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Who Nose Best? A Sensory-Ethical Approach to Aldous Huxley's *Eyeless in Gaza*

Quem mete o nariz? Uma abordagem sensório-ética de Sem olhos em Gaza, *de Aldous Huxley*

Ákos Farkas [*]
Eötvös Loránd University of Budapest - ELTE

RESUMO: Este artigo busca demonstrar que *Sem olhos em Gaza*, de Aldous Huxley, é um romance memorialista tão exemplar quanto modelos amplamente reconhecidos desse subgênero, como trabalhos relevantes de James Joyce, Virginia Woolf ou William Faulkner e, sobretudo, *Em Busca do Tempo Perdido*, de Marcel Proust. Por meio de uma cuidadosa comparação do Bildungsroman escrito por Huxley na metade de sua carreira e o celebrado romance sequencial de Proust, essa contribuição à edição especial da *Contexto* propõe demonstrar como o emprego de métodos e conceitos dos estudos literários cognitivos suplementado com insights relevantes da crítica ética pode aprimorar nossa compreensão acerca de como literatura e ciência se complementam. Na conclusão, propõe-se que se Proust foi neurocientista da beleza, então Huxley pode ser concebido com um cientista cognitivo do bem, e ambos como investigadores da verdade.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Huxley. Proust. CLS. Olfato. Crítica ética.

ABSTRACT: This article aims to demonstrate that Aldous Huxley's *Eyeless in Gaza* is as much of an exemplary memory novel as such widely recognized specimens of the subgenre as James Joyce's, Virginia Woolf's, or William Faulkner's relevant works and, above all, Marcel Proust's *In Search of Lost Time*. Through a careful comparison of Huxley's mid-career Bildungsroman with parts of Proust's celebrated novel-sequence, this contribution to the special issue of *Contexto* proposes to show how the employment of the methods and concepts of cognitive literary studies supplemented with relevant insights of ethical criticism can enhance our understanding of how literature and science complement each other. In the conclusion it is

[*] PhD – Literature (2002, Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest).

proposed that if Proust was a neuroscientist of the beautiful, then Huxley can be seen as the cognitive scientist of the good, and both of them as seekers after the true.

KEYWORDS: Huxley. Proust. CLS. Olfaction. Ethical criticism.

> *They are able to move at will […] from the universe of discourse called "chemistry" to the universe of discourse called "ethics."* (Aldous Huxley)

Statistically and thematically, if not chronologically, Aldous Huxley's *Eyeless in Gaza* is a typical mid-career work. Published in 1936 as the writer's sixth novel of eleven, this biblically titled psychological conversion narrative is an important turning point in his intellectual, moral and spiritual evolution. Whether seeing it as Huxley's finest achievement (e.g., GARNETT, 1975, p. 250; MURRAY, 2 2, p. 294; FIRCHOW, 2 2, p. 159) or a needlessly drawn-out exercise in fashionable intellectualising (e.g., Q.D. LEAVIS,1975, p. 255; STEVENS, 1975, p. 261, BAKER, 1982, p. 184), most of the novel's early as well as later critics acknowledge the importance of *Eyeless in Gaza* as a document of change in the writer's overall outlook (e.g., ADAMS, 1975, p. 266; WASSERMAN, 1996, p. 132).

Although literary assessments abound, Huxley's trajectory of artistic-intellectual development replicated by the novel's autobiographical hero can be best summed up in philosophical terms – ideas borrowed from Søren Kierkegaard's system. In the Danish thinker's conception, the modern individual suffering from boredom, anxiety and despair needs to pass through three successive phases in order to attain regeneration: the aesthetic, the ethical and the religious. Resulting in the Kierkegaardian "Composition of Personality," these stages on life's way are the ones through which the novel's protagonist passes – as pointed out by Jerry Wasserman in his insightful article "Huxley's Either/Or."

