril Senior, the architect, will be analyzed in the fourth section. His character brings the concept of architecture as art into the narrative. He is also an idealist
whose situation in a capitalist society forces him to create “architecture” that he feels is
beneath him. He tries to resist the commercial forces, but like Lypiatt, he is unsuccessful
in his attempts.

The fifth section deals with the use of art, by some, to represent wealth and status. It also presents the Arts and Crafts movement revived by Roger Fry, that among other things, equated artisans with artists (a concept that Huxley did not agree with). The sixth section deals with literature which is also an important and prominent subject in Antic Hay. In this section, like in the “Art History” section, some prominent literary movements will be introduced to better place the literary issues presented in the novel as well as better situate Huxley as a writer. This section also serves as a preliminary for the following section which will discuss Antic Hay’s structure and style. Huxley’s preference for proportion in the visual arts and architecture are not translated into his own writing. Neither is his call for art that inspires change and endorses morality explicitly clear in the novel. But, as mentioned before, his desire to render the formlessness and chaotic nature of society may be responsible for his lack of structure and his elusive style.

The novel ends with Shearwater, the physiologist performing an experiment in a laboratory. This is fitting with the novels critique of the loss of values in art and society. Shearwater is a cold rationalist who lacks proportion. There are no moral values in the laboratory only cold experimentation. The subject of art, which was very prominent in the beginning and throughout the novel, is no longer mentioned towards the end. Art, like religion before it, is no longer discussed in the novel; it is replaced by science.
Art and Religion

The question of aesthetics is a major issue in Antic Hay. The emphasis on art in the novel reflects Huxley’s belief in the importance of art as a reflection of society and as a guide for society. While art once held a venerated position in the esteem of some, Antic Hay demonstrates how art, as well as religion, has lost some of its moral meaning and value within society. The idea that art should have a purpose and meaning was becoming irrelevant in a society that was slowly losing its own sense of purpose and meaning. For Huxley, the main point may not necessarily have been art or religion in and of itself, but what the loss of these things represents: “To Huxley, in the 1920s, art was not supposed to delve into the abstruse depths of reality; art was supposed to create order out of the chaos of the daily paradoxes of life” (Bimbaum 82). Like his granduncle, Matthew Arnold, before him, Huxley stressed the importance of good and meaningful art to society.

It is important to notice that the novel begins in a chapel (7) and ends in a laboratory (208). In the opening chapter, Theodore Gumbril Junior is sitting in the chapel of the school he works at as a history teacher speculating on the existence of God “in his rapid and rambling way.” He looks at the “vast window opposite, all blue and jaundiced and bloody with nineteenth century glass” that depicts the Old Testament story of David and Goliath—David standing over his defeated foe: “young David stood like a cock, crowing on the dunghill of a tumbled giant. From the middle of Goliath’s forehead there issued, like a narwhal’s budding horn, a curious excrescence” that causes Gumbril Junior wonder if it is the “embedded pebble” shot by David or if it is instead “the giant’s married life” (7). The irreverent description, apparently a euphemism for the male sexual
organ, and the making fun of the biblical story, indicates the position that religion has taken in society and in the novel. Religion in many ways had itself become a slain giant.

There are also two things going on here at once: theological speculation and the constant interference of Gumbril Junior's opinions about the artwork displayed in the chapel. Both art and theology seem to be a priority in these opening pages. Although the theological (the fact that he is in a church and that there is a sermon going on) wants to overshadow the stained glass window and the chapel's architecture, ideas about art keep pushing themselves to the forefront. Reverend Pelvey's sermon is mocked and therefore rendered irrelevant. This represents the place religion held in twentieth century England. There is also some reasoning going on that strikingly contrasts with both theology and art as Gumbril Junior tries to rationalize the existence of God and his mother's goodness in terms of figures and numbers (7-8): "God as a sense of warmth about the heart, God as exultation, God as tears in the eyes, God as a rush of power or thought—that was all right. But God as truth, God as 2+2=4—that wasn't so clearly all right. Was there any chance of their being the same? Were there bridges to join the two worlds?" (7). There are no easy or satisfying answers for Gumbril Junior who poses them. When Gumbril Junior tries to assimilate the religious/spiritual with the scientific/rational the feeling is one of confusion.

Peter Bowering discusses the incongruent relationship between science and moral values: "The gulf that divided the values of scientific materialism on the one hand and those of the traditional custodians of morality on the other appeared by the early nineteen-twenties to be virtually unassailable." They were in "such a position of frank disagreement that there could be no escape except by abandoning the clear teaching of
either one or the other" (23). The two positions were so opposed at that point that there was no easy way of combining them.

It is important to take into account the social changes that had been occurring in England due to several scientific, industrial and technical advances. Pericles Lewis states, “In the early nineteenth century, a series of scientific discoveries began to undermine belief in the literal truth of the Bible” (Lewis 18). He continues, “Darwin’s theory of evolution provided the most intellectually coherent alternative to the biblical account of creation...Science promised an alternative to religion, or the basis for a new ‘religion of humanity’” (Lewis 19).

Lewis describes the situation:

The masters of suspicion [i.e. Nietzsche] preached the death of God and the limitations of human self-understanding...Science showed that humans had evolved from apes rather than being created intact by God and that no absolute measure of time or space was possible. Literature and the arts responded, already in the nineteenth century, to the changed place of the human intellect in the universe. (Lewis 25)

The changes brought on by scientific revelations affected people’s beliefs and made them question traditional dogma. Art, as we will see, was also influenced by these changes in several ways.

Art has been known to take the place of religion in the estimate of some, to fill a human void, or to serve a moral purpose. One example of this is the nineteenth century aesthetic movement or the “art for art’s sake” led by Walter Pater and Oscar Wilde. Another example, completely opposed to aestheticism, is Huxley’s granduncle’s Matthew
Arnold's view that art and literature can be used as a vehicle for building social character and to endorse and encourage morality. Art and literature, in Arnold's and also Huxley's view, were important for carrying the values that religion used to carry and not as the aesthetes deemed it, a religion in and of itself. Huxley was neither a proponent of the "art for art's sake" movement nor was he religious. He did, however, believe that art and literature should follow a humanistic tradition. In *Antic Hay* however, Huxley depicts a loss of hope due to the unraveling of traditional modes of values such as religion and art. This message is not explicitly stated but it is implied.

In the essay "The Substitutes for Religion" (1927), Huxley says that "During the last two or three hundred years the religions of the West have manifestly decayed...we are living today in what is probably the most irreligious epoch of all history" (249). Yet "the fact that many people are now without a religion does not mean that they are without some substitute for a religion...Lacking religion, they have provided themselves with substitutes for it" (249-50). He names several things that people use as surrogates for religion, art being one of them. The problem however, is that "No religious surrogate can completely satisfy all the religious needs of men." He goes on to say that perhaps, "Much of the restlessness and uncertainty so characteristic of our time is...due to the chronic sense of unappeased desires from men naturally religious, but condemned by circumstances to have no religion" (251). He is not against art as a substitute for religion when it inspires or is humanistic in nature. His concern about the substitution of art for religion is based more on his assumption that much of the modern art used as substitutes are rhetorically empty and/or bad. As we will later see, Huxley often criticized the influx of bad art and artists in modern times. He goes on to explain that the "arts, including
music and certain important kinds of literature” were at one time “the hand maids of religion” whose “principal function was to provide religion with the visible or audible symbols which create in the mind of the beholder those feelings which for him personally are the god” (254). However,

Divorced from religion, the arts are now independently cultivated for their own sake. That aesthetic beauty which was once devoted to the service of God has now set up as a god on its own. The cultivation of art for its own sake has become a substitute for religion. That it is an extremely inadequate substitute must be apparent to anyone who has observed the habits of those who lead the pure, aesthetic life. Where beauty is worshipped for beauty’s sake as a goddess, independent of and superior to morality and philosophy, the most horrible putrefaction is apt to set in. The lives of the aesthetes are the far from edifying commentary on the religion of beauty. (254)

In this essay he is objecting to the use of art as a substitute for religion but the kind of art he really objects to is modern art that is rhetorically empty, art that is viewed and admired for its own sake and not for what it has to say or what it aspires to. He acknowledges that “Art occupies a position of great importance in the modern world” but that this does not mean “that modern art is better than the art of other generations” for according to him “it obviously is not” (253). It is important to understand that Huxley was not a fan of most modern art and did not agree with the veneration of art as the aesthetes saw it.

For Huxley this view of art, or the new art as a substitute for religion, is “far from edifying” (254); it was an empty aestheticism that neither he, nor his granduncle before
him, could endorse. During the interwar times the need for fulfillment which conventional religion had failed to provide was being replaced not by good or morality producing art but by an influx of empty, modern art. People were now looking up to art as a god in itself and not for its content or what it had to say. Because a lot of the modern art being produced at the time was of poor quality and rhetorically empty in Huxley’s opinion, he did not agree with the use of art to fill the void that the lack of religious belief had produced. This worried Huxley, as it did Arnold before him, because he feared that society was in danger of falling into a shallow and valueless existence. Huxley was not a religious believer in the conventional sense, nor had he yet adopted the mystical stance he would later adopt, yet he was a proponent of art and literature that endorsed a sense of morality—one that readers could try to live up to. Arnold saw “The Bible [as] a great work of literature like the *Odyssey*” and thought that “Both Bible and church must be preserved not because historical Christianity was credible but because both, when properly understood, were agents of what he called ‘culture’—they contributed to making humanity more civilized” (Abrams 1348). So, the issue is not religion or Christianity in and of itself, but what it represents and the moral values it produces.

Contemporary society had devalued art by preferring to worship an art that, in Huxley’s view, was without purpose and bad at that. An aesthetic that was tied to moral values was being replaced by a mediocre and empty one. Although in the 1920s Huxley did not necessarily call for art that was explicitly didactic or religious, his fear was similar to that of Arnold’s. Arnold defends literature “against its enemies and detractors, whose emphasis on science, moneymaking, and commercial prosperity had led them to regard poetry as merely a pleasant past-time” (Leitch 809). Art and literature was losing
its value. Instead of it being a means to an end, art was becoming an end in itself.

Arnold and Huxley, however, thought that good art and literature should teach people "How to live" (Leitch 803). They believed that quality art would inspire quality living.

Huxley's biographer, Dana Sawyer writes, "In *Jesting Pilate*, published in 1926, [Huxley] explains...in agreement with Arnold that the artist, in this case, the writer, is important to 'fill the vacuum created in the popular mind by the decay of established religion' (Sawyer 50). Sawyer quotes Huxley: "We tend to think and feel in terms of the art we like; and if the art we like is bad then our thinking and feeling will be bad" (74).

Here Huxley is declaring that art reflects society and its psychology and vice versa. Taking these statements into account, an art for art’s sake philosophy, for Huxley, reflects a sense of shallowness.

In the article "The Modern Spirit and a Family Party" (1922), Huxley declares that, "We live today in a world that is socially and morally wrecked. Between them, the war and the new psychology have smashed most of the institutions, traditions, creeds, and spiritual values that supported us in the past" (33). He uses Dadaism as an example "in the sphere of art" of "that complete disintegration of values" (33). "Dada" Huxley writes, "denies everything; even art itself, that last idol which we all tried so pathetically hard to keep standing when everything else—the soul, morality, patriotism, religion—has been laid low, even art itself was assaulted by Dada and smashed" (33). Not only had the war caused uncertainty and loss of hope—even art, which had in the past stood as a fortress that people could hold onto, something they could believe in, was being threatened by such avant-garde art movements such as Dadaism. If art was to guide people, then movements such as Dadaism threatened not only art but societal values.
In *Antic Hay*, the characters do not have anything substantial or solid to hold on to. Lypiatt and Gumbril Junior at one point in the narrative seem to have some hope but this hope soon fades. Lypiatt contemplates suicide, and Gumbril Junior loses any hope of achieving real happiness after he loses what could have been real love. Gumbril Senior’s fate is no different; he ends up selling his cherished model of London to help out his financially troubled friend. In *Antic Hay*, the art and ideals that people put their faith in quickly lose their relevancy and meaning. Even the romantic connotation that the word “dream” once suggested has changed. With Freud and psychoanalysis, the word has become a psychological/medical term (38-39). Lypiatt’s character seems to acknowledge these changes and tries to prevent them from happening, but his own arrogance and lack of talent make him seem, not a savior but an idealistic buffoon. In the end, even though he has put all his faith in his art, once he realizes he’s been insincere (for he lacks talent) he also realizes that he has based his beliefs, and therefore his life, on a lie. Lypiatt and Gumbril Senior try to hold on to their idealized concept of art and to the status that art used to hold in society, but their idealized way of looking at art does not work in the new modern, commercially minded society. Lypiatt is not taken seriously by the other characters. He is easily offended by those who suggest he should become a commercial artist. He represents both the upholder of artistic ideals and the mediocre artist who deceives himself into believing that he is good. His extremism and lack of talent make him seem more like a caricature than a real, balanced man.

The theological expression in the title of one of Huxley’s essays, “The Cry for a Messiah in the Arts” (1922), written for *Vanity Fair*, demonstrates the importance that Huxley put into art, equating it, in a sense, with religion. In the essay, Huxley expresses
his own “messianic longings”: “The world of painting awaits its messiah, like all the
other worlds of today” (31). He also says that “so much of modern art” is “at its best...
‘amusing’” and “at its worst is ‘tiresome’” but none very good (31). Huxley declares that
“London decays slowly” that “There is nobody large enough in literature or in painting to
do the large simple obvious things, and do them well” (29). He says that in London
instead of having a Shakespeare, who can turn “the feuilleton theme of Romeo and Juliet
into a masterpiece,” there is

Nothing between the people who turn feuilleton themes of love, ambition,
jealousy, and sin into feuilletons, and the sensitive, talented artists who
know themselves too small to treat the feuilleton themes well, and so take
refuge in the minor unimportant second-hand themes provided by culture
and an undue introspection. There is no Shakespeare to fill the gulf; there
is only H.G. Wells….Living in these circumstances, one finds oneself
haunted by the expectant hope of a messiah, of somebody new and
prodigious, who will appear suddenly, out of nowhere, pronouncing a new
unheard-of word of illumination. (29)

Huxley was well aware of the post-impressionist and avant-garde movements in art but
says that neither this movement nor the French theorists and their British followers,
(Roger Fry and Clive and Vanessa Bell, among others), satisfy his longing.

Huxley describes the eclectic “The London Group exhibition at the Mansard
Gallery” that included Post-Impressionist as well as Neo-Realists, and “the newly-formed
Futurist-Cubist group” (Fry 163), as “a rather depressing affair...the pictures that were
shown, competent and serious and well intentioned though they were, were mostly a little
lifeless and uninteresting” (31). In fact, as Sawyer writes, “[Huxley] favored traditional themes and approaches, and would remain suspect of modern art all his life” (88). Obviously he is not satisfied with the turn that art had taken in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. (It is also interesting to note that in Antic Hay, Huxley does not name any modern artist but fills the novel with references to old ones. Perhaps this is because specific modern artist were not worth mentioning in his opinion.) In order to understand the artistic transitions that were occurring in Britain, a brief and abridged historical outline may be in order.

**Art History, Movements and the Critics**

Insight into some of the art movements and their effects on British art and literature is beneficial when reading Antic Hay. Huxley was extremely knowledgeable about art. In fact he had learned a lot about art from his friend, the art critic and connoisseur, Roger Fry. This association, as we will later see, does not mean that Huxley would share or endorse Fry’s formalist rhetoric, at least not in its strict sense. Huxley himself enjoyed creating art. One of Huxley’s biographers says that Huxley had a “real talent for drawing” (Murray 111). But as Huxley would admit in “On Handicraft,” “I myself...spend much of my spare time painting pictures. The exercise of this manual skill gives me extraordinary pleasure; but I do not for that reason imagine that I am producing masterpieces” (89). And even though he wrote a lot on art in his articles and essays, he was not necessarily an art expert. In 1918 he turned down “an offer from Fry to edit the Burlington Magazine,” because he felt “a sense of inadequate knowledge of art” (Murray 107-08). This did not, in the end, suppress him from becoming an art critic and expressing his own feelings about art and what art should aim for.
Huxley wrote extensively about art in his fiction and his nonfiction writing. His opinions about art however, are more clearly expressed in his many articles and essays than they are in *Antic Hay*. There are so many opinions expressed in the novel that it is difficult at times to decipher what exactly is being said and what side Huxley endorses. He has so much to say in his articles and essays and criticizes a lot of the contemporary art and artists of his day. Milton Birnbaum writes that Huxley "preferred the classicists and realists...to romantics and ultramodernists; in the arts at least he advocated tradition over radical experimentation" (176). Huxley blamed the radical experimentation and proliferation of bad art on the increase of industrialization which created a domino effect that, in his opinion, lessened the value of art.