A little more than halfway through the journey of his life, the protagonist of *Eyeless in Gaza* is awakened, by a strong somatosensory experience followed by a freak accident, to the recognition that he must change his life. Anthony Beavis celebrates his forty-second birthday by casually reviewing an odd assortment of family snapshots taken decades earlier, and then by the apparently unrelated act of enjoying the pleasures of the flesh with his young girlfriend, Helen Ledwidge. It is during this erotic engagement that the quirks of fate and memory provide Beavis with what later turns out to be a life-altering epiphany, one that causes this intellectual socialite to transform into an empathy-driven, responsible moral being ready to embrace values transcending his former, pleasure-seeking, quotidian existence. While making love to Helen on the flat rooftop of his villa on the Riviera, Beavis experiences a flash of episodic memory triggered by a whiff of the salty odour of his lover's pleasure-exercised body. The smell-cued recollection whisks Beavis back to "the nadir of [his] fortunes" (MECKIER, 1969, p. 149) – the messy suicide of Brian Foxe, the protagonist's loyal, long-time friend.

Hardly has Beavis the leisure to reflect on the distressing autobiographical memory when something even more unexpected happens: a frantically yelping dog falls literally out of the sky – in fact from an aeroplane flying by – smack onto the rooftop where the lovers embraced a moment earlier. Horrifyingly, the ill-fated fox-terrier splatters the love-exhausted paramours with the blood squirting from its mangled body. The horrid accident serves as yet another, this time far more shocking, reminder of young Brian's premature death by his own hands, motivated, in large part, by his friend Beavis's unconscionable prior behaviour. The shock-provoked confrontation with the long-supressed memory of his guilt is the starting point from which "scientifically" amoral Beavis can begin his year-long pilgrimage on the path that will lead him to accepting

personal responsibility, experiencing honest remorse and making meaningful amends.

This summary of an extended, highly complex and deliberately fragmented narrative may sound not only too simplistic but also jarringly pious for a paper on a descendant and admirer of the evolutionary scientist Thomas Henry Huxley, who introduced the very word "agnostic"[1] into intellectual discourse. It is well to remember though that *Eyeless in Gaza* ends with a chapter of its protagonist's dense spiritual meditation aiming at union with what Huxley was later to call the "transcendent Ground of all Being" (HUXLEY 1947, p. 1). But if that is so, then what is this paper doing in a selection of articles on literature and cognitive studies – a branch of systematic inquiry owing as much to science as it does to scholarship – rather than some other thematic compilation focussing on literature and religion or literature and philosophy? The explanation lies in the fact that regardless of the ethical reflections and idiosyncratic mysticism pervading its conclusion, *Eyeless in Gaza* is a storehouse of scientific reference and neuro-psychological insight, as the rest of this article is meant to demonstrate. Hence the predominantly, albeit not exclusively, cognitive approach to the subject of these investigations. However, a caveat and a brief personal detour may be in place before a more systematic examination of Huxley's *Eyeless in Gaza* is undertaken.

As anticipated by some important references to a major philosopher and some highly regarded literary scholars above, I cannot, and will not, ignore lessons

[1] Péter Dávidházi's paper "Thomas Henry Huxley and the Naming of Agnosticism" read at the Huxley-conference hosted by Eötvös Loránd University and the Hungarian Academy of Science in Budapest, 2019 (see <https://huxley125.wordpress.com/>) traces the term back to its Huxleyite inception, placing the word and its significance in a rich context of intellectual history. From Professor Dávidházi's contribution it clearly appears that T. H. Huxley's vaunted agnosticism was by no means tantamount to atheism or anti-religion. And yet, grandfather Huxley's spirited defence of the theory of evolution in the face of fierce attacks from the Christian right represented by Bishop Wilberforce in the famous Oxford debate of 1860 earned him the accolade of being Darwin's – and by extension science's – bulldog.

to be drawn from such more "conventional" branches of the humanities as classic philosophy and traditional literary criticism. My insistence on relying on authorities other than the strictly scientific is not only attributable to my background as an academic who has spent half a lifetime teaching and researching literature. Notwithstanding Aldous Huxley's diverse contributions to the sciences by telling us, through his novels as well as his non-fiction, "something directly about the nature of cognition" (SEMIR ZEKI cited in HOGAN, 2015, p. 273), we should bear in mind that first and foremost he was a novelist. Examining his work in general and *Eyeless in Gaza* in particular can still benefit as much from some familiar literary and philosophical considerations as it will no doubt profit by the employment of the more innovative approaches of cognitive literary studies (CLS). That borrowing from (and contributing to) neuroanatomy, evolutionary psychology, information technology and a range of other branches of the "hard sciences" has in recent times proved to be beneficial for the humanities does not mean that students of the arts and literature should uncritically accept the ideology of narrow scientism and thoughtlessly abandon the methods, assumptions and values of their own academic specialisation. This is not to deny that exposure to the growing body of CLS-oriented criticism – from, say, Jonah Lehrer's phenomenally successful (pun intended) *Proust Was a Neuroscientist* (2 7) to the collection *Cognitive Joyce* (2018) "scientifically" comparing the writer of *Ulysses* to his French contemporary[2] – has had a lot to do with my decision to venture into the to me formerly alien world of neuroimaging, laboratory experiments and social-psychological surveys to find out more about Huxley the "cognitive psychologist." Meanwhile, seeing how "cognitive literary critics are committed to issues animating literary and cultural studies" (ZUNSHINE, 2015, p. 2) has reassured me that by joining their ranks I can still to mine own self be true. As cogently argued and convincingly demonstrated by E. O. Wilson in the whole of his magisterial work on consilience, one does not have to transfer one's

[2] For a detailed introduction of *Cognitive Joyce*, see FARKAS, n. d.

disciplinary loyalty to the "other side" – the scientific side in my case – in order to accommodate, with all necessary circumspection, the approaches, insights and methods of the side which is better seen as complementary than oppositional.

Of more immediate relevance to my approach here is Patrick Hogan's theoretical piece "What Literature Teaches Us about Emotion" (2015), which has clearly demonstrated to me where such leading international experts of neurobiology as Semir Zeki and no lesser exponents of ethical criticism than a Martha Nussbaum can be seen to cross paths, part ways and be theoretically reunited (HOGAN, 2015, esp., p. 277-78 and 281-84). What is to follow should show whether my own efforts at invoking philosophers and literary scholars as well as laboratory researchers and science writers is worthy of such an inspiration. With that, it is time to return to Huxley and his psycho-philosophical Bildungsroman *Eyeless in Gaza* to see whether Huxley the "novelist-neuroscientist" knew best.

Huxley's and his novel's semi-autobiographical protagonist's shared *scientific* interests are given the clearest expression by Anthony Beavis's psychological, biological and physical speculations. His musings about the mind-body nexus or the reducibility of the self to a cluster of physical particles are prime examples of Beavis's turn of mind.[3] In more general terms, the novel as a whole can be regarded as a so-far unrecognised representative of *the literature of memory*, a body of fiction in the focus of a significant aspect of cognitive literary studies as represented by critics and researchers like Mark Rowlands or Suzanne Nalbantian. It is my contention that to the attentive reader *Eyeless in Gaza* is

[3] If not technically, at least thematically, descriptions of Beavis's speculations about his physical environment may be reminiscent of Leopold Bloom's internal reflexions on what he sees around him in James Joyce's *Ulysses*. The difference does not only lie in the divergent techniques of narrative representation (diary entries and third-person narration in *Eyeless* as opposed to interior monologue in *Ulysses*) – but in Beavis's more systematic and better informed comments than those characterising the highly idiosyncratic "Bloomisms" in Joyce's novel.

no less of an exemplary *memory novel* than such widely recognised specimens of the subgenre as James Joyce's, Virginia Woolf's or William Faulkner's finest work, and above all, Marcel Proust's novel-sequence *In Search of Lost Time* (*À la recherche du temps perdu*, 1913–1927).