Peter Childs puts things into perspective when he writes in *Modernism: the New Critical Idiom*, that "European art underwent a series of upheavals from the mid-nineteenth century" on, due to the "Kodak camera," "cheaper painting material" and more access for the general public to great art. Huxley weighs in with his view in essays such as "The Spread of Bad Art" where he attributes the proliferation of bad art to an increase in population and technical advances which in turn increased financial means, leisure, boredom, and the desire for entertainment. Technological advances such as the camera changed traditional art. Huxley writes, "Photography has tended to make the modern painter much less interested in the exact imitation of nature than he was in the past" (169). With photography, exact imitation was no longer worthwhile for painters; why would it be when "the camera can do the job so much more quickly and easily" (169)? As the result of photography, newer modes of art, such as "Cubism, expressionism, post-impressionism, and all the other brand of non-realistic art, together
with the whole modern theory of aesthetics” have developed (169). Traditional imitation
gave way to experimentation.

Another result of the advancement of photography and also another contribution
to the spread of bad art, according to Huxley, was the displacement of the “second-rate”
artist. Huxley suggests that “The camera has now robbed these worthy second-rate artists
of their occupation” (169). In “The Spread of Bad Art” Huxley writes: “The making of
exact (and beautiful) imitations of nature was one of the principal functions of the
second-rate artists of other days” (169). With the advent of the camera they become
expendable: “Modern theory tells them that they ought to produce something purely
aesthetic and formally significant. They do their best—and the result is that unspeakable
dismal second-rate ‘advanced’ art which fills the galleries of the contemporary world”
(169). He uses the engraver as an example of a displaced “second-rate” artist. The
engraver once held an appropriate and invaluable position within society; he reproduced
great paintings at the request of the public. After the advent of the camera and other
processes, the engraver was basically out of a job. Huxley writes:

In pre-photographic, pre “process” days, the work of engraving occupied
the energies of a very large number of conscientious, technically
competent, and entirely unoriginal artist of the second rank…They did
useful work, which was often, incidentally, beautiful in itself. Then came
“process”—the photographic reproduction first of line drawings, then of
half-tones. The engravers were doomed. (169-170)
The changes in society due to technological advances affected art and the very concept of art. Those that were not necessarily artists now were forced to become artists or believed themselves to be artists:

The labor which, in a happier age, they would have expended in the reproduction of Rubenses and Raphaels, in making steel engravings of Turner, in neatly scratching architecture, landscape, animals, figures on copper plates is now devoted to the playing of “original” five-finger exercises on canvas. No wonder, then, that the great mass of modern painting is in general so appallingly dull. (170)

(The Arts and Crafts movement, which will be discussed in the “Art as a Sign of Wealth and Status” section of this essay, also suggests that the “second-rate artist” or the “artist of the second rank” should be equated with the “first-rate” artist.)

In *Antic Hay*, Huxley writes something strikingly similar to what he writes in “The Spread of Bad Art.” In Gumbril Junior’s first attempt at being the “Complete Man” he meets a woman, who he later finds out is his friend Shearwater’s wife. When they go back to her apartment, Gumbril comments on “the one decent picture hanging on the walls” which happens to be “an eighteenth century engraving of Raphael’s ‘Transfiguration’—better, he always thought in black and white than in its bleakly coloured original” (91). He goes on to echo Huxley’s sentiments saying that: “Photography...is a mixed blessing. It has made it possible to reproduce pictures so easily and cheaply, that all the bad artists who were well occupied in the past, making engravings of good men’s paintings, are now free to do bad original work of their own” (91). After Gumbril Junior makes this comment, he realizes that what he had said was so
"impersonal" so "terribly off the point" (91). It is off the point in the sense that it seems like an aside, but this is in keeping with the "novel of ideas."

In "On Handicraft" Huxley talks about the rarity of good artists: "Artistic talent is an extremely rare phenomenon; therefore good art is extremely uncommon. The only substitute—and it is at best a partial substitute—for personal talent is a good artistic tradition," one in which the bad or mediocre artist can imitate good art instead of "using their own second-rate, or tenth-rate imaginations." He defines a "good tradition...as the ghost of good dead artists dictating to bad living artists. So long as the bad artists listen to the dictations, and so long as they make no attempt to launch out on their own account" (90). In fact, Huxley would often write about the lack of talented artists and the influx of bad ones. Here he suggests that it is better for the "second-rate" or mediocre artist to imitate good art than to venture off and try to create art using his own creativity.

After the Romantic Movement, which focused more on the expression of the artist or poet, John Ruskin returned to the concept of mimesis. In the preface to Modern Painters, David Barrie calls Ruskin "the most eloquent and influential interpreters of the visual arts that Britain has ever produced" (xv). Huxley would later comment on Ruskin's influence on his young taste. As part of his Oxford education and its endorsement of Ruskinian aesthetics, Huxley was taught to reject and dislike art that did not follow Ruskin's theory of what art should be. Ruskin's influence would later be rejected by Huxley. In Beyond the Mexique Bay (1934), Huxley writes:

My parents, for example...had no great love for the Oxford Movement; but I was brought up in the strait and narrow way of Ruskinism; and so strict was my conditioning that it was not till I was at least twenty and had
come under the influence of the aestheticians of a newer school that I could perceive the smallest beauty in Saint Paul’s cathedral. Till then, its dome and its round arches had acted on me like a Pavlovian bell: at the sight of them I had shuddered and the thought, ‘How ugly!’ had immediately presented itself to my consciousness. (Birnbaum 15)

Huxley, like his character Gumbril Senior in *Antic Hay*, eventually becomes a lover of Wren and an avid admirer of Saint Paul’s cathedral. By the 1920s, Huxley had rejected Ruskin’s aesthetics.

With Ruskin and his *Modern Painters*, the emphasis on art as a means of worshiping God became the blueprint for many Victorians in interpreting art and architecture. However, Ruskin’s emphasis on art as a means of worship was not focused on didactics but on mimesis. The first volume was published in 1843 and it was written mainly as a defense of Turner whose art was viciously criticized by the Royal Academy of Art.

Ruskin endorsed the concept of art as mimesis and worship, but his theory was one that surprisingly called for art that was imperfect. For him, true or good art mimics nature; yet it does not idealize as Renaissance painters such as Michelangelo had done. He believed that nature as a representation of the divine needs no help from humanity. The emphasis is on the importance of God and his creation and not on the artist and his or her creation. He opposed the idealism of the humanistic tradition that Huxley, Arnold, and Gumbril Senior endorsed. Barrie writes that Ruskin was convinced that “great art ought to serve a high moral or spiritual purpose” (xli).
Wolfgang Iser quotes Francis G. Townsend’s comment about Ruskin, “Scripture is one manifestation of God and the preacher expounds it; nature is another manifestation of God, and the artist expounds it” (33). The better or more accurately an artist depicts nature as it is (with all its imperfections), the better the artist and his/her work. Mimesis was important for Ruskin, but he preferred imitation that did not idealize its subject as the Renaissance artist had done. Huxley and Gumbril Senior, however, praised the Renaissance artists and architects. Ironically, Ruskin’s non idealized concept of mimesis vaguely resembles much of the modern view of art, particularly that of impressionism, which he would later discredit.

With Walter Pater and Oscar Wilde came the suggestion of “art for art’s sake.” In contrast to Ruskin, “The aestheticists elevated art above other moral ends” (Lewis 10). Pater invented the phrase “art for art’s sake” which he later changed to “art for its own sake” (Leitch 833). His Studies in the History of the Renaissance (1873) expands the definition of the term Renaissance and describes it “as an ‘outbreak of the human spirit’ from the ‘limits which the religious system of the middle ages imposed on the heart and the imagination’” (834). The emphasis is taken away from God and art as worship and it is placed on the art itself: “By making a religion of art, a sacred duty of artistic creation and perception, Pater built the foundation for modern aestheticist rapture as well as for impressionist criticism” (Leitch 834). The focus becomes the pleasure that a work of art brings upon the viewer. As Huxley explains in “The Substitutes for Religion,” he was not too keen on the “art for art sake” approach to art. Some “attacked Pater for advocating pleasure as the highest good and self-gratification as the best rule for the conduct of life” (Leitch 834). In fact, this is the kind of behavior that Huxley condemns
in *Antic Hay* and society. Many Victorians also had a problem with this idea and condemned Pater calling him a hedonist.

The problem with Pater’s view of art and what made it so different from what Victorians were used to in other critics such as Ruskin and Matthew Arnold was that it was free from any religious, moral, social or political responsibility:

Pater’s view of criticism and art startled his contemporaries, because God is absent from it. Most of them saw death not as final but as the pathway to the highest form of life. Pater neither offers any religious consolation nor invokes the moral earnestness and high seriousness of earlier Victorian writers, including Thomas Carlyle, Arnold, and Eliot. Pater seems unconcerned as well about social and political change: there is no higher purpose than seizing, desperately, each moment for whatever intensities it might supply. This is obviously the main limitation of his position, for the responsibility of the critic is maximizing his or her *pleasure*, not contributing to knowledge or to change in a body politic that in Pater’s view can no more withstand decay and death than anything or anyone else.

(Leitch 834)

One of Pater’s views that sympathizes with modern ones is his desire to remove himself from the dreariness and nastiness of everyday life—from the reality of modern life and ultimate death. The question for Pater became, why would anyone want to imitate nature and reality (as Ruskin suggests), when reality is something that should be avoided because it represents death? “While Ruskin believes that the artist attains piety by imitating nature, Pater hopes that the dejected self exposed to the demands of a pedestrian
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reality will be stimulated to a new freedom by restructuring the given” (Iser 34). Pater viewed everyday life as boring and deplorable with death—an inevitable reality—lurking around every corner. Art as an imitation of such a life was not cathartic, but instead reminded one of the dreariness of reality and hence mortality. Pater’s view of everyday life resembles the modern view depicted by the characters in Antic Hay who live their lives seeking momentary pleasures and by doing so avoiding reality and any social responsibilities. While Pater uses art to fill the void, the characters in the novel, with the exception of Lypiatt, use partying and philandering to try to find solace and entertainment and as a means of escape. Instead of art, other kinds of pleasures are sought out with the hope of achieving a temporary relief from the reality and condition of life. Yet the novel ends and there is no resolution; the characters are still restless and unsatisfied.

Huxley spoke against technological advances because they create an increase in leisure and as a result an increase in the desire for different modes of entertainment to satiate boredom. In Aldous Huxley: A Quest for Values, Birnbaum explains Huxley’s stance: “those who thought that the movies, the radio, television, drugs would lessen boredom have discovered that the masses, instead of being relived of the tedium of living, crave additional and more stimulating diversions. The creation of new pleasures merely leads to a greater desire for more pleasures” (146-47). The idea is that when pleasure, whether it comes from art or any of the activities that Birnbaum mentions, is the means and the ends of life, one never becomes satiated but his or her desire to seek more and more pleasure leads to a meaningless existence.

Huxley was not necessarily in agreement with Ruskin’s view of art neither was he a proponent of “art for art’s sake” aesthetics. Sawyer writes, “Neither Arnold nor
[Aldous] Huxley believed in the adage of ‘art for art’s sake’...Art is a means not an end. Art, if it has no moral purpose, is empty and therefore vulgar for both men” (72). This does not mean that Huxley believed that art should be religious in nature (Huxley shared his grandfather’s Thomas Huxley’s agnosticism); the morality that he attributes to art is one that leads to a better way of life not to God. It is an endorsement of humanism. In “The Best Picture,” Huxley praises Piero della Francesca who “seems to have been inspired by what I may call the religion of Plutarch’s Lives—which is not Christianity, but a worship of what is admirable in man. Even his technically religious pictures are paeans in praise of human dignity...With the drama of life and religion he is very little concerned” (211-12). Alberti whom Gummibl Senior praises in Antic Hay (26) and Huxley praises “Rimini and Alberti” (201) is lauded for the same reasons as Piero. Huxley calls Alberti’s at St. Francis “a tribute to intellectual greatness” (202). Huxley is very deliberate in establishing the fact that what he likes about Piero’s work, even the paintings with religious themes, is not the actual story depicted (i.e. his “Nativity,” “Baptism,” or “The Resurrection,”) but the moral values it signifies. He goes as far as saying that not even Piero was concerned with the religious aspect of the picture. What Huxley liked was the celebration of life and humanity that it presented. This is an artist whose works satisfied him (212) not because of his technical virtuosity or for its religiosity but for its content and exaltation of humanity.

The Impressionism that in some ways was influenced by Pater, led to other movements initially generally known as Post-Impressionism. But some of the artistic movements such as Cubism, Futurism, and Dadaism, were drastic changes to the modes of artistic expression that the English public was accustomed to seeing. Huxley makes
fun of the pace that abstract art movements were taking in some of his early novels.

Birnbaum writes that in *Crome Yellow*, Huxley

> has a character comment wryly that one of these abstractionists is growing increasingly abstract every day; he had already given up the third dimension and was contemplating giving up the second also. ‘Soon, [the abstractionist] says, there’ll be just the blank canvas. That’s the logical conclusion. Complete abstraction. (83)

Behind the comedy lies a serious concern for Huxley. Art was divorcing itself from life and morality. A “blank canvas,” or “complete abstraction,” goes against Huxley’s belief that art should inspire greatness. The humanistic aspect of art was in danger of becoming extinct.

For some, like the Italian F.T. Marinetti, art was used as a political or social tool. Lewis writes: “Those artists who broke the conventions of traditional art were often also interested in breaking the conventions of traditional morality” (Lewis 29). Art was no longer seen as a mimesis of nature or an object to be worshiped, but as a tool to be used for presenting political or social commentary. With Marinetti’s “The Technical Manifesto of Futurist Literature” (1912), Marinetti is said to have broken “new ground by launching a violent assault on the notion of aesthetic autonomy, the very concept of art. ‘Each day we must spit on the *Altar of Art!*’” Marinetti was also “quoted as saying, ‘Art is not a religion, not something to be worshipped with joined hands’” (Rainey 39). This is a far cry from nineteenth century art and criticism, both Pater’s and Ruskin’s. Marinetti condemns the veneration of art as if it were a religion. “By November 1913, when Marinetti was again in England and giving lectures to packed houses, he was
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quoted as saying, 'Art is not a religion, not something to be worshiped with joined
hands.' Instead it 'should express all the intensity of life – its beauty...sordidness,' and
'the very complex of our life to-day’” (Rainey 39). Marinetti rejects the emphasis on
aesthetics and beauty that artists placed on art as well as the veneration of art. Marinetti’s
comments are somewhat reminiscent of Huxley’s “The Substitute for Religion” when he
suggests that art should not be worshiped for its own sake. But Marinetti also rejects
morality in art which Huxley believes is essential in art. Huxley felt that art should have
substance—something to say, Marinetti’s extreme message and his theory of art, i.e.
futurism, was something Huxley frowned upon.

Post-Impressionists were similar to the Romantics because they returned to an
“emphasis on the art and mind of the artist as creator, rather than the reflector, of reality”
(Ayers 62). Fry is known as the proponent and spokesman for modern art. He
introduced Impressionism to England and later “coined the term ‘Post-Impressionism’”
(Reed 1). He has also been known as one of the main influences for the movement
towards an emphasis on form over content in art. Christopher Reed, however, suggests in
the introduction to A Roger Fry Reader, that many have enclosed Fry into a stiff formalist
bracket focusing on his 1917 “Art and Life” essay which he, in Reed’s words, argued
“for art as a realm apart from life, subjective to its own evolutionary logic, its ‘rhythmic
sequences of change determined...by its own internal forces—and the readjustment
within it, of its own elements’” (1-2). This statement sparked a trend that placed more
importance on the form of art and literature over content or subject. Ayers writes that “In
‘An Essay on the Aesthetic’, Roger Fry insists that art create its emotional effect purely
through the arrangement of line, mass, space, light and shade, and colour. He rejects the
argument of Tolstoy in *What is Art?* That art must be judged purely in terms of its moral effect, its 'reaction upon actual life'” (99). Yet Reed suggests that Fry was not as strict and committed to this idea as some may have taken him to be. Whether or not Reed is right, a formalistic approach became the mode of many modern artists and writers.

In his review of Clive Bell’s *Art, “A New Theory of Art,”* Fry focuses on Bell’s concept of “significant form.” In it he says that Bell makes a distinction between emotions provoked by content and/or subject matter and aesthetic emotions provoked by what Bell termed “significant form” (Fry 159).