The best-known and most frequently cited example of the convincing literary rendering of how autobiographical memories are activated by sensory triggers is of course *Swann's Way*, a novel treated as a prime example of the phenomenon by a host of neuroscientists as well as cognitive literary scholars such as Lehrer, Rabinowitz or Chu and Dowes. The first volume of Proust's *roman-fleuve* contains the celebrated madeleine episode where the flavour of a small, shell-shaped cake soaked in lime-blossom infusion evokes for the narrator-hero vivid and exquisitely pleasurable recollections of his distant childhood. What is far less widely known or recognised is that with *Eyeless in Gaza* Huxley has no less to offer the scientist or the scholar than any of their favourite modernist classics, including the one for whose author the Proust-phenomenon of memory studies has been named.[4] The scientist who wishes to examine, "beyond laboratories and experimental control," the manner in which memories are encoded, stored and retrieved has as much to gain from a careful reading of *Eyeless in Gaza* as the literary scholar aiming to tap into the "new scientific vigor [that] can nurture analysis of the arts anchoring their connection to the material world" (NALBANTIAN, 2 3, p. 2). If it is true, as convincingly argued by Jonah Lehrer in his popular contribution to literature-aided brain research, that "the reductionist methods of science must be allied with an artistic investigation of our experience" (LEHRER, 2 7, p. xii), then cognitive research can gain just as much from studying Huxley's *Eyeless in Gaza* as from

[4] Proust's classic has found its way even into a major handbook on emotions: Haviland-Jones and her co-authors make mention, in their chapter on olfaction, of how idiosyncratic autobiographical memories conjured up by olfactory events "have […] been immortalized in literature, most prominently by Marcel Proust in *Swann's Way*" (Haviland-Jones et al., 2016, 207). Maybe "most prominently," but certainly not most purely, as in Proust's case olfaction is coupled with gustation – smell with taste, as the tea-sipping, cookie-crumbling episode shows.

(re)reading Proust's *In Search of Lost Time*. It can indeed be argued that Huxley was no less of a "neuroscientist" than Proust, and that if the insight his memory-novel has to offer falls short of *Search* in scope, it goes beyond its French prototype in somatosensory intensity and, perhaps more importantly, with its ethical implications in terms of the integrity of selfhood seen by the later Huxley as an essential condition of personal responsibility for past actions.

Evidence to support the bold claim that Huxley exceeded Proust's achievement in such an important area can already be found in the first chapter of *Eyeless in Gaza*, set in southern France on a summer day of 1933, and then in subsequent chapters delving, analeptically, into the depths of the protagonist's past or anticipating his future. As suggested above, the first salient, ethically-charged, because at least vaguely guilt-inducing, memory event is the odour-evoked recollection preceding the horrendous dog incident. The moment Beavis catches a whiff of Helen's "sun-warmed skin impregnated with a faint, yet penetrating smell, at once salty and smoky" is fraught with significance (HUXLEY, 1955, p. 22). In itself, there would be nothing out of the ordinary about a pretty young woman's skin smelling "salty and smoky" under the circumstances: lying in the sun by the briny waves can easily create such an olfactory combination, which may even have a pheromone-like erotic effect. However, the ambiguity of the adjective *penetrating* demands some kind of psychological explanation. Despite the appropriateness of the hint at the sexual act couched in the root verb *penetrate*, the pungency of an odour whose unpleasant effect on Beavis is suggested by the adjective that in the given context seems to be at variance with what one might expect to sense, or perceive being sensed, in a romantic encounter such as the one described here.[5] The undeniable feeling of revulsion accompanying arousal that the word "penetrating" conveys may well be a function of the peculiar neurological

[5] I thank Prof. Ferenc Takács of Eötvös Loránd University for alerting me to the sexual implications of the word *penetrating*.

proximity of the areas activated by revolting *and* arousing stimuli in the human brain. As experiments aided by functional magnetic imaging (fMRI) have proved, the brain regions saliently activated in erotically aroused subjects were the same as the area most powerfully reacting to aversive sensory stimuli. As Rachel Herz puts it, "the reason lust and disgust are […] intertwined is because they are neurologically in bed together" – both functions being located in the brain structure known as the insular cortex (HERZ, 2013, p. 159).