Fry’s writes:

> Mr. Bell expresses rather a pious belief than a reasoned conviction that the aesthetic emotion is indeed an emotion about ultimate reality, that it has, therefore, a claim as absolute as the religious emotion has upon those who feel it. The real gist of his book is a plea that to those who feel the aesthetic emotion, it becomes of such importance, so intimately and conclusively satisfying to their spiritual nature, that for them to have it interfered with by any other considerations, by the intrusion of any human emotion, however intense and valid it may be, is to miss the greatest value of art. His book is in praise of contemplative as against practical virtue. (Fry 160)

Although Fry agrees with Bell’s general assessment of art, he however finds what he himself calls a “weak patch in the wall of his argument” (160). Fry says that Bell:

> himself admits that the artist has very rarely set out to create significant form; that the early Christian masters set out to express dogmatic
theology, the fifteenth-century Florentine and the impressionist to state laws of optics, Giotto and Rembrandt to express human emotion. Indeed, he considers that few things are more disastrous to the artist than the desire to create significant form in the abstract. It leads to naked and empty aestheticism. (160)

Bell believed that the public was preoccupied “with the anecdotal, narrative, and morally didactic functions of traditional realistic painting” (Biography Collection Complete), but on the other hand, creating “significant form in the abstract” runs the risk of producing an empty aesthetic. He says that it is important for the artist to “have something to get into a passion about” and Fry suggests that perhaps a combination or “fusion” of content or purpose and form may be the key (160). Huxley suggested a similar solution to the lopsidedness that art criticism had taken. In “Breughel” (1925), Huxley writes against the exclusive focus on form in art and calls it a fad (190). He suggests that while “it would be absurd...to deny the importance of formal relations” it would be a mistake to assume that form without an emphasis on content is all that matters:

great dramatic or reflective painters know everything that the aestheticians who paint geometrical pictures, apples, or buttocks know, and a great deal more besides. What they have to say about formal relations, though important, is only a part of what they have to express. The contemporary insistence on form to the exclusion of everything else is an absurdity. So was the older insistence on exact imitation and sentiment to the exclusion of form. There need be no exclusions. (193)
Just as Huxley was against “art for art’s sake” and Ruskinism, he was also against extreme modern experimentation. In “Conxolus” he writes, “there are many young people who, in their anxiety not to be thought old-fashioned, regard all pictures bearing a close resemblance to their subjects as highly suspicious...To these ascetics all natural beauty, when reproduced by art, is damnable” (207). He called for proportion in art and decried the extreme measures that some modern artists were taking. Birnbaum writes that Huxley admires, Breughel the Elder, Goya, El Greco, and Piero della Francesca for “not only the technical skill of these painters but also their interpretation and criticism of life” (81). Interestingly enough, the concept of art/poetry as a “criticism of life” comes from Arnold himself: “poetry is at bottom a criticism of life; that the greatness of a poet lies in his powerful and beautiful application of ideas to life,—to the question: How to live” (Leitch 803). Huxley endorsed art that was balanced, that had both good technical form and meaningful content.

Other formalist theorist such as the Russian Viktor Shklovsky thought differently. He argues that, “The technique of art is to make objects ‘unfamiliar,’ to make forms difficult...Art is a way of experiencing the artfulness of an object; the object is not important” (Lewis 26). This concept differs drastically from that of Ruskin’s. The object is no longer important neither is the content of the art work, what is relevant is the form or technical virtuosity. Childs informs us that “For many Modernists, what was painted and what was written about became in some ways less important, and how it was written or painted became the key question. Much of this...was part of a drive to move away from the devaluation of art and writing that Modernists perceived to have taken place in the Victorian period” (114). The idea of making objects unfamiliar did not correlate with
mimesis or with didactic art. For many Modernists, demonstrating technical prowess in order to differentiate themselves from popular or low-brow art and literature became more important than the subject or content of a work. One can see how this kind of art can become shallow and why Huxley, although "modern" in many ways, would have shunned an art that was completely devoid of content.

Reviewing the artistic and societal changes going on in Europe and England can help the reader of *Antic Hay* to better place Lypiatt and the other characters within the framework. Reading some of Huxley's early essays, as opposed to his early fiction, also provides a glimpse of his own opinions concerning art. Huxley is against Ruskin's kind of mimesis and theory of art as a means of worshipping God. He agrees with Ruskin's idea that "great art ought to serve a high moral or spiritual purpose" (Barrie xli) to a certain extent but not as strictly and religiously as Ruskin. Huxley's aim was humanistic and not religious in nature. Neither did he agree with Ruskin's theory of irregularity in art and architecture. Huxley preferred art that was proportional and that celebrated and endorsed the greatest human qualities and potential. Huxley was also against empty Paterian aestheticism, strict formalism (that focused on form to the exclusion of content), and experimental art such as Dadaism or any art that was extreme or whose philosophy was one of anti-art. Huxley was a traditionalist in an Arnoldian sense. Like Arnold, he felt that art and literature should guide, and inspire, that it should teach people how to live. A return to a humanistic tradition in art was something that Huxley, as well at Lypiatt and Gumbril Senior advocate in *Antic Hay*. 
Lypiatt, the Artist

Even though *Antic Hay* is a “novel of ideas,” Lypiatt is a complicated character. His artistic style is post-impressionist, abstract, with a tinge of the excessive and baroque, but he has a romantic attitude and an idealistic mentality. He believes that art should be for “God’s sake,” not for its own sake (41). Mercaptan calls him a “muscular Christian artist” (49). Like Huxley, he is not an aesthete and is in favor of content over form. Although Lypiatt’s romantic tirades make him look like a buffoon, many of the ideas about art that he expresses are similar to the ones Huxley expresses in his essays and articles. There are some differences, however. Lypiatt’s character can not easily be encapsulated or understood; because *Antic Hay* is also a satire, Huxley has taken some artistic attitudes, mixed them up and exaggerated them in such a way, that Lypiatt seems like a complete contradiction at times. Therefore, the reader cannot assume that because he echoes many of Huxley’s sentiments, that he is in fact synonymous with Huxley. Even though Lypiatt is passionate and his work is passionately rendered, he is not a very good artist. He has a good theory of art, yet it does not help him become a decent practitioner.

Lypiatt is pretentious and often annoyingly bombastic. When first introduced, he compares himself to great artists saying that he means to “recapture...the size, the masterfulness of the masters” (34). He says he feels the “greatness of the masters” in him. “He knew his own power, he knew, he knew. He could do all that they had done. Nothing was beyond his strength” (34). Yet as the novel goes on, we see that he is rather delusional when it comes to his talent and artistic ability. This self-deception, however,
stems from an extreme idealism as to what art should be and do. His desire conflicts with his abilities.

In an article entitled “Alfieri” (1920), Huxley says that a person can not become a good artist by “sheer force of will” alone. If this were the case, he writes, then “Ben Jonson would be as great as Shakespeare” (23). In “The Portraits of Augustus John” he writes: “In this world the really important things are not achieved by hard work and high principles, or even higher education. They are achieved by that native talent which is born in a man and for the possession of which he has to thank, not his own efforts, but the mere mysterious luck of heredity” (50). Lypiatt is therefore unsuccessful because he lacks raw talent.

Lypiatt can be seen as serving two discrete purposes in the novel. He is both an antihero of sorts and a representation of the mediocre/bad artist that Huxley often criticizes in his essays. Lewis talks about the “new types of hero” who can be seen as “antiheroes” in many Modernists’ writing. These types may be “the object of their authors’ irony or even disdain but they also seem to embody what Baudelaire called the ‘heroism of modern life…’ Such heroism…often had as much to do with passive suffering of the changing circumstances of history as with transcendent bravery or accomplishment” (Lewis 28). In this sense, Gumbril Junior, Senior and Lypiatt can all be seen a modern day heroes or antiheroes.

In Three Modern Satirists: Waugh, Orwell, and Huxley, Stephen Jay Greenblatt describes what he calls “the satiric hero”:

In the midst of this world of relentless and cruel dehumanization stands the satiric “hero,” the main character who has retained a small measure of
individuality and aloofness, by being either a stranger...or a misfit in the depraved society. In the course of the satire the hero is exposed to the corrupting forces of meanness, imbecility, conformity, and greed and is affected in one of three ways: surrender, death, or a hopeless and unheroic continuation of the feeble resistance against both. (110)

Greenblatt focuses his attention on Gumbril Junior, the protagonist and reaches the following conclusion about his character and at the same time generalizes the satiric hero’s persona:

The satiric hero...suffers much and accomplishes nothing. His struggle takes no direction, leads to no increase of knowledge or understanding, and never transcends his suffering or passes on to a comprehension of his fate. The absurdity of the character’s agony and his inability to act or to understand radically diminishes the normal sympathy of the reader for the downtrodden and oppressed. (111-12)

Although Greenblatt focuses on Gumbril Junior, if we take Lypiatt into consideration we can see that it is his position and ultimate fate which are the most tragically ironic. His contemplating suicide can be seen as his refusal and inability to adapt to a changing era, but it can also be seen as a brave accomplishment by a personality who does not fit in and in fact refuses to fit in with the current society. Gumbril Junior on the other hand, as we will later see, is constantly trying to fit into a preconceived mold constructed by society. Lypiatt, however, instead of selling out as many have done, rejects this kind of life by wanting to end his own. This is a rather striking indication of the feeling of meaningless and futility that some of the young early twentieth century individuals felt.
This is not the only time that Huxley writes about or deals with suicide. In “The Spread of Bad Art” (1925), Huxley writes about a young artist with “just enough talent to enable him to do many things charmingly, as an amateur, and none really well” who “learns in sufficient quantity to make him realize his own and all other men’s bottomless ignorance” who commits suicide because he is distressed about “the fearful mediocrity of contemporary art. He complained that there were more bad artists in modern times than there had ever been in the past” (166). Although not a complete representation of Lypiatt’s character, this young man is rather similar. This example also demonstrates Huxley’s own cynicism about the proliferation of bad art at that time. In the essay he tries to explain the reasons for this advent. He blames it on an increase in population, education, money, industrial and technological advances, and on a loss of faith and values.

Lypiatt is following his dreams but he has been unsuccessful, and his state of poverty is depressing. Symbolic of his isolation, he lives in what sounds like a ghetto, yet he self mockingly says that “it was the best place in the world...for studying aerial perspective” (61). All of this fits with the starving artist motif that he tries whole heartedly to personify. For Lypiatt art is “a protest against the horrible inclemency of life” (64). His style seems to be post-impressionistic, expressionistic, and abstract, futurist and romantic all at once. When Mrs. Viveash sees one of Lypiatt’s painting, she protests to herself “abstract again—she didn’t like it” (63). As for the portrait of her in process, it is described as “a stormy vision of her, it was Myra seen, so to speak, through a tornado. He had distorted her...made her longer and thinner than she really was” he “had turned her arms into sleek tubes and put a bright metallic polish on the curve of her
cheek” (65). The image seems to be slightly twisted like one of those “ivory statuette carved out of the curving tip of the curving tip of a great tusk” yet, in the narrator’s words, Lypiatt’s “curve seemed to lack grace, it was without point, it had no sense” (65). It sounds a lot like a futurist painting. This description is important and perhaps another play on words. The phrase “it was without point” could signify that it did not have any discernable meaning, but it could also mean that it has no point or no three point perspective, a technique used by many realist painters. And if the painting had no sense, it is dead despite the artist’s attempt to breathe life into it. It is ironic however, what Mrs. Viveash hates about it is what Lypiatt loves. Mrs. Viveash complains that he’s “made [her] look as though [she] were being blown out of shape by the wind.” Lypiatt ecstatically agrees, thinking that she had gotten the point, that the wind represents his passion (65). In Huxley’s article, “Cherubini—Emotion and Form” (1923), he criticizes this kind of extravagance in art. He writes: “There is a thousand times more passion and power in the studied repose of the statues that adorn the Medici tombs than in the wild gesticulation of Bernini’s saints and angels and pagan gods” (319). There are other instances where he criticizes Baroque art. What he is against is representation or the attempts at representing passion realistically. It is something that can not be rendered in realistic form. He writes:

Art that reflects life immediately and realistically tends to be less moving, less satisfying...than art in which the passion of life appear at a further remove, and are expressed in terms of something that is not a realistic representation of life. Perhaps it is no paradox, but obvious and inevitable. Perhaps the process of artistic creation consists precisely in
thus removing life into a different, formal world in which it is made to obey unfamiliar laws. Perhaps the men who insist so violently on passion and energy and who try to reflect these qualities immediately and realistically in their art—perhaps they are not artists at all. (319)

The problem with this statement and with the article in general is that it is rather confusing since he does not really come out and give examples of what he means by a “different, formal world” with “unfamiliar laws.” What we do know by reading it is that whether in music, literature, or the visual arts, Huxley calls for a “more restrained and less feverish” interpretation of emotions.

Huxley criticizes artwork that is extremely emotional and loud. Interestingly enough, he uses Lypiatt as an example. Not only does his work fit this description, the artist does too. Lypiatt is pretentious, loud, and is always ranting and raving, wearing his passion on his sleeve. The effect is that he becomes an annoying joke. It is difficult for the reader to feel any compassion for his character because of his overly passionate outbursts. Only when Lypiatt locks himself in his apartment does Huxley prove his point about emotion and passion being rendered more effectively in a controlled fashion. Here Lypiatt is barely moving; he calmly and quietly considers suicide. Lypiatt’s deflated self allows the reader to feel his pain and anguish. In this scene, the reader can sympathize with him much more than when he is ranting and raving like a lunatic.

Mrs. Viveash’s portrait is described “as noisy and easy and immediately effective as a vermouth advertisement in the streets of Padua. Cinzano, Bonomelli, Campari—illustrious names. Giotto and Mantegna mouldered meanwhile in their respective chapels” (84). Here commercial art is compared to New Realism and Renaissance style. Even
though theoretically Lypiatt wants to belong to the later group, practically he belongs to the former one instead. In Lypiatt’s opinion “the artist rushes on the world, conquers it, gives it beauty, imposes moral beauty” (84). There is a definite inconsistency between the passion that Lypiatt feels and tries to render in his painting, and the quality of the painting itself. He is reminiscent of Arnold in purpose but not in tone. But his lack of talent and inconsistency brings another of Huxley’s essays to mind.

In “Sincerity in Art” (1927), Huxley argues many sincere artist produce insincere works of art. An artist may lead a very passionate and sincere life and yet if one looks at his pictures—“They are full of stage grandeur, the cold convention of passion, the rhetorical parody of emotion. They are ‘insincere’” (52). The reason is that the artist lacks talent and is unable to successfully transmit the emotion onto the work.

Lypiatt tries to explain his passion for Mrs. Viveash and at the same time voices his own frustration with the “art for arts sake” and formalist movements. He says:

life—that’s the great, essential thing. You’ve got to get life into your art, otherwise it’s nothing. And life only comes out of life, out of passion and feeling; it can’t come out of theories. That’s the stupidity of all this chatter about art for art’s sake and the aesthetic emotions and purely formal values and all that. It’s only the formal relations that matter; one subject is just as good as another—that’s the theory. You’ve only got to look at the pictures of the people who put it into practice to see that it won’t do. Life comes out of life. You must paint with passion and the passion will stimulate your intellect to create the right formal relations. And to paint with passion, you must paint things that passionately interest
you, moving things, human things. Nobody, except a mystical pantheist, like Van Gogh, can seriously be as much interested in napkins, apples and bottles as in his lover’s face, or the resurrection, or the destiny of man.

Could Mantegna have devised his splendid compositions if he had painted arrangements of Chianti flasks and cheeses instead of Crucifixions, martyrs and triumphs of great men? Nobody but a fool could believe it.

And could I have painted that portrait if I hadn’t loved you, if you weren’t killing me? (66-67)

Lypiatt’s art work is just as empty and shallow as the formalist art that he criticizes. First of all he is too extreme and secondly, he lacks any talent. Like the “insincere” artist that Huxley talks about, Lypiatt’s lack of talent does not allow him to successfully portray what may in fact be real passion. In “Sincerity in Art,” Huxley writes that “most people, perhaps—have been at one time or another violently in love. But few have known how to analyze their feelings, and fewer still have been able to express them...They feel, they suffer, they are inspired by a sincere emotion; but they cannot write” (53) or in Lypiatt’s case cannot paint. Later on Lypiatt realizes this and admits that:

it was my...low genius which did not know how to draw love from you, nor beauty from the materials of which art is made...I have come to admit everything. That I couldn’t paint, I couldn’t write, I couldn’t make music. That I was a charlatan and a quack. That I was a ridiculous actor of heroic parts who deserved to be laughed at—and was laughed at. (179)

Huxley also writes in “Sincerity” that, “All literature, all art, best seller or worst, must be sincere if it is to be successful” (50-51). If Lypiatt were to acknowledge the
limits of his ability as an artist then he could find success as a commercial artist or as a “stage designer,” but he is in denial. His desire to become a great artist conflicts with his capacity to do so. But his ideals do not go along well with the concept of art as commodity. He insists on being called an artist when in fact his abilities are more suited for a second-rate artist or artisan. When Mr. Boldero comes to commission him to draw the pictures for advertisement of Gumbril’s “pneumatic trousers,” and after seeing Mrs. Viveah’s portrait, he is convinced that Lypiatt is the man for the job (181-82). Lypiatt is insulted by Mr. Boldero’s proposition; he responds by beating him up and violently kicking him down the stairs (182). In a negative review of Lypiatt’s artwork, Mercaptan calls it insincere and suggests that Lypiatt “would make an excellent stage designer” (166). Lypiatt is extremely offended by this suggestion to which Mercaptan responds by assuring him that he was simply suggesting “that you protest too much. You defeat your own ends; you lose emphasis by trying to be overemphatic. All this folie de grandeur, all this hankering after terribility…it’s led so many people astray. He adds that the “look of insincerity” is “hardly avoidable...in work of this kind” (166). Here, it is Mercaptan who sounds a lot like Huxley in his critique of insincerity in art and art that tries to depict passion excessively. So, Huxley agrees with Lypiatt’s rejection of strict formalism and aestheticism but disagrees with Lypiatt’s romantic excess. Once again, this is because Huxley calls for an art that is balanced. Excess was not something that he advocated.

Lypiatt disparages realist work saying that it lacks life, yet to Mrs. Viveash it is his work, like the Bonomelli and Cinzano, “those Italian vermouth advertisements” that lacks life (66, 67, and 75). Mrs. Viveash reflects on Lypiatt’s words and agrees with his
assessment about the lack of life in some art, but her opinion of Lypiatt’s work is similar to that of Huxley’s view in his article:

That was precisely why his paintings were so bad—she saw now; there was no life in them. Plenty of noise there was, and gesticulation and a violent galvanized twitching; but no life, only the theatrical show of it. There was a flaw in the conduit; somewhere between the man and his work life leaked out. He protested too much. But it was no good; there was no disguising the deadness. Her portrait was a dancing mummy. (67)

(Ironically, Mrs. Viveash is herself somewhat of a “dancing mummy,” but at this moment that is beside the point.) While Huxley, Mercaptan and Mrs. Viveash would criticize artists such as Lypiatt, in “Breughel” (1925), Huxley nonetheless voices a lot of Lypiatt’s concerns. In this essay he criticizes “the early twentieth century, [that] under the influence of the French, deplores and ignores, in painting, all that is literary, reflective, or dramatic” (193). Huxley says that “Fashion changes and the views of art critics with it. At the present time it is fashionable to believe in form to the exclusion of subject” (190). Here is a critique of formalistic modernist art that his friends Fry and Bell were generally known to endorse.

Huxley also surprisingly makes almost the same exact statement that Lypiatt makes about passion and artists such as Mantegna and Van Gogh:

...purely aesthetic considerations are, as I have said, important. All artists are interested in them; but almost none are interested in them to the exclusion of everything else. It is very seldom indeed that we find a painter who can be inspired merely by his interest in form and texture to
paint a picture…One feeling is excited by another. Our faculties work best in a congenial emotional atmosphere. For example, Mantegna's faculty for making noble arrangements of forms was stimulated by his feelings about heroic and god-like humanity…If Isabella d'Este had made him paint apples, table napkins and bottles, he would have produced, being uninterested in these objects, a poor composition. And yet, from a purely formal point of view, apples, bottles, and napkins are quite as interesting as human bodies and faces. But Mantegna—and with him the majority of painters—did not happen to be very passionately interested in these inanimate objects. When one is bored one becomes boring. (192)

The exception, Huxley explains, would be a Van Gogh, who is able "to make pictures of cabbage fields and the bedrooms of cheap hotels that shall be as wildly dramatic as a Rape of the Sabines" because of "that queer pantheism, that animistic superstition which made [him] regard the humblest of common objects as being divinely or devilishly alive" (192-93). Here he uses Lypiatt as a mouth piece to express his opinion. Like Lypiatt, Huxley is opposed to the concept of placing all the emphasis on form to the exclusion of content. He seems to agree with Lypiatt in theory but not in practice. Lypiatt's over emphatic approach and the fact that he lacks talent renders him a bad practitioner and an inefficient spokesman for the return to artistic values.

Huxley's answer or solution (in the essay) is the same as Gumbril Senior's when he calls for proportion (112). In "Breughel" he suggests that "There need be no exclusions" (193). In other words, one should follow Shearwater's words when he says, "Everything in proportion. In proportion" (112). Shearwater is a complete cerebral
scientist. He is a completely disproportionate being who, in the last chapter, repeats the word “proportion” over and over again while pedaling on a stationary bike (210).

Lypiatt, like other characters in the novel, is disproportionate; he is too extreme in his actions. He fails to effectively combine his theory of art with his practice of it. Therefore, he is unsuccessful. Gumbril Senior is also unsuccessful; his extreme idealism conflicts with his need to make a living as an architect. In this case, Huxley creates a character whose theory of art/architecture does not correlate with the kind of art he is commissioned to produce. Gumbril Senior is conflicted between the artist he wants to be and the one he is forced, under a capitalist society, to become.

**Gumbril Senior, the Architect**

Like Lypiatt, Gumbril Senior is an idealistic artist. His artistic idealism becomes unrealistic and is out of fashion in the modern society he lives in. In the modern world, their artistic tastes are remnants of a past that no longer exists. He also hates being commissioned to design and build dwellings that could be designed by practically anyone. He says “In the old days these creatures built their own hovels and very nice and suitable they were too. The architects busied themselves with architecture—which is man’s protest, not his miserable acquiescence” (26). Here the difference between the artist and artisan is delineated. As we will later see in the “Art as a Sign of Wealth” section, Huxley thought that there was in fact a difference between the artist and the artisan despite certain movements of the time that tried to erase any difference.

Leo Tolstoy makes an important observation in *What is Art* (1898). When posing the question, Tolstoy suggests that some people may simply answer that “Art is architecture, sculpture, painting, music, poetry in all its forms.” “But” he adds that, “in
architecture, one may object, there are simple buildings that are not works of art, and buildings that claim to be works of art, but are unsuccessful, ugly, and which therefore cannot be regarded as works of art” (10). Viewing Gumbril Senior’s situation after considering Tolstoy’s hypothetical suggestion can help us to better understand Gumbril Senior’s objections to his line of work.

In the opening chapter, Gumbril Junior describes his father as an “atheist and an anti-clerical” as well as an “unsuccessful architect” (8). Both descriptions are relevant if one were to consider that this description is being given while Gumbril Junior is sitting in a church and if one were to compare Gumbril Senior’s attitude with that of Ruskin’s whose aesthetics is based on Christianity. Even though he is an atheist, he believes that architecture should tell a story, possess some kind of ideal and value, as well as inspire people to achieve greatness. He admires artists such as the Renaissance humanist and classicist, Alberti, “who put Plutarch into their architecture,” as well as others such as, Piranesi, Brunelleschi, Michelangelo, Wren and Palladio who shared the same spirit and humanistic idealism (26-27). These artists were proponents of symmetry and proportion in art. Fiero writes in *The Humanistic Tradition*, Vol. 3, that Alberti shared “Brunelleschi’s enthusiasm for architecture of harmonious proportions” (42). Alberti also “argued that all architecture should be based on the square and the circle, the two most perfect geometric shapes” (42). To emphasize this preoccupation with proportion, Fiero says that “all the parts of the façade” in Alberti’s design of the church “Santa Maria Novella in Florence…are related by harmonic proportions based on numerical rations” (42). This is reminiscent of the mathematical equations performed by Gumbril Junior in the opening scene. Gumbril’s focus on proportion, as well as the novels repetition of it
via Shearwater, seems to indicate that this is what Huxley calls for, not only in art but in life as well.

As mentioned earlier, John Ruskin was “the most eloquent and influential interpreters of the visual arts that Britain has ever produced” (Barrie xv). He was just as influential when it came to architecture. His ideas about the purpose of art are the same with architecture. Huxley criticized Ruskin’s influence on English taste. In “Sir Christopher Wren,” Huxley sarcastically writes about Ruskin: “Descending with majesty from his private Sinai, Mr. Ruskin dictated to a whole generation of Englishmen the aesthetic Law. On monolithic tables that were the Stones of Venice he wrote the great truths that had been revealed to him” (115-16). This reference is a poke at Ruskin’s second book on architecture called *The Stones of Venice*. This book “was partly responsible for the Gothic revival in English building” (Contemporary Authors on line).

Ruskin, particularly in the beginning of his career as an art critic, thought that the main purpose in all art—architecture included, should be to worship God. Ruskin was often dogmatic and to a certain extent closed-minded. His *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* reads like a sermon or an appendage to the Bible. In *The Seven Lamps*, Ruskin also advocates irregularity in architecture and its ornaments and appendages. Huxley did not agree with Ruskin’s dogmatic nature or his theory of irregularity. As we shall soon see, he preferred architecture that is proportional.

In the introduction to *Modern Painters*, Barrie describes *The Seven Lamps* as establishing “Ruskin as a leading propagandist of the Gothic Revival” (xxx). Huxley criticizes this influence in his article “Sir Christopher Wren” (1923). He, however, criticizes not only the architecture of the nineteenth century but that of the eighteenth
century as well. He denounces the “touch of the baroque” in eighteenth century architecture, the “folie de grandeur” and pretentious “magnificence” that he also in rejects in other extreme modern art forms and that he and Mercaptan criticize Lypiatt for. Restraint is one of the reasons he admires Wren: “How vastly different is the baroque theatricality from Wren’s sober restraint! Wren was a master of the grand style; but he never dreamed of building for effect alone. He was never theatrical or showy, never pretentious or vulgar” (117-18). Huxley also disliked the nineteenth century architecture influenced by Ruskin because it took architecture in an extreme opposite direction:

The architects of the nineteenth century sinned in a diametrically opposite way [than the eighteenth century] towards meanness and a negation of art... The sham Gothic of early Victorian times yielded at the end of the century to the nauseous affectation of “sham-peasantry.” Big houses were built with all the irregularity and more than the “quaintness” of cottages; suburban villas took the form of machine-made imitations of the Tudor peasant’s hut. To all intents and purposes architecture ceased to exist; Ruskin had triumphed. (118)

Huxley disapproved of the excesses of the eighteenth century and the irregularity of the nineteenth. Here again we can see him calling for proportion.

Ruskin, who was a proponent of irregularity in architecture, championed Gothic architecture as more reflective of his ideas. In Robert Simpson McLean’s view, “Ruskin agrees with ancient Christian teaching that imperfection in man’s handiwork is a frank confession of his fallen nature.” This is why “Gothic architecture...is essentially Christian, since its characteristics of ‘rudeness’ and ‘imperfection’ confess the condition
of man” (348). According to Ruskin the idea that “neither architecture nor any other
noble work of man can be good unless it be imperfect,” should be accepted as a
“universal law” (McLean 348). Ruskin’s idea of imperfection and asymmetric
architecture is at odds with Gumbril Senior’s tastes as well as Huxley’s.

In “Sir Christopher Wren” Huxley says “that in all matters connected with art,”
the complete opposite of what Ruskin says should be done. “Thus” he irreverently
writes:

when we find him saying that good architecture has nothing to do with
proportion or the judicious disposition of masses and that the general
effect counts for nothing at all, we may take it as more or less definitely
proven that good architecture is, in fact, almost entirely a matter of
proportion and massing, and that the general effect of the whole work
counts for nearly everything. (116)

He goes on to praise St. Peter’s for its “harmoniously proportioned wholes” (116).
Huxley calls Wren a genius (115). Huxley says that “Wren’s most characteristic
quality—which gives to his work, over and above its pure beauty, its own peculiar
color and charm—is a quality rather moral than aesthetic” (117). Once again, Huxley
acknowledges the importance of form but adds that the most important element is the
moral quality of Wren’s work. Huxley and Gumbril Senior seem to share the same views
about Wren and his work.

When Gumbril Senior shows his son the finished model of London, Gumbril
Junior asks if it is the “capital of Utopia” to which a delighted Gumbril answers that it is
the London that should have been had the architect Christopher Wren (1632-1723) been
allowed to proceed with his original plans of rebuilding London after the Great Fire of London in 1666 (114). He goes on to describe his model city done in the “Roman” style Wren intended. Gumbril Senior is pretty accurate in his description of what happened after the fire of 1666 according to the 4th volume in The Humanist Tradition series. Wren’s plans for London which were “(based on Rome) were rejected” (Fiero 34). And even his initial plan of basing Saint Paul’s on the “Greek cross plan that Michelangelo had proposed for Saint Peter’s in Rome” displaced by the clergy’s desire for a “Latin cross structure” instead (Fiero 34). But it was still considered an amazing work of art that even Huxley admired and praised in “Sir Christopher Wren.” Gumbril Senior however, wishes Wren had been allowed to go through with his initial plans. Wren offered to build for the imagination and the ambitious spirit of man so that even the most bestial...as they walked those streets, might feel that they were of the same race—or very nearly—as Michelangelo; that they too might feel themselves, in spirit at least, magnificent, strong and free. (114)

Gumbril laments that instead they “preferred to re-erect the old intricate squalor; they preferred the mediaeval darkness and crookedness, and beastly irregular quaintness...they preferred the wretched human scale, the scale of the sickly body, not of the mind” (114).

Gumbril Senior hates British architecture and spends most of the time complaining about it. He is not happy with the “Vile and discordant architecture” that surrounds them (112). He associates this with the “foul smells...stagnant air,” the “ugliness” and dirtiness of London (114). He does not necessarily blame Londoners;
they can’t help going in circles and repeating the same mistake over and over (reminiscent of Mrs. Viveash and Gumbril Junior’s taxi ride and Shearwaters experiment at the end of the novel). The problem as Gumbril Senior suggests is that the “contemporaries...are making it still worse than it was” (115). The contemporaries have the opportunity to fix things, but they have, in his opinion, made it worse. The commentary can be applied to Huxley’s overall feeling about society and art. Even though society in general may be degenerating, it does not mean that one need cross one’s arms and allow it to happen. One can, in Lypiatt’s words, use art as a means of protesting “against the horrible inclemency of life” (64). Gumbril Senior suggests something very similar when he remembers the good old days when “architects busied themselves with architecture—which is man’s protest, not his miserable acquiescence” (26).

Even the business side of architecture bothers him. He admits that his “business is architecture” (24); it is a business where one’s ideas are commissioned. Gumbril Senior, however, dislikes the business side of it. He finds the “horrible jostling with clients and builders and contractors and people, before one can get anything done...really revolting” (24). He, like Lypiatt, resists commercial art even though becoming a commercial artist would likely bring him financial success. For Gumbril Senior, architecture is more than just a job. He says “I’m not good at people. Most of them I don’t like at all, not at all” (24). Architecture, although normally seen as a social art form to be commissioned, is a personal endeavor for him. This is the reason why he is “an unsuccessful architect” (4) by early twentieth century standards. His work may be good but his misanthropy and lack of determination lead him no where. He places his faith on
a model of London which is just that, a model. Yet he has no other choice for he is not
being commissioned to design or build structures in the vein of Wren or Alberti; this was
not what modern Londoners wanted. In Gumbril's opinion and perhaps even Huxley's, a
little Plutarch, Alberti or a bit more humanism built into the architecture would do society
well. Society's rejection of this kind of art is symbolic of its condition.

In an ironic twist, in spite of his aversion to commercial forces and the business
part of art, he ends up selling his model to The Victoria and Albert Museum (207).
Interestingly enough, even though Gumbril Senior's style is opposed to Victorian tastes
as well as modern ones, his model ends up in a museum (which is an antithesis to
modernity). Both Gumbril's idealistic Renaissance style and the reserved style of the
Victorians are lumped together here. This may be symbolic of a modernist tendency to
view both the Renaissance and Victorian styles as antiquated. The fact that Gumbril
Senior would sell his cherished model to this museum demonstrates the sacrifice that he
is forced to make due to (his friend's) financial problems. He is forced to go against his
aesthetic integrity. These are the kind of sacrifices that some artists had to make in order
to succeed financially in what was becoming an advanced capitalist society.

Gumbril Senior, like Lypiatt, is naively idealistically. His pessimism over the
business aspect of architecture transforms itself into optimism when he declares, as if it
were a fight between love of art and commerce: "Still, I can do something. I have my
talent, I have my imagination. They can't take those from me" (24). He sounds as
determined and passionate as Lypiatt does but is just as unsuccessful in his idealistic
attempts. What good is talent and imagination or even desire, if nothing comes out of it?
Neither really achieves anything regardless of their heroic ideals and their art.
The passion that Gumbril Senior demonstrates as he shows his son the model city is in some ways similar to Lypiatt’s enthusiasm as he shows Mrs. Viveash his painting. The detailed recreation of an ideal London, with its “little rococo pavilions...a vaster and austerer St. Peter’s” the interaction of his artificial light and shadow, “a city of palaces and domes,” the “Spanish patio,” the “treble tiers of arcades, the vaulted cloistmers...the central Triton spouting white water into a marble pool” makes the old man rejoice in pure “ecstasy” (24-26). But the problem is that his “design would hardly do for England.” For one, the darkness of England makes it necessary for so many windows or as Gumbril Senior puts it “the walls have to be like sieves, all holes.” His plan would be better suited for a sunnier climate such as Barbados (25). One of the advantages of living in a sunny climate, in Gumbril Senior’s opinion, is that of being able to live in privacy. There would be “no need to look out on the dirty world or to let the dirty world look in on you” (25). Here he sounds a little like Pater but is extremely pessimistic over the state of twentieth century Great Britain. His excitement over his idealistic London soon fades after he accidentally knocks over one of his model cathedrals. The “ruins” burst the bubble, awakens him from his dream. The reality of the matter comes back, the business aspect of architecture. He gloomily adds:

And to think that I’ve been spending these last days designing model cottages for work men at Blethley! I’m in luck to have got the job, of course, but really, that a civilized man should have to do jobs like that! It’s too much. In the old days these creatures built their own hovels and very nice and suitable they were too. The architects busied themselves with architecture—which is man’s protest, not his miserable acquiescence.
You can’t do much protesting in a model cottage at seven hundred pound a time. A little, no doubt, you can protest a little, you can give your cottage decent proportions and avoid sordidness and vulgarity. But that’s all, it’s really a negative process. You can only begin to protest positively and actively when you abandon the petty human scale and build for giants—when you build for the spirit and the imagination of man, not for his little body. (26)

He protests against the size of Britain’s architecture. This grievance suggests more than face value. The artists that Gumbril Senior admires are all idealistic humanists who celebrate human potential. Small scale architecture is not reflective of large ideals, neither are blandness, practicality and lack of uniqueness.