Whether some sort of neuroscientific precognition was at work here or the writer was simply prompted by his classical education, which enabled him to recall Cicero's dictum that "the greatest pleasures are only narrowly separated from disgust" can neither be established beyond doubt,[6] nor would that knowledge contribute much to our better understanding of the episode in question. More, as it turns out, is at stake here than the nature and origins of Huxley's recognition of how lust and disgust are interrelated *as such*. The perceived unpleasantness of the skin-odour in the Riviera scene of *Eyeless* has much more to do with the (un)ethical, thoughtlessly irresponsible and in its consequences even deadly, past which it evokes than with the erotic present from which it arises. This is despite the fact that the specific memory of the protagonist's history recalled by the smell is not particularly disturbing in and of itself. Indeed, what first comes to Beavis's mind is a "pleasurable hour" spent many years ago with the childhood friend Brian "striking two flints together and sniffing […] at the place where the spark had left its characteristic tang of marine combustion" (HUXLEY, 1955, 18). We sense, however, that the seemingly innocent flash of recollection has something more ominous about it than either the odour of a lover's skin or the distant memory that the smell immediately triggers. Anthony's internal reflection on the episodic memory involving Brian illuminates the dangers of involuntary remembering beneath the seemingly "firm ground of […] sensual immediacy" (HUXLEY, 1955, 22). As it

[6] *Omnibus in rebus voluptatibus maximis fastidium finitimum est* (qtd. in Stone, 2 5, 83).

turns out, the memory event in question has a capacity for revealing unsuspected depths beyond the sensations of the pleasure-filled present and the recollection of an innocent-looking (or, rather, smelling) past.

It is with the smoky-smell episode, for the first time in *Eyeless*, that the reader of creative literary fiction gains a distinct advantage over the laboratory researcher of emotional cognition, in being able to assess the full experiential implications, in other words the "ecological validity" (see HOGAN, 2015, p. 275), of an apparently simple sensory experience. Or, to shift the emphasis from competition to cooperation, Huxley manages here to "use fine details to flesh out and make strikingly clear by implication [the] qualities" whose principle-based biological diagnosis is provided by science (WILSON, p. 238-39). Described by Wilson, in contradistinction to the scientist's "coarse grained" approach, as the artist's "fine grained" representation of human behaviour is present in the "novelistic strategy" employed by Kierkegaard. The philosopher's quasi-literary methods of dialogue, fictional diary, emplotment and humour, as explained by C. Stephen Evans, are meant to facilitate "the existential or subjective reflection Kierkegaard wants his readers to engage in" (p. 38) – an intention obviously shared by Huxley. This threefold analogy involving Kierkegaard, Wilson (himself an accomplished stylist) and the writer of *Eyeless*, is all the more surprising as the Danish thinker merits but a single, passing, reference in Huxley's ambitious comparative study of Western and Eastern mysticism *Perennial Philosophy* (p. 198), and no more than a dismissive comment in Wilson's *Consilience* (p. 37). Whatever their divergent approaches, the three historically and temperamentally distant thinkers are in a way united in their insistence on the importance of conveying experiential knowledge as well as, or in place of, propositional knowledge.

The validity of such general remarks can be clearly seen as we return to the relevant storyline of *Eyeless*. By the time we are informed of the circumstances

of Brian Foxe's suicide many years after the childhood flint-striking episode reminding Beavis of his personal responsibility for the events leading up to his friend's desperate deed, we have covered most of the novel's bulky volume. As we read on, we are treated to random instalments of the protagonist's biography – a process accompanied by repeated instances of olfactory sensations and odour-induced remembering at almost every turn of the plot. From the beginning to the end of this extended, time-shifting narrative, the recurrence of smell-triggered recollection turns out to be a standard feature of the various characters' lives – including but not restricted to significant moments in the biography of the novel's central character. Autobiographical memories cued by one strong odour or another are everywhere used as powerful stimuli of mental agitation or physical activity for Anthony Beavis, his widowed father, his lover Helen Ledwidge, and a host of marginal characters related to the three of them in one capacity or another.