Whether just repeating some of his father’s complaints, Gumbril Junior also criticizes small scale architecture. While at church:

The view of David and Goliath was exchanged for a Crucifixion in the grand manner of eighteen hundred and sixty...No, no, Gumbril preferred to look at the grooved stonework rushing smoothly up on either side of the great East window towards the vaulted roof; preferred to reflect, like the dutiful son of an architect he was, that Perpendicular at its best—and its best is its largest—is the finest sort of English Gothic. At its worst and smallest, as in most of the colleges of Oxford, it is mean, petty, and but for a certain picturesqueness, almost wholly disgusting. (10)

In this passage it is obvious that as the son of an architect Gumbril is familiar with some architectural terms and somewhat knowledgeable of art even though the reader may not
be. There were two styles: Earlier on, “English Cathedral builders were less concerned with height than their French counterparts” while the latter and “final period of English Gothic architecture produced the Perpendicular style, [A] nineteenth century term, derived from its characteristic tall, rectilinear decorative elements” (Stokstad 576, 578).

In the passage above Gumbril Junior, whether merely repeating his father’s sentiments or not, is described as preferring the large scale, Perpendicular style, to smallness.

In “Architectural Heresies of a Painter” (1921), Fry sounds like the Gumbrils and like Ruskin when he complains about the lack of size in British architecture, for although neither the Gumbrils nor Huxley care much for Ruskin’s call for irregularity in architecture or his insistence against symmetrical proportion, they do agree with him when it comes to size. Fry writes: “Ruskin once wrote that the English had always built rather for rats and mice than for men... We finish our tiny details with short-sighted, ant-like industry... In the realm of imaginative form we, this great, imperial, adventurous race, appear as burrowing, furtive, obliterated creatures” (217). Like Gumbril Junior, Fry compares “our snug little Gothic cathedrals, built piecemeal and without any generous comprehensive plan, with the vast pretensions of French cathedrals, mostly built straight off under the impulse of a single all-compelling \textit{élan}, or with the great bare emptiness of Italian churches of the same time” (217). The size of architectural edifices was not reflective of their ideals and most importantly did not celebrate humanity. Huxley agrees with both Ruskin’s and Fry’s sentiments about size; however, he prefers Renaissance perfection and humanism to Ruskin’s Gothic Imperfection, as well as rejects the sterile and strict formalism that Fry and others like Shklovsky were known to endorse.
Gumbril Senior's commentary on architecture—that it reflects a shallow society and in turn society reflects it—his criticism of the position that architecture has taken in a commercial economy, one that is more concerned with practicality and utilitarianism than with ideals or humanism—are parallel to Huxley's ideas about architecture. Architecture, like fine arts and literature, can be used to inspire greatness and morality in humanity. Instead, as Gumbril Senior suggests, London is filled with "vile and discordant architecture" (112) which reflects the vileness and lack of values in society. Not only was society lacking in values, art too was losing its intrinsic value as more and more people started looking at art as a commodity and as a sign of wealth and status.

**Art as a Sign of Wealth and Status & the Arts and Crafts Movement**

*Antic Hay* not only criticizes the loss of the idea of art as a bearer of values, but it also criticizes the use of art as a sign of wealth and class status. One strident example is Gumbril Junior's desire to be wealthy and to be a part of the leisured class. He is neither like his father nor like Lypiatt who resist commercial success; Gumbril Junior wants to be a capitalist (22). He quits his job in pursuit of leisure and wealth. Once he has "taken out a patent for [his] invention" (his pneumatic pants), he tells his father that he intends to "either sell it to some capitalist, or I shall exploit it commercially myself" (21). For him, the possession of priceless pieces of eclectic art personifies his ideal of wealth and leisure.

Gumbril Junior is not particularly passionate about art, or at least not to the extent that Lypiatt and Gumbril Senior are. Most of the time he does not seem to have any personal conviction when it comes to art; he merely repeats what he hears others say about art. For example, when Mercaptan and Lypiatt argue over art and their respective
literary tastes, Gumbril interjects “giving them all a piece of his father’s mind” instead of his own. Mimicking his father he says that “Alberti was much the better architect, I assure you” (41). He is somewhat reminiscent of the young gallery attendant who tries to impress the visitors by making unoriginal remarks that he has memorized beforehand. He goes around writing down different mottoes and sayings that he hears others say about art, with the “gold-belted fountain pen which his Aunt had given him when he first went into business” (33). After trying to impress Gumbril Junior when he first comes to visit the gallery, he takes mental and written notes of Gumbril’s comments (33). Some of them as simple as “Very intense” when referring to the etchings on display. “That’s the word,’ he said, delighted. ‘Intense. That’s it. Very intense.’ He repeated the word several times as though to make sure of remembering it when the occasion presented itself. He was determined to make good” and proceeded to write the phrase down on paper in capital letters so that he would not forget to include it in his repertoire of words used to impress those in the art scene (33). The narrator, however, describes the art work in the gallery as a “dismal collection of etchings” (32). This episode depicts a pretentious art world where phrases to describe art seem forced and superficial. The goal is social status and not the quality of art or real independent judgment. It is all a show, like a dramatic act in a bad play. Fittingly, this is where Lypiatt is first introduced and where he is to exhibit his own art work.

In chapter 7, Huxley satirizes a couple of so-called art critics and journalists. Mr. Clew, who works for the Daily Post, is an enthusiast and art connoisseur who loves painting; his problem, however, is that he loves “painting, indiscriminately. In a picture gallery he was like a Turk in a harem; he adored them all” (71). He only dislikes that
which he is not familiar with. For example, he initially hated the art at "the first Post-Impressionist Exhibition...in 1911" calling it "an obscene farce" (71). Yet when that kind of art came to be more accepted, his hate miraculously turned to love. Many people (who are just as clueless and eager to fit in with the art scene as the gallery assistant) hold him in high esteem and respect his expertise in art; yet he, like Lypiatt, is a fake. Not intentionally deceptive but deceptive nonetheless, he erroneously tells people who bring him "dirty old pictures to look at" that these pictures were painted by El Greco or some other well known artist: "Since the coming of El Greco into fashion, he had discovered dozens of early works by that great artist" that in reality were not by El Greco at all (71-72). The gullible public believes him yet he does not know what he is talking about. "When asked how he knew, he would shrug his shoulders and say: But it's signed all over. His certainty and his enthusiasm were infectious" (71).

While Mr. Clew loves Lypiatt's work, the discriminate and "erudite" Mr. Mallard, who writes for the *Hebdomadal Digest*, hates it. He also hates El Greco whose work he criticizes for its "disgusting forms, garish colouring and hysterical subject matter," most modern painters, and "all that [is] beautiful" (72-73). It is hard to say what he likes for it seems as though there is not much left to like and because the novel does not say. It does say, however, that Mr. Clew "was afraid of Mr. Mallard: His enthusiasms were no match for Mr. Mallard's erudite and logical disgusts" (72-73). Once again here are portrayed two extremes. One critic is deemed an expert by mere enthusiasm and passion; the other by erudition; yet one is, insincere like Lypiatt, while the other one is doing a disservice to art because his formal knowledge/education has made him passionless and indiscriminately hateful.
In “Breughel,” Huxley introduces his piece by discussing some of the art critic’s faults. He says that “All classifications and theories are made after the event; the facts must first occur before they can be tabulated and methodized.” Yet the tendency has been to reverse the process and “attack the facts forearmed with theoretical prejudice” (193). He writes that “Instead of considering each fact on its own merits, we ask how it fits into the theoretical scheme.” If a “meritorious” aspect does not fit into a “fashionable theory” (fashionable at the time), then it is ignored or the work of art is deemed inferior to others that do fit into a preconceived theory. Huxley writes:

Thus El Greco’s art failed to conform with the ideal of good painting held by Philip the Second and his contemporaries...under the influence of Ruskin, the later nineteenth century contrived to dislike almost all architecture that was not Gothic. And the early twentieth century, under the influence of the French, deplores and ignores, in painting, all that is literary, reflective, or dramatic. In every age theory has caused men to like much that was bad and reject much that was good. (193-94)

According to Huxley, “Every good painter invents a new way of painting” and therefore, the questions that “a critic must ask himself” should be “is this man a competent painter? Has he something to say, is he genuine?” and “Not, Does he confirm with my theory of imitation, or distortion, or moral purity, or significant form” (194). In other words, the art critic needs to stop judging art armed with fashionable and/or “preconceived” theories. But it all seems to lose any valuable meaning when two other critics/journalists arrive, one from the Daily Cinema and the other from the Morning Globe. They apparently know nothing about art and are just there on an assignment.
The different kinds of critics each writing for different magazines and journals, casts a shadow on criticism and underscores its prejudice and limitation. It also shows how different kinds of magazines and journals will review a particular subject or object depending on that magazine or journal’s angle. The reporter for the *Daily Cinema*, and the other from the *Evening Planet*, apparently know nothing about art and have to be told by Mr. Albemarle, the owner of the gallery, that there were “no portraits of celebrities” and “which [paintings] were the best” (73). The reporter for the *Evening Planet* simply writes down in shorthand what Mr. Albemarle dictates. Mr. Albemarle continues his rounds by addressing the guy from the *Morning Globe* and surely telling him what to write down (73-74). That a magazine such as the *Daily Cinema* would run an article on art, shows how art was becoming a part of the mainstream. It sullies the idea of art as something distinct from the mundane and blurs any high perception of art. The scene also seems to show how art criticism was losing any validity because of critics like Mr. Clew who are too indiscriminative, or like Mr. Mallard, who are too discriminative. The other critics/reporters are being dictated to by Mr. Albemarle who is obviously biased because he owns the gallery and has vested interest in the art displayed there. Both Mr. Clew and Mr. Mallard are too extreme in their approach. The others are too disinterested. There is no balance. By presenting these different views and how they are developed, Huxley seems to be indicating that the public’s opinions about art should not come exclusively from critics/journalists but should be based on some kind of independent judgment.

Gumbril Junior envies his more secure and leisured friends (29) who have money and own posh art and furniture. He is sad because “Nobody belonged to his herd. How
could they? No chameleon can live with comfort on a tartan” (79). His friend Mercaptan lives in what Gumbril Junior calls a “rococo boudoir” (159). Mercaptan’s furniture, décor, and taste in art reflect his personality. “The rococo style was born in France among members of the leisured nobility” (Fiero 137). “Fashion and fashionableness – clear expressions of self-conscious materialism – were major themes of rococo art” (Fiero 144). He owns “exquisite Condor fans,” a “lovely Marie Laurencin of two young girls, pale skinned and berry-eyed, walking embraced in a shallow myopic landscape amid a troop of bounding heraldic dogs,” his “cabinet of bibelots,” his “nigger mask and the superb Chinese phallus in sculptured rock crystal contrasted so amusingly with the Chelsea china,” “the little ivory Madonna, which might be fake but in any case was quite as good as any mediaeval French original, and the Italian medals” his “writing desk in shining black papier-mâché and mother of pearl” and the “vast white satin sofa” that was possessed with the spirit of Crebillon (166, 170). Eclecticism in art and primitive art was fashionable in the early nineteenth century. Huxley writes in “Breughel” that “At the present moment...we have achieved an unprecedentedly tolerant eclecticism” but that it has been “achieved at the expense of almost the whole content of the various works of art considered” (191). Many people collected primitive or eclectic art because it was in fashion to do so, but they were oblivious of their true and intended meaning. Another problem was that these pieces of art were becoming merely décor and commodity instead of art.

In the first chapter, Gumbril Junior has a daydream where he sees himself owning a house surrounded by eclectic art:
The Chinese statues looked out from the niches; the Maillols passionately meditated, slept and were more than alive. The Goyas hung on the walls, there was a Boucher in the bathroom; and when he entered with his guests, what a Piazzetta exploded above the dining-room mantelpiece! Over the ancient wine they talked together, and he knew everything they knew and more; he gave, he inspired, it was the others who assimilated were enriched. After dinner there were Mozart quartets; he opened his portfolios and showed his Daumiers, his Tiepolos, his Canaletto Sketches, his drawings by Picasso and Lewis, and the purity of his naked Ingres. And later, talking of Odalisques, there were orgies without fatigue or disgust, and the women were pictures and lust in action, art. (14)

In a similar way Mr. Mercaptan tells his friends that all he needs is, “readable books, amusing conversation, civilised women, graceful art and dry vintage music...a quiet life and reasonable comfort (41). Although the art work Gumbril mentions differs from Mercaptan’s possessions, the general sentiment is the same, a materialistic, shallow existence, for although Gumbril’s daydream is rather romantic in nature, it is not exactly all that deep.

The double meaning of the following description subtracts from an imagined ideal and brings everything back to the mundane: “Over the empty plains forty horses impelled him towards Mantua: rubadub—adubadub, with the silencer out. Towards the most romantic city in all the world” (15). Mantua is a city in Italy but, the word mantua is also a “loose gown open in front to reveal an underskirt, worn by European women in the 17th and 18th centuries” (the American Heritage College Dictionary). This, coming
after the description of women as “pictures of lust in action, art,” seems to corroborate the statement’s double meaning—a romantic place and sex.

However, the tone changes towards the end of his daydream. As his daydream continues there appears an obvious contradiction. He suddenly breaks from dreaming about art as décor or symbols of status, comfort and sex, and begins imagining a scene where the politicians work “for the salvation, not the destruction of humanity (15). The problem here is that this would only be a way of glorifying himself amongst others. Yet this contradiction or multiple view points is consistent with Gumbril’s character as we see in certain examples in the novel (40). It can also represent the struggle that Huxley faced as an artist and the ongoing argument of form verses content, “art for art’s sake” versus art with a social or political purpose, and/or the difference between the aesthete and the social advocate. The change in the daydream from a seemingly careless inventory of art to the imagining of social justice is not only contradictory but also introduces a greater debate. It is reminiscent of the first chapter where religion and art are interchanged in the scene and in Gumbril Junior’s thoughts. The change from a concern about art as possession to social issues and injustices, makes art as possession seem less important than a greater more moral concern. If this is the case, then it depicts Huxley’s criticism of the possession of art for its own sake. Art should be used for higher purposes, not just to show off one’s wealth or status. Art can be used as a tool towards the “criticism of life” that Arnold requests of literature and poetry.

Despite these glimpses of social consciousness, Gumbril Junior’s main concern is still to be well off. All the artists that form part of his daydream represent a different style or form of art; they all lived and practiced their art at different time periods. For
instance the artists go from Mailol, the French sculptor (1861-1944) known for his
classically inspired female nudes, to Goya (1746-1828), a Romantic painter known for
his political paintings, Boucher (1703-70) who was a painter in the Rococo style, the
Italian Canaletto (1697-1768), a realist painter of Venetian scenes, to the Cubist, Picasso
(1881). Some are Romantic, some Neo-Classical, some are Modern; but the possession
of these at once would symbolize wealth and leisure, none of which Gumbril Junior has.
But it may also have a deeper significance.

In *The Dark Historic Page*, Robert S. Baker says that Huxley’s novels are often
“filled with such ‘random’ collections, assemblages of haphazardly gathered documents,
paintings, and relics” in which he includes “Mercaptan’s collection of historical and
aesthetic artifacts” (8). And Gumbril Junior’s list can also be added. Baker writes:

> These accumulations of discrete and unrelated fragments are emblems of
discontinuity, finding their literary counterparts in the fragmentary
autobiographical texts scattered throughout the novels. They collectively
testify to Huxley’s belief that the failure to discover meaning in the past
too often finds a counterpart in the inability to confer meaning upon the
present. (9)

Here we are reminded of Gumbril Senior who states that the British have not learned
from their past mistakes when deciding to “re-erect the old intricate squalor” that is
British architecture. He says that “The inconveniences and horrors of the pox are
perfectly well known to everyone; but still the disease flourishes and spreads. Several
million people were killed in a recent war and half the world ruined; but we all busily go

on in courses that make another event of the same sort inevitable.” He goes on to add:

*Experentia docet? Expeientia doesn’t*” (115).

Rosie, like Gumbril Junior, walks around wishing to be someone else. While Gumbril tries to take on the personae of the Rabelaisian figure or the “Complete Man” (80-81), Rosie tries to be like Catherine the Great or the “fastidious lady” (85, 89). She has dreams of grandeur which manifest themselves in her desire to have flings with artistic and poetic, civilized types. Ironically, she falls for fakes such as Gumbril Junior and Mercaptan. With her lack of self she falls for anything that passes for sophistication. Instead of paintings and sculptures, she is obsessed with different kinds of furniture and what they represent.