A comparison with Proust's contribution to our understanding of sense-evoked memories becomes unavoidable at this point on account of the salient role of smells in the cognitive lives of various fictional characters in both writers' relevant novels. An important difference between *Eyeless in Gaza* and Proust's foundational work is that the key memory events represented in Huxley's novel are almost invariably focussed on smells, whereas related episodes in *Search* are based on various faculties representing the entire spectrum of the human sensorium. The reader's impression that autobiographical memories are triggered by the full range of sensory input in *Search* is not undermined by the fact that the best-known, and possibly most important, memory trigger for Marcel is indeed flavour, the element in taste which also depends on the sense of smell. No doubt, the prominent stimulus in the opening episode of *Swann's Way* is frequently cited as an illustration of how somatosensory remembering in *Search* is activated by the sometimes deliberate stimulation of the protagonist's

olfactory and gustatory faculties.[7] And yet, Proust's remembering subject – whether it is the narrator Marcel or his melancholy hero Charles Swann – is undoubtedly reminded of emotionally-charged moments of the past by *every* type of sensory experience. In *Swann's Way*, related stimuli thus range from the distant view of the emblematic church-tower of Combray, through a memorable phrase in the "Vinteuil sonata,"[8] or the searing feel of a hotel address "printed in letters of fire" on hurried notes sent by Odette to her desperately jealous lover Charles (PROUST, 1992, p. 474), to the starchiness of a napkin on the narrator's lips conjuring up boyhood memories of the touch of a towel and thence the "pure and saline" swells of the ocean at Balbec as recalled at the end of the sequence in *Time Regained* (PROUST, 1993, p. 258) – not to mention the powerfully evocative flavour of the tea-soaked madeleine on Marcel's palate at the beginning of *Swann's Way*. In scientifically-tested reality,[9] as in Proust's novel, sensations in the mouth and the nose are among the most potent reminders,[10] but smells and tastes are frequently supplemented with visual, auditory, and tactile-motoric stimuli throughout the French writer's magnum opus.

[7] Nalbantian calls it a "commonplace" to "cite Proust's madeleine episode as a classic literary illustration of the process whereby such a trigger of the senses evokes a memory" (p. 60). She also mentions by name some of the most important sources from Beckett through Deleuze to today's neuroscientists where the notable episode is discussed. My own, most prominent, sources on the madeleine sequence include Lehrer, Chu and Downes, Haviland-Jones, Zunshine as well as Nalbantian (see my "References" below).

[8] Huxley's awareness of Proust's multiple achievements in this particular area is well documented by his complimentary remark that the attempt, in the first part of *Search*, at giving a "literary rendering of […] music" was "remarkably successful" (HUXLEY, 1933, p. 249). The compliment could have been returned by Proust in acknowledgement of Huxley's no less remarkable success of rendering musical experience in *Point Counter Point*. In view of Huxley's vaunted musicalization of fiction in his earlier novel, it is quite astonishing how small a part is played by music in *Eyeless* when it comes to the representation of sensory-triggered remembering. Jean-Louis Cupers is right in observing that from *Eyeless in Gaza* music ceases to be the operative force of construction in Huxley's novels even as it remains a subject of reflection in his essays (1985, p. 254, my translation).

[9] See Chu & Downes as well as Herz quoted below.

[10] Citing the evidence of experiments conducted by four different pairs of researchers, Saive, Royet and Plailly conclude that "[a]mong all sensorial stimuli, odors appear to trigger the most vivid and emotional memories." Relying on the findings of another row of scientists, they also offer an anatomical explanation, pointing it out that "[t]he olfactory input has direct connections via the olfactory bulb and the primary olfactory (piriform) cortex onto two key structures involved in emotion and memory: the amygdala and hippocampus" (2014, n. p.)

By contrast, there is an almost dogged (in more than one sense) insistence on olfaction in Huxley's *Eyeless in Gaza