Rosie often compares her “Poor Aunt Aggie with her Arts and Crafts, and her old English furniture” or her own furniture with, for instance, Mercaptan’s white satin sofa—crebillon (170, 172). When she meets Gumbril Junior while window shopping, he comments on the “revolting...sham cottage furniture” on display. Rosie on the other hand “had been on the point of saying how much she liked those lovely old Welsh dressers” but changed her mind and agreed with Gumbril saying it was “so v-ulgar” (85). Gumbril added that it was “So horribly refined. So refined and artistic” (85). Rosie thought about how wrong she had been:

Poor Aunt Aggie with her Arts and Crafts, and her old English furniture.

And to think she had taken them so seriously! She saw in a flash the fastidious lady that she now was—with Louis whatever-it-was furniture at home, and jewels, and young poets to tea, and real artists. In the past, when she had imagined herself entertaining real artists, it had always been
among really artistic furniture. Aunt Aggie’s furniture. But now—no, oh no. This man was probably an artist. His beard; and that big black hat.

But not poor; very well dressed. (85)

“Yes it’s funny to think that there are people who call that sort of thing artistic” she tells Gumbril, as if she had felt that way all along (85). She allows herself to be swayed by the dictums of others. In this case, Gumbril Junior who usually is the one being swayed by the opinions of others is now, under the guise of the “Complete Man,” doing the swaying. The main point, however, is that Rosie’s taste in art seems less a matter of being knowledgeable or passionate about art than seeing art as a marker of status.

Rosie’s character brings the Arts and Crafts movement into the narrative. The Arts and Crafts movement was “Rooted in the moralistic writings of John Ruskin and exemplified by William Morris’s medieval-revival workshops... [They] condemned the industrial revolution for its effects on the worker and proposed a return to guildlike methods of production” (Reed 167). Roger Fry became a proponent and active practitioner of this late nineteenth and early twentieth century ideal with his own Omega Workshops that “conceived the work of art as an alternative to the product of mass industry” (Lewis 12).

The movement could easily be seen as a fad but many artists and artisans, not to mention the upper class consumer (if one is to consider that handmade articles would cost more than factory made ones), took the movement quite seriously. Two principal ideas of the movement, Alan Crawford writes, were “the Unity of Art” and “Joy in Labor.” The first was an attempt to unite the artist and the artisan:
Arts and Crafts people opposed the hierarchy in which the arts were arranged in late-Victorian Britain: painting and sculpture at the top as fine arts; architecture somewhere in the middle, less artistic but still with high professional status; and the decorative arts at the bottom, their status both artistically and professionally. They argued that, in the Middle Ages, this hierarchy had not existed; and that in their own day, painters, sculptors, architects, and decorative artists should be on an equal footing again. (16)

That the artisan should be perceived as an artist or that the artist should spend time on handicraft was an idea that Huxley would repudiate.

In “On Handicraft” Huxley begins his article by poking a little fun at a couple of “new William Morrises” who have traveled to “Mexico and, confronted by its peasant arts, have broken out into an intemperate and hysterical enthusiasm” (88). For Huxley, there is a marked difference between handicraft and masterpieces of fine arts. The art or work of the handicraft person and the amateur artist often times is attributed “too much aesthetic merit” when the “real value” of “the result of [these] activities…is psychological, social, and economic” (88). Morris would probably disagree arguing against separating the aesthetic. Huxley does, however, distinguish the artist from the artisan as well as the first-rate artist from the second-rate artist. Huxley admits that “the productions of a people of handicraftsmen are often excellent; but the nature of this excellence is essentially inferior to that of the excellence we find in the work of great artist” (89). He himself dabbled in painting which he admits gave him much pleasure, yet he was aware that he was not “producing masterpieces” (89).
The concept of "Joy in Labor" is in many ways a socialist concept as well as a progressive one. The idea originated with Ruskin's *The Stones of Venice* (1853). It was an attempt to diminish the drudgery of the industrial factory worker and at the same time produce objects that were original and imperfect, to get away from the generically and perfectly factory produced craft and/or furniture. Ironically, with William Morris, the movement's products could only be afforded by the wealthy (Simpson McLean 356) which seems to defeat the purpose. It is understandable how such a movement could become fashionable among those trying to be distinguished and/or trendy.

Although Huxley understood and often blamed industry and the increase of technology for the decline of worth and value of art, as stated in *The Spread of Bad Art* and other articles, he did not necessarily endorse the Arts and Crafts movement because the movement further decreased the value of art (i.e. by calling handicraft art). It also increased the amount of bad art and those calling themselves artists. This idea is also suggested in Lypiatt's case; he is better suited to create commercial art, which in Huxley's opinion would be a lower level of art yet appropriate for his limited abilities.

In contrast to Rosie and her décor, Mrs. Viveash and her flat epitomize the wealthy leisured and their trendy tastes. Mrs. Viveash's flat is chic and modern. Her "drawing room [is] tastefully in the movement. The furniture is upholsterd in fabrics designed by Dufy—race horses and roses, little tennis players clustering in the midst of enormous flowers, printed in grey and ochre on a white ground" (138). Dufy was a Fauvist painter who dabbled in domestic design and was very in and successful at the time. "There were a couple of lampshades by Balla." a Futurist painter/furniture designer, also in at the time. Both dabbled in fine arts and tapestry or furniture. This is a
good example of how the lines between “artists” and “artisans” were being erased by the influence of the arts and crafts movement. Also, “On the pale rose-stippled walls hung three portraits of herself by three different and entirely incongruous painters, a selection of the usual oranges and lemons and a rather forbidding contemporary nude painted in two tones of green” (138). One is a “full length portrait by Jacques-Emile Blanche” (188). And yet she declares that she is bored with the room and “all these beastly pictures” (138). Apparently, she like other characters in the novel, has selected art, not because she likes it or has any genuine affinity for it, but because it is fashionable. All her possessions bore her.

As a cure for her boredom, Gumbril suggests that she move to the country and live the simple life; maybe then she would no longer be so bored (138)? However, the country and the simple life are so incongruent with Mrs. Viveash’s character that the suggestion seems ridiculous. Mrs. Viveash lives in luxury and yet is still unfulfilled. Rosie on the other hand lives moderately, in a flat that is “not very splendid...the furniture—decidedly Hire Purchase (88). She owns “curtains and cretonnes” that are “brightly ‘modern,’ positively ‘futurist,’” which had been picked out with such pain. Yet she and her husband had “doggedly paid for it, month by month” (88). The artwork on Rosie’s walls are not portraits painted by modern painters but engravings such as Raphael’s “Transfiguration” that she purchased in a “secondhand shop,” and photographs of her friends (91-92). The décor and art that Mrs. Viveash and Rosie have in their apartments work as signs of status. Mrs. Viveash belongs to the upper middle class, while Rosie belongs to the lower, middle or working class.
Art was losing its moral and intrinsic value. No longer was art viewed or judged for its beauty or humanistic ideals; instead it was viewed as symbols of economic and class status. Often times, as in Mrs. Viveash’s case, art was bought or owned because it was created by an artist who was popular at the time or because a certain style was in vogue.

Huxley satirizes the pretentious art world, its practitioners, and critics. On the one hand we have Mr. Clew whose taste is indiscriminative; he likes all art even Lypiatt’s horrible paintings. His passion for art does not make him an expert; yet he has clients who believe his every word about art even though, most of the time, he does not know what he is talking about. Mr. Mallard’s erudition, on the other hand, takes him to the opposite extreme. He is not passionate about art and merely looks at art from a logical point of view. If it does not fit into any of the theories he has learned about, then it is deemed worthless and not good.

The Arts and Crafts movement also endangered the value of art in Huxley’s eyes. The idea of equating the artist with the artisan, or the work of art with “handicraft” or furniture, was something that Huxley did not agree with. He felt that not only should one be able to differentiate the first from the second-rate artist, but also the artisan from the artist.

**Literature**

During Huxley’s time, the question of aesthetics was just as important and complex when it came to literature as it was when it came to art. The changes within the literary world are in many ways similar and parallel to the changes in the art world. Impressionists attempted to create art that was a reflection, not of the realists’ perception
of reality, but what they perceived as the true reality, the way things are optically perceived. The post-impressionists developed from and later opposed the impressionists. They called for more subjective and non-mimetic renderings. And these artist stressed form over content. New literary movements are also often the result of opposition or modifications of existing movements. Like in the art world, literary movements were in search of ways to depict reality. This is best personified in the debate between the realist novelists and modernists such as Virginia Woolf. The difference consisted in subjective versus objective reality. In fact, many modernist writers were influenced by art movements such as impressionism and post-impressionism.

The question of aesthetics and artistic worth was complicated by technological advances, increase in educational opportunities (which meant that more people were becoming educated), and the newly formed middle class which began to develop and take a prominent position in Victorian times and were at full swing by the early twentieth century. By the end of the 1800s and the beginning of the 1900s, concepts such as “high” and “low” brow were being used as descriptions for segments of society and their respective tastes. The modernists intended to save literature and art from the newly developing middle classes whom they called Philistines. Their attempts to distinguish themselves from what they deemed the corruption of art by the mass culture rendered them literary elites. Different avenues opened up, as a result of the social changes taking place, for different kinds of novels to be published. A middle ground was created which allowed for a buffer between what was seen as the “high” and “low” brow, and this came to be known as the “middle-brow.” (“Huxley,” according to Murray, “would go on to identify himself as a ‘highbrow.’ He stood on the creative, risk-taking side of the fault
line which opened up in English culture in the early twentieth century” (104). His early novels are “high-brow,” but they are also unique in their format. Therefore, *Antic Hay* and his other “twenties” novels are more open-ended and not as overtly didactic as his later novels are.

Peter D. McDonald writes in “Modernist Publishing: ‘Nomads and mapmakers,’” that “What was, for some, an apocalyptic crisis of value was, for others, a new opportunity for cultural mobility and innovation” (226). The “purists” or “intellectuals” feared that art had lost or was losing its inherent value. They felt a threat by the “masses” or the “profiteers” (224-225). This was Huxley’s early stance as well. This also relates to the market forces pressing on Lypiatt and Gumbril Senior who wanted to preserve the value of art.

Sawyer writes that “just after the middle of the nineteenth century” realism became the “dominant literary genre” as a response to or “in opposition to the romantics’ veneration of the inner life” and their excessive sentimentality (43). Their kind of writing, however, created a backlash. Many Modernist writers, such as Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, D.H. Lawrence, Henry James, and even Huxley, began to move away from the often limited scope of realism, particularly in the midst of drastically changing society.

Peter Childs uses the debate between H.G. Wells and Henry James as an example of the “break from the realist mode” towards that of Modernism (78). While Wells criticized James’ emphasis on structure and stylistic technique, James criticized Wells’ failure to delve into his character’s psyche. Wells simply presented “quarried and gathered material” without questioning or analyzing, as Childs puts it “the value of the
knowledge, facts and details he was presenting” (43). Even “Virginia Woolf,” Sawyer writes, “recoiled from the ‘materialism’ of their attention to the exterior world” (44). She sided more with James than with Wells. Modern writers were put off by the realists’ focus on describing “the outer life, the truth of the world around them,” (Sawyer 43). They opposed the realists’ mode of telling a story, an approach modeled, as Sawyer writes, “on the scientific method” (43). They were also against the realists’ use of an omniscient—third-person narrative that they felt presented an objective view of life—and their linear narrative that lacked stylistic and technical complexity. The modernist writers, on the other hand, attempted to present another reality that focused, not on the outside world, but on an inward, subjective and individual reality.

Structure and style often became the main focus for the modernists, and their writing acquired a technical complexity that is reminiscent of Fry and the post-impressionist movements in the arts. James, and other modernist including Fry, was often criticized for being more concerned with the artistic aspects of the novel or short story than its subject matter. According to Childs, James and Wells “debated the role of the novel as art or entertainment…” (43). Wells criticized James saying that “To you literature, like painting, is an end, to us literature is a means, it has a use…I had rather be called a journalist than an artist” (78). Wells believed that his writing “had a number of aims: education, social criticism and entertainment; whereas he thought James’ work was about style and form only,” that his “novels were art for a purpose, like architecture, whereas James’s were not, like painting” (78-79). For James, however, “the distinction” was “null and void”; in his opinion “all art was for a purpose, and all art was aesthetically determined” (78-79).
Writers such as James and others who experimented with form, style, and point of view attracted a more intellectual audience, while realists such as Wells appealed to the masses. Hence, Wells was extremely popular, while James was not as successful with the general public, though he was esteemed by many intellectuals. In “Popular Literature” (1924), Huxley’s response to the question: “What is the difference between a popular and an unpopular artist [?]” is that “For every ten people with Henry-Jamesian minds there are several hundred with Nat-Gouldian minds” (158). Huxley believed that “No literature can be popular that deals with anything but the primary instincts and the emotions dependent upon them. All intellectual interests are ruled out” (159). Realist writers’ straightforward style enabled readers to simply read without having to think much—the author did all the thinking for them. It was a lot like journalism. Realist novelists appealed to the masses and therefore became very successful. Modernist writing is generally known for its intricacies, not necessarily in subject matter, but in the way it is written. As with fine art, when it came to literature, Huxley was also against an emphasis on form to the exclusion of subject. In “The Horrors of Society” (1925), Huxley writes that “Literature is turned into a sort of elegant game, in which it is the object of the players to score points of ‘style’ and ‘form’—as though form and style possessed any real existence apart from substance” (390). Form and style often became the main focus for the modernists and their writing acquired a technical complexity that is reminiscent of Fry and the post-impressionist.

Lypiatt, who seems to personify the romantic, idealistic, passionate artist, tries to hold on to the romantic notions of art and refuses to acknowledge the changes going on around him. His attitude is not restricted to painting but to the world of literature as well.
The use of the word “dreams” in one of his poems sparks an argument over the meaning and purpose of art and literature:

Look down, Conquistador!

There on the valley’s broad green floor,

There lies the lake; the jewelled cities gleam;

Chalco and Tlacopan

Awaiting the coming Man.

Look down on Mexico, Conquistador,

Land of your golden dream. (38)

Both Gumbril Junior and Mercaptan object to Lypiatt’s use of the word dream. The word can no longer be used in what Gumbril sarcastically calls, “this year of grace, nineteen twenty-two.” Mercaptan suggests that “Dreams...belong to the Rostand epoch” (40). The term “dreams” at one time connoted a romantic notion but in the Modern world, as Gumbril says, “the word merely connotes Freud” (42). Like many of the changes that were occurring during the time, concepts such as dreams had lost their mystique and had become mere medical or psychological terms. The Romantic sense is no longer valid in their post war world, especially not, as Gumbril asserts, “after you’ve accepted the war,” and “swallowed the Russian famine” (40). But Lypiatt disagrees and thinks that this pessimistic view is a sign of the spiritual poverty of the times. “Ideals,” he suggests, are “not sufficiently genteel for you civilised young men...No dream, no religion, no morality” (40). He describes Gumbril and Mercaptan and anyone who shares their view as spiritually void, aesthetically and morally shallow. Yet, Mercaptan finds nothing at all wrong with being “civilised” (40). The term civilised here seems to take on a feeling of
smugness and in many ways, indifference. His preferences epitomize the complacency and materialism of the upper middle class, the same class that Gumbril Junior wishes he was a part of. Mercaptan seems too lazy to actually try and figure out a Jamesian novel, but would probably try for the sake of keeping up with appearances.

Mercaptan tells Lypiatt that “We needn’t all be Russians, I hope. These revolting Dostoievskys...Nor all Utopians...And as for Homo a la H.G. Wells—ca ne pue pas assez”; he prefers “the civilised” middle ground between “stink and asepsis” (40-41). Dostoevsky, although influencing modernist writers with “stream of consciousness” techniques and who Mercaptan finds “too Russian,” grappled with the issue of morality in his work although differently from Tolstoy whom Mercaptan also dislikes (41). Both are considered realist writers. Their approaches to realism are rather different but both share similar social and moral concerns:

Tolstoy is so robust, has his feet so firmly on the ground, presents what he sees with such clarity and objectivity, that one can be easily deluded into considering his dominating quality to be physical, sensual, antithetical to Dostoevsky...But these profound differences should not obscure one basic similarity: the deep spirituality of both writers, their rejection of the basic materialism and the conception of truth propounded by modern science and theories of realism. (Mack 2434)

Mercaptan’s declarations could be seen in two distinct ways: as indifference or as another example of Huxley’s call for proportion. In the first instance, one could assume that Mercaptan does not care for moral or social issues; all he cares for is comfort (40-41). This notion is reminiscent of the accusations made against Pater by some Victorians.
Mercaptan admits to simply wanting "Readable books, amusing conversation, civilised women, graceful art and dry vintage music, with a quiet life and reasonable comfort—that's all [he] ask[s] for" (41). The second instance can be seen as a critique of extreme behavior and/or views as well as a call for balance. But when Lypiatt refuses to accept Mercaptan's indifference, he asks him: What about Tolstoy and Michelangelo? Mercaptan responds by saying that they are too Russian and too pretentious; he prefers the art of "Borromini and the baroque" (41). The problem with the second assumption—that it is a call for balance—is that Mercaptan rejects writers whose works are idealistic and socially and morally conscientious, in favor of one that is excessive. Baroque is a style that Huxley himself considers insincere and over the top (see "Lypiatt the Artist" section). Huxley repudiates baroque art in "Cherubini" for being ineffectively extravagant. In Huxley's opinion, baroque art is an imbalanced art because baroque artists try too hard to render passion and emotion. Hence, baroque art becomes excessive instead of effective. Therefore, although Mercaptan says he prefers a middle ground or a balance, he ends up contradicting himself when he admits to preferring baroque art to excessively idealistic or morally conscientious art. When asked about Beethoven and Blake? Mercaptan says he prefers too keep them in the hallway, out of his boudoir.

Lypiatt is utterly disgusted by Mercaptan's declarations:

you disgust me—you and your odious little sham eighteenth century civilisation; your piddling little poetry; your art for art's sake instead of for God's sake; your nauseating little copulations without love or passion; your hoggish materialism; your bestial indifference to all that's unhappy and your yelping hatred of all that's great. (41)
Mercaptan prefers not to concern himself with the social problems of the day. He dislikes art that is social, idealistic, or spiritual. All he wants out of life is material comfort and physical pleasure. Any kind of art, literature, or music that might remind him of discomfort or pain, that is didactic or stresses some kind of morality, or that is other worldly, is an art, literature, or music he does not want to deal with. It can be said that Lypiatt prefers art, literature, and music that is passionate, idealistic and has some kind of moral ambition. It can also be said that Mercaptan seems to prefer art that is entertaining or dramatic to art that is morally or idealistically inclined. Yet it is also safe to say that Huxley does not completely agree with any one side. Mercaptan seems excessively indifferent and Lypiatt is just plain excessive. Mercaptan likes Baroque artists such as Borromini whose extravagance is similar to Lypiatt’s own art. Huxley criticizes both Lypiatt’s art and baroque art. Therefore, although Lypiatt wants to present Mercaptan as shallow, both are hypocritical, pretentious, and excessive. They do not even realize that they are somewhat similar and have similar tastes.

_Antic Hay's Structure and Style_

With _Antic Hay_, Huxley provides his readers with the same social commentary that is often expressed in his articles and essays. Because of the predominance of ideas expressed in the novel, and Huxley’s other “twenties” novels, it is often referred to as the “discussion novel” or the “novel of ideas.” The novel presents various opinions with each character representing a particular stance. All characters and their ideas—as different as they may be—represent—to a certain extent—a part of Huxley. Huxley uses a formant that was made famous by Thomas Love Peacock in the nineteenth century.
After writing *Crome Yellow* using the Peacockian form, he told his publishers that “he had written *Crome* because [he] lack[ed] the courage and patience to sit down and turnout eighty thousand words of Realismus. Life seems too short for that” (Murray 131). Peacockian novels and their characters are usually vessels developed to carry the author’s ideas. Therefore, it is not surprising that many of the novel’s characters echo Huxley’s views. This kind of novel is normally set in a place where the characters can easily gather and hold discussions, usually the country estate, or around a dinner table. It focuses on the characters’ ideas and not necessarily their actions. Huxley’s first novel *Chrome Yellow* and his third, *Those Barren Leaves*, are set in the country estate where the characters physical movements are rather limited. *Antic Hay* is a little different, however. *Antic Hay* does show a little more action than a “novel of ideas” would normally allow.

First of all, *Antic Hay* is not set in a country estate which allows for much more action (essential since it is one of the main things Huxley satirizes in this novel). To begin with, the novel’s title, taken from Marlowe: “My men like satyrs grazing on the lawns / Shall with their goat-feet dance the antic hay” describes frenzied movement.\(^2\) The scene where Gumbril Junior and Mrs. Viveash are being driven around London in a taxi is an example of this concept. Another example would be Gumbril Junior’s antics as the “Complete Man.” He runs around with Shearwater’s wife and tries to meet other potential conquests on the streets of London or in museums. There are also scenes of mistaken identity that are similar to those in Shakespeare’s comedies and Wildean dramas (all fitting in with a long tradition of satire and farce). All these involve action

\(^2\) It is interesting to note that the word “satire” was “influenced by G.k. *satur*, satyr, and *satyros*.”
and movement. Even though this is the case, *Antic Hay*’s action cannot be compared to, say, Evelyn Waugh’s *Vile Bodies* where the characters are in constant physical motion.

With *Antic Hay*, the ideas are the main focus. Most of the time, the often rapid way ideas and information are presented in *Antic Hay* takes the place of the physical action. A good example of this is found in chapter 21 where Gumbril provides a “lullaby—soliloquy” for Mrs. Viveash (192).

Mrs. Viveash herself is constantly in motion. She is described as going out for dinner and drinks with friends, moving about here and there and having sexual escapades with different men whom she remains friends with even though they bore her. In fact, everything bores her and nothing satisfies or fills her emptiness. Her husband’s death in the First World War has left her cold and emotionless (also symbolic of the effect that the war has had on society in general). When a headache forces her to lie down, she makes Gumbril Junior talk to her because she cannot bear being still or in silence. His constant verbiage works as a soothing mechanism for her. Gumbril’s “lullaby—soliloquy” goes from one subject and idea to another, in a rapid and senseless succession until she finally falls asleep. Even though she is asleep, Gumbril knows that if he stops talking “she would probably be woken by the sudden blankness of the silence” so he continues to ramble on (191). In a similar moment, Gumbril Junior talks with Emily about his fear of silence and repose:

> There are quiet places also in the mind...But we build bandstands and factories on them. Deliberately—to put a stop to the quietness. We don’t like quietness. All the thoughts, all the preoccupations in my head—round and round, continually...And the jazz bands, the music hall songs, the
boys shouting the mews. What’s it for, what’s it all for? To put an end to the quiet, to break it up and disperse it, to pretend at any cost it isn’t there. Ah, but it is, it is there, in spite of everything, at the back of everything.

(123)

He goes on to describe the fear that he and others feel when life is still and silent. He says that “the quiet grows and grows. Beautifully and unbearably...” It is both “beautiful and terrifying” (123). This is also symbolic of the fear and inability of being a proportioned whole. For Gumbril, Mrs. Viveash and others like him, a calm and quiet life would mean death; therefore, one should “Quickly, before it is too late, start the factory wheels, bang the drum, blow the saxophone. Think of the women you’d like to sleep with, the schemes for making money...anything for a diversion. Break the silence, smash the crystal to pieces” (124). These examples show that instances of constant motion in Antic Hay are not exclusively or predominately physical; there is constant mental movement even when one is physically still. This fear makes Gumbril Junior choose the momentary diversion that Mrs. Viveash provides over the peace that Emily offers (131-136).

The constant fast-paced motion, whether it be the characters speech, actions, or whether it be the rapid transitions between ideas expressed or scenes presented in Antic Hay, is a metaphor for the state of early twentieth century. Lewis writes, “Time seemed to move more quickly in the industrialized world of the twentieth century, and the rapid succession of world-changing historical events in the early decades of the century strengthened the sense of acceleration” (32). This fast pace is shown not only in the scenes where characters such as Mrs. Viveash and Gumbril Junior are involved in their
antics, but also in *Antic Hay*'s exchange of ideas and its narrative style. Ideas and words often take precedence over the action. The emphasis is still on the ideas about art, architecture, literature and society. The setting and pace are not the only thing that differs from the Peacockian novel, the moral thrust of the novel does too.

Bowering says that “to regard Huxley as a mere twentieth-century imitator of Peacock is to invite over-simplification,” for, as he adds, “Huxley did more than hold a mirror to the ideological conflicts of his day. Almost from the beginning he saw in the novel an exploratory vehicle for moral values” (2). Bowering says that Huxley was not the “cynical” and “irresponsible” writer that some critics assumed. He writes:

In retrospect it is clear that he was neither; he was always a moralist even when appearing the very opposite. The novels themselves were above all satires on ‘modernism’ and, while highlighting the sex and pleasure merry-go-round of the fashionable set, Huxley....was already seeking an alternative. (19)

Many early critics viewed *Antic Hay* as decadent and immoral. In reality, though it describes the decadent and somewhat immoral actions of the characters (i.e. Coleman’s blasphemous comments and actions), it does not encourage this behavior, but satirizes it. His irreverent style and comments, his characters’ decadent behavior and sexual episodes, are actually the means that he uses to criticize this same attitude and behavior, not to endorse or encourage it. A.C. Ward claims that “Huxley can be claimed as a non-decadent and moral writer because there is always in the background to his books the implication that a more desirable way of life exists and must be found” (Bowering 19). The problem with this assumption is that, even though Huxley may have thought of the
novel as a “vehicle for moral value,” the message is not clearly expressed by him in the novel. One has to go out of it, read some of his articles and auxiliary information, to make sense of what the novel is saying. In this way his position as a modernist writer is secure, but this puts the novel in danger of being misunderstood. A novel does not necessarily need to be didactic or explicitly moral in order to be a vehicle for moral values; but *Antic Hay*’s style—its ambivalence, and the plethora of ideas expressed—may impair its effectiveness as a vehicle for moral criticism in an Arnoldian sense. Readers may end up confused and not fully understanding the novel or its motive.

Being merely artistic was not enough for Huxley; he yearned for more. Meckier describes Huxley as “an artist who prefers unpopular truth to artistic effect” (7). This description becomes more pronounced with his later works, but at least we know that Huxley’s feelings and desire for moral standards were present early on. Birnbaum writes that Huxley’s 1920s novels “were all concerned with showing how some of the traditional sources of value—religion, love, family life—were absent from the postwar generation. Most readers thought these books to be cynically entertaining and did not see their essentially moral undercurrent” (5). But this moral undercurrent, particularly in *Antic Hay*, is difficult to perceive because of the polyphony of ideas presented and the fast pace in which they are sometimes expressed. Perhaps this is the result of Huxley’s struggle with deciding what kind of writer he wanted to be, or it can be the result of his uncertainty about solutions to society’s problem.

The ending, in particular, may leave the reader in a kind of limbo. There is apparently no moral message at the novel’s end. Huxley does not tell the reader what to do; there is not even a subtle suggestion. Neither is there any resolution. He merely
presents the problem using satire. The novel, like Huxley’s other early ones, seems to present and set up problems without offering solutions. Huxley himself may have still been looking for solutions which would explain his lifelong search and the didactic nature of his later novels. Although the moral message may be lost because of *Antic Hay*’s complex and unique style, the novel’s overall structure successfully reflects the fragmented and disordered society that Huxley satirizes.

The lack of structural proportion in *Antic Hay* works in this kind of novel because it reflects the disjointedness and imbalance that Huxley aims to indict. This lack of proportion is consistent with the state of society that Huxley criticizes. The structure is also in line with the characters and their lives. Society’s fragmentation is represented in the characters’ discord and in their differences of opinion. There are a lot of things going on in the plot but no systematic structure. Meckier suggests that Huxley has “always [been] engaged in a conscious struggle with the form of the novel. He was continually trying to stretch its confines, to make it do new things,” i.e. with the early novels “to control and render the formlessness of English society in the 1920s” (7). Huxley is satirizing a fragmented, confused and often frantic post World War society; the novel’s structure is consistent with its theme. Huxley “at his finest...manages to fuse satire and structure so that the form (or design) of his novels becomes part of his attack on modern life and exposes his characters as thoroughly as he does himself when talking about them directly” (Meckier 4). The pessimism that he feels is sustained throughout the novel. There is no pronounced solution and no happy ending. Huxley does not tie everything up for the reader at the end, a technique which is also in keeping with modernist writing.
But his overall style puts him in a different bracket from other modernists whose focus was primarily on form. Donald Watt assumes that

[Huxley's] writing appeared to defy the new authoritative view of fiction as an organic art form which had evolved through the influence of Flaubert and Henry James...Huxley's practice of the novel ran counter to these trends...To many observers the failure of Huxley's fiction either to adopt a traditional posture or to adhere to a formalist criterion meant that he was stuck in an untenable sort of writing which hovered indecisively between the novel and the essay. (Watt 2)

Antic Hay is a far cry from the organic form that James and other modernists endorsed, but although many of the issues expressed in the novel are expressed in his essays, or some of the subjects discussed in the novel seem to fit in more appropriately in an essay, the novel's structure is too informal to be an essay. Huxley himself declared in a letter to his father that “[Antic Hay] is...very serious book. Artistically, too, it has a certain novelty, being a work in which all the ordinarily separated categories—tragic, comic, fantastic, realist—are combined so to say chemically into a single entity, whose unfamiliar character makes it appear at first sight rather repulsive” (Watt 9). Although Huxley rejects art work that is too experimental, Antic Hay's style, from his description of it, seems rather experimental. Perhaps, he was trying to achieve some kind of

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3 Modernist writers such as “Joyce, Lawrence, Kafka, Woolf, Proust, and Huxley” developed new structures “based on how best to present the interior world. The stream of consciousness technique is the most famous, but Huxley...developed his own approach” (Sawyer 44). Huxley did not like the stream of consciousness technique employed by Woolf and the “methods used by Joyce” because he believed these techniques to be egocentric in their tendencies to focus on one point of view (their own), and did “not tak[e] other viewpoints into account when formulating their own” (Meckier 59). Huxley chooses another approach, one that combines traditional genres such as satire and the “novel of ideas” with his own more modernist tendencies.
harmonious and proportioned work by incorporating elements of varying styles. As he states above, his aim is to create a “single entity.” *Antic Hay*, however, seems to fail in its attempts to create wholeness.

There seems to be a contradiction in Huxley’s aesthetics; what he likes in fine arts and architecture—harmonious proportion and symmetry—he seems to lack in his own work. Huxley called for proportion in art and in life, yet *Antic Hay* is not structurally proportioned, and neither are its characters. When it comes to the visual arts Huxley prefers art that shows mass and solidity. This is one of the reasons why he likes Alberti and Piero; their work depicts both mass and solidity. In “The Best Picture,” he says that the painter Piero

has a passion for solidity...The faces of his personages look as though they were carved out of some very hard rock into which it had been impossible to engrave the details of a human physiology—the hollows, the lines and wrinkles of real life. They are ideal, like faces of Egyptian gods and princes, surface meeting and marrying with curved unbroken surface in an almost geometric fashion. (213)

His paintings of people look solid, real and three dimensional. Huxley’s characters however, seem flat and shallow. Meckier writes that “The predominance of one-pointed personages in Huxley’s novels leaves him even more vulnerable than Dickens to the charge that he creates few three-dimensional figures. It is a character’s one-pointedness, even more than the fact that he may be the mouthpiece for an idea, that makes him seem mechanical (23). Yet, because Huxley’s intention was to satirize this type of character and to emphasize extremes, this is not a “mistake” per se, but an intentional device.
Meckier claims that in his early novels Huxley satirizes egotistical and eccentric people and that “The egoist-eccentric in Huxley’s world is consistent to extremes” (13). Although Meckier focuses more on other early novels and not specifically *Antic Hay*, his ideas about egotism and eccentricity can still be applied to the novel. Some of the ideas expressed by the characters are similar to Huxley’s ideas, but Huxley exaggerates the characters, their ideals, and actions thereby satirizing extreme behavior and beliefs. For example, Lypiatt and Shearwater’s main defect is that they are often extreme in their ideals. They are one-sided in their views and physicality. The attack on extremism fits in well with Huxley’s advocacy of proportion in art and in life.

Extremists are never proportioned beings. The characters’ imbalance has led them to fail in art and in their relationships with others. The characters’ egotism creates a disjointedness that mirrors that of early twentieth century society. Huxley, in Meckier’s opinion, calls for unity and centrality which both society and his fragmented characters lack. He suggests that Huxley stresses wholeness “and completeness as antidotes to the fragmentary, compartmentalized life his characters lead” (5). This may be the solution that Huxley suggests, but like the novel’s moral endorsement, it is not explicitly stated in *Antic Hay*. It is to be inferred by its readers.

Huxley employs a lot of the traditional satirical devices such as irony and juxtaposition in *Antic Hay*. The novel is filled with ironic situations, mistaken identity, and paradoxical situations. But unlike a traditional novel, *Antic Hay* does not really have a plot, at least not in the conventional sense. The story follows the characters as they indulge in their antics or as they gather together to talk or have a drink. The sudden, sometimes unexpected and long drawn conversations usually come from minor characters
that seem to be there only to provide a voice to an idea. For example, Mr. Porteous (17-23), Mr. Bojanus (27-31), Bruin Opps (53), the old gentleman on the train (159-162) seem strange, out of place and rather tedious at times; but they are there to provide a particular opinion or social commentary. These conversational digressions, although tedious and seemingly out of place, are commonplace in Huxley’s “novel of ideas.”

There is, however, a sudden and unexpected shift in novel’s tone that occurs about half way through the novel. With the opening of Chapter 12, the tone of the novel abruptly changes. In this chapter, Gumbril Junior’s situation seems optimistic when he meets the virginal Emily, but eventually even this hope or sign of enlightenment is lost. Initially Gumbril’s designs for Emily are impure. He meets her while disguised as the “Complete Man,” but after getting to know her he realizes that the “Complete Man” approach is not going to work with her, so he decides to leave his beard at home (118). The change in plot dictates a change in tone to such a degree that it seems like a different novel altogether. It is like a novel within a novel or a traditional, optimistic novel within Huxley’s satirical, pessimistic one. In these two chapters, the reader is transported into another world from the one that Huxley had previously set up. After he gets to know Emily better, his ulterior motives change. He manages to sleep with her without having sex with her (131): At that time “He did not desire her; to desire would have been to break the enchantment. He let himself sink deeper and deeper into his dark stupor of happiness. She was asleep in his arms; and soon he too was asleep” (131). Unlike his experience with Rosie, there is no rush to have sex with her; to do so would sully the beautiful experience. By the end of chapter 13, the reader expects a happy outcome between Gumbril Junior and Emily, but Huxley soon reminds us that this is not a
“happily ever after” novel. In “Popular Literature,” Huxley describes popular fiction in the following manner: “The young man who makes a great deal of money in a perfectly honorable fashion, marries the heroine in the last chapter and lives happy ever after, is, of course, the ideal hero of popular fiction” (160-61). Since *Antic Hay* is not considered a “popular” novel, its ending is not the traditional happy one that Huxley describes in his essay.

Chapter 14 begins with a description of Mrs. Viveash who provides a rude awakening. This shift back to the original tone expressed in the novel is a technique known as bathos. Bowering writes that “The yoking together of discordant elements, the sudden reversal of values, the unexpected plunge from the serious to the absurd: these are the familiar features of Huxley’s art” (217). Gumbril has an opportunity to escape from all the craziness around him, but he allows himself to get sabotaged by Mrs. Viveash, who is the complete opposite of Emily’s character. He is easily persuaded by Mrs. Viveash to abandon his original plan of meeting Emily in the country, and spends the day in London with her instead (133-35). He ends up choosing the hustle and bustle of London, to Emily’s “native quiet,” the “cottage,” the “honeysuckles and red ramblers and hollyhocks” (134). He chooses the harsh sounds of the city over the “tweedly, weedly, weedledy dee” of the whitethroat (134). He chooses Mrs. Viveash’s cynicism and worldly experience, over Emily’s purity of heart and “flawless…pellucid integrity” (134).

Emily is out of place among the pretentious, fake, self-indulgent and jaded characters. Her displacement is driven home by Huxley when in a twentieth century novel he has her attributing Gumbril Junior’s missing their meeting to Providence: “I

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4 Bathos I.a. An abrupt, unintended transition in style from the exalted to the commonplace, producing a ludicrous effect. b. An anticlimax.
thanked God for the accident which had prevented you coming. In this way, Providence
lets us off very lightly—you with a bruise or two (for I do hope it really is nothing, my
precious darling), and me with a bruise inside, round the heart. But both will get well
quite soon” (157-58). It sounds like a Jane Austen novel. But in Antic Hay, or the world
that Huxley has created, Emily’s optimism and innocence, as well as the two chapters,
seem absurd. She sounds as out of place in twentieth century Britain as Lypiatt does
when he uses the word “dream” in his poem. Her sexual naivété is made fun of as well:
“And she had been born within the twentieth century. It seemed a case for the textbooks
of sexual psychology. ‘Mrs. Emily X, born in 1901, was found to be in state of perfect
innocence and ignorance at the time of the Armistice, November 11th 1918, etc.” (120).
Yet there is something intrinsically wrong with the idea that optimism, innocence and
sincerity are absurd and to be mocked. Huxley’s technique here seems similar to
“reverse psychology.” For the first eleven chapters of Antic Hay, the reader has been
conditioned to the cynical world that Huxley has created. As a result, it does not seem
wrong to laugh at someone like Emily or to criticize someone for thinking of the word
“dream” as something idealistically positive, even when to do so seems cynical and
negative. Even Gumbril Junior, who seems to be in love with Emily and who finds her
innocence refreshing, makes a joke out of the situation in Chapter 14. By juxtaposing the
two disparate sections of the novel, Huxley highlights the cynicism and jadedness of the
time. Also, by creating a microcosm (Antic Hay) of a macrocosm (Huxley’s society), he
invites the reader to enter his world and feel what it is like living in a shallow,
pessimistic, valueless and immoral environment.5
Antic Hay is a satire placed in an informal Peacockian package. However, the novel's structure and style are more complex than that of the simple or traditional satire and "Novel of Ideas." Although Huxley's aesthetic taste in the fine arts and in architecture calls for work that is proportioned and harmonious both in its concrete details as well as in its inclusion of good form and meaningful content, his own novel lacks proportion. Yet because Huxley is satirizing fragmentation and extremism, the novel too is fragmented and extreme. The characters frantically go from one meaningless experience to another; likewise, the scenes and opinions expressed at times frantically go from one to another creating a confusion and chaos that mimics the twentieth century society that he is criticizing. This criticism in itself can be seen as the "vehicle of moral values," yet Huxley has created a style that does not explicitly express any call for moral change; it is to be inferred. In fact, as mentioned earlier, many early critics thought the novel endorsed the cynicism and irresponsible behavior that's portrayed in the novel. They failed to see that satire is an indictment and critique of certain behavior, not an endorsement of said behavior, people or situations. Because of the novel's complex style and some readers and critics' misunderstanding, it is difficult to assume whether or not Antic Hay has succeeded as a moral vehicle. Only when one goes outside of the novel to Huxley's nonfiction, can one see that he was in fact a moralist and traditionalist.

5 In Aldous Huxley: a Study of the Major Novels, Bowering writes: "It is perhaps debatable whether a writer who is primarily an ironist and satirist should in fact try to explore the more positive aspects of human nature. His appointed task is to tear away the mask of human pretensions, to shock us into awareness; if he momentarily drops the cloak of irony, he takes the risk of either lapsing into sentimentality or becoming merely a propagandist. It must be admitted that Huxley's attempts at moralizing bring him dangerously close to failure on both counts. In the early novels, whenever irony is absent, he is betrayed into sentimentality" (225). Bowering uses the Emily section as an example. But, this technique works in Antic Hay as explained above. The irony is made even more explicit when the Emily episode is juxtaposed with the rest of the novel. The reader has been conditioned to Antic Hay's cynical tone and subject matter to such a degree that sentimentality is made almost impossible by the middle of the novel; sentimentality becomes an absurdity.
Therefore, he is criticizing the characters’ crazy behavior and the lack of moral values, not endorsing it. Another thing that Huxley does not endorse is a strict adherence to science and the rational side of humanity; as with art, he preferred a balance.

**Shearwater, the Physiologist**

Huxley was very knowledgeable in science yet is said to have “written the century’s severest critiques of science” (Meckier 7). *Antic Hay* is no different. The novel ends, not with arguments over art and literature but with a combination of science and motion, reminiscent in some ways to Futurism. Shearwater, the physiologist, is conducting an experiment riding on a stationary bike (208-212); all the while, he is thinking about and repeating Gumbril Senior’s mantra—“proportion” (210). Mentally, he tries to escape, but no matter how hard and long he pedals, he goes nowhere. He knows that the answer lies in attaining personal balance, yet he is unable to achieve it. Like the episodes involving Gumbril Junior and Emily, the reader hopes that Shearwater will change by the end of the novel, but once again, we are disappointed. His pedaling symbolizes his desire to get away from the essence of what makes him human; therefore, he remains one-sided and unbalanced. He is the opposite of the “Complete Man” that Gumbril Junior tries to be. Shearwater, like other characters in the novel, is extremely disproportionate. He is too reliant on the rational and scientific and is completely ignorant of his emotional, spiritual and sensual side.

Although not overt, the juxtaposition of the opening scene and the closing scene depicts a meaningful contrast. The novel begins in a church and ends in a laboratory; this shift represents the shift in societal beliefs. As mentioned in the “Art and Religion” section of this paper, from the nineteenth century on, science had begun “to undermine”
religious beliefs (Lewis 19). The shift from a belief in God and art as a guide to moral values is represented here by the novel’s shift from a discussion of religion and art to one exclusively scientific. There is no longer a balance.

Shearwater struggles with being a proportionate human being. He, like Lypiatt, seems to understand the concept of proportion in theory, but like many intellectual Huxley characters, is unable to put it into practice. Interestingly enough, a physiologist deals with biological parts in order to understand the body as a whole. Yet, Shearwater remains fragmented.

The end of the novel is rather absurd with Shearwater pedaling on a stationary bike like a fool and sweating into a glass receptacle (208-09). This is not the only instance in Huxley’s early novels where “one-sided” scientists and their experiments are satirized. Shearwater reminds one of Lord Edward Tantamount of Point Counter Point. Meckier’s description of Tantamount, that he “puts his whole self into his absurd experiments and is grotesquely asexual” (13) reminds one of Shearwater. Shearwater’s inability to emotionally and physically satisfy his wife depicts the “preoccupations with scientific truth [that] leads to ‘one-sidedness,’” that Bowering includes in his analysis of things that Huxley satirizes (Bowering10, 234). He is so preoccupied with the mental and rational side of his personality and line of work that he ignores the spiritual and physical side. Shearwater contemplates his situation; “I think too much of my work... Too much physiology. There’s also psychology. People’s minds as well as their bodies... One shouldn’t be limited” (110). He is intelligent and rational enough to understand his dilemma yet is unable to put this understanding into practice. According to Morris Philipson, in the introduction to Huxley’s On Art and Artists, Huxley was
against the specialist and thought that being a generalist would benefit the individual more because she gets to see the broader picture. Philipson writes,

the distinguished specialist—particularly the research scientist, and the academic scholar—who is an emotional infant or a social adolescent, has been portrayed nowhere more knowingly, with both sympathy and satire, than in the novels of Aldous Huxley. Such a character may be a mature genius in his professional, impersonal life, but a terrible child in his subjective, personal life. (10)

Shearwater thinks that passion is "nonsense" and "unnecessary." "With a little strength of will one could shut it out." "Women" he thought were only to be dealt with "for a half an hour out of the twenty-four" (111). Ignored and unsatisfied, Rosie ends up seeking satisfaction from a more complete man. The irony is that the "complete" men she encounters, Gumbril Junior, Mr. Mercaptan, and Coleman are all shallow impersonators or extreme types and not exactly complete men themselves.

In an episode with Mrs. Viveash (similar to the opening scene when Gumbril Junior is trying to rationalize the existence of God using mathematics), Shearwater shares his theory of love by saying that $x^2 - y^2 = (x + y)(x-y)$ and the equation holds good whatever the values of $x$ and $y$. It's the same with your love business, Mrs. Viveash. The relation is still fundamentally the same, whatever the value of the unknown personal quantities concerned. Little individual tics and peculiarities—after all, what do they matter" (55). The meaning of love is lost on Shearwater who reduces everything to mathematical equations. The same can be said about the emptiness of modern art with its emphasis on technique as Lypiatt so
emphatically states. But Huxley is not necessarily making fun of scientists for the mere fact that they are scientists but because these scientists are often disproportionate beings. Philipson writes, “Aldous Huxley is one among those that speak against this lopsidedness in the individual, this imbalance, and insufficiency in thought; he speaks for the Good life as a whole, the Whole Man, and the Whole life” or as he suggests in Antic Hay, the “Complete Man” (10).

In Proper Studies (1927) Huxley says that he has “known men whose religion was homeopathy, others whose whole life was constellated round the faith that is antivivisection” (Meckier 13). And as Tantamount tries “to graft a tail onto the leg of a newt in order to demonstrate the natural harmony of life” (Meckier 13), Shearwater has “engrafted an ovary” onto a cock who is now confused and does not know “whether to crow or cluck” (211). Another example of these crazy experiments, “The beetles, who had had their heads cut off and replaced by the heads of other beetles” and who “darted uncertainly about, some obeying their heads, some their genital organs” (211-12), seem to be metaphors for some of Antic Hay’s characters and the people that Huxley satirizes.

Another example of Shearwater’s lopsidedness is found in chapter 5: Gumbril Junior is in the park with his friends and there is a poor, working class couple describing their hardships to onlookers (54-57). No one but Gumbril seems to care or feel any sympathy for the couple’s lot (58-59). Everyone is completely indifferent. When Gumbril tries to talk about it with Shearwater, telling him that “It’s appalling that human beings should have to live like that. Worse than dogs,” Shearwater is too concerned with himself and antivivisection to even listen to Gumbril’s concerns: “Dogs” he responds, “have nothing to complain of...Nor guinea pigs, nor rats. It’s these blasted
antivivisection maniacs who make all the fuss” (58). The juxtaposition and disparity between the two sentiments is striking. Shearwater completely misses the point. He is incapable of sympathy because he is too concerned with science and his lab experiments. He misses out on life and is not happy because he fails to see that life is not a laboratory and that people are not lab animals. In the end, he has nothing of substance to hold onto. Instead he holds on to the stationary bike’s handlebars and his experiments. The novel ends abruptly and in a deceptively fast pace, for although Shearwater pedals ferociously, he goes no where.

Just as Shearwater pedals frantically, ideas, art movements and society in general were moving about and changing at a frantic pace. There is no balance, no more moral values and no solid ground to stand on. In Shearwater’s case the rational side has taken over his entire self. He no longer resembles a man; instead he seems more like a machine. Even though he mentally understands that his problem is lack of proportion, he is unable, or maybe even unwilling to change.

**Conclusion**

That the novel begins in a church and ends in a laboratory is reflective of where Huxley believed his society was headed. A decrease in religious and artistic values resulted in a loss of societal standards. There was no more passion, only running and the affectation of passion. Lypiatt and Gumbril Senior are the only two characters who show some sign of passion; however, they end up losing the battle against the modern world that they live in as misfits. In the end, even Shearwater who seems to understand the solution to his problem, fails to attain the proportion he needs to become whole.
Like the characters, the novel is not balanced, nor does it offer any satisfactory resolution at the end. The characters do not progress or grow. However, this imbalance and stagnation is consistent with *Antic Hay*'s structure and style because it resembles the topsy-turvy world the characters live in and that Huxley satirizes. Just as Gumbril Junior finds no resolution or answer to his religious equation, neither does the novel provide any answers in the end. For those used to resolution at the end, this novel may leave one confused and unsatisfied; yet this was the general feeling that Huxley wanted to express and criticize. As Bowering suggests, "The scintillating novels of the twenties with their surface levity and underlying pessimism 'epitomized the disillusions, desperate gaiety and moral confusion' of the age" (Bowering 19).

Huxley can be seen as a moralist even early in his career. "Huxley's development as a moralist" can be seen when we examine the ideas that "firstly...led up to a moral crisis; and later of those which under the pressure of meaninglessness motivated the desire to seek a new and better way of life" (Bowering 22). When one analyzes and compares the ideas expressed in the novels with Huxley's essays and articles written in the twenties, one could see that there is a sense of lament over the loss of moral stability and values in society. The concept of art and literature as tools to regain moral stability and values as Arnold saw it was quickly losing any validity. This was partly due to the shift from an emphasis on content to one where the emphasis was placed exclusively on form. For someone like Huxley, who prefers proportion in art and in life and who prefers art that works as a vehicle for moral values, this shift in art was potentially detrimental to society. A focus on form to the exclusion of content was for Huxley a step towards
vulgarity and shallowness. In his opinion, a vulgar society produces vulgar art and vulgar art produces a vulgar society.

Also, the view of art as a commodity and as a symbol of wealth and status endangered the value of art and its potential of being a vehicle for morality. People were buying art for what it outwardly symbolized (wealth and status) and not necessarily for its intrinsic worth or meaning. Art collection and knowledge was becoming trendy, therefore, people indulged in this activity not for any true love of art, but because it was fashionable to do so. It was also becoming fashionable to equate the artist with the artisan and the work of art with crafts and furniture. For Huxley, this was a detrimental attitude that further devalued art. In the "Pierian Spring" (1925), Huxley laments the loss of artistic standards and a static tradition. He attributes this loss to too much knowledge: "our sympathy is so vast and we are so much afraid of showing ourselves intolerant towards the things we ought to like, that we have begun to love in our all-embracing way not merely the highest, in whatever convention, when we see it, but the lowest too" (219). He writes:

How many styles have come and gone during the last seventy years! Pre-Raphaelitism, impressionism, art nouveau, futurism, post-impressionism, cubism, expressionism. It would take the Egyptians a hundred centuries to run through such a fortune of styles. Today, we invent a new convention—or, more often, resuscitate a combination of old conventions out of the past—exploit it and throw it away, all in the space of five years. The fixity of the old traditions, the sure refinement of taste, born of
ignorance and intolerant fastidiousness, have gone. Will they ever return?” (218)

Huxley denounces the decadence and shallowness of twentieth century England and its art; as an alternative, he endorses a return to a sense of morality and values in art and life. Art and literature that is humanistic in nature, one that inspires its viewers and readers to greatness and one that leads and guides, is the kind of art that Huxley champions. He felt that a lot of the art being produced in the early twentieth century was not good at all. Mass culture and cultural instability contributed to the lack of quality in art. As a result, vulgar art reflected a vulgar society and vice versa.

Although Antic Hay lacks proportion and is not an organic whole, the call for proportion is still there. And although it is not explicitly stated, the novel endorses values and morality. The problem, however, is that the novel’s convoluted style and structure runs the risk of overshadowing Huxley’s call back to values and stability. At the end of the novel there is no resolution. The question whether tradition and values “will...ever return,” remains unanswered.
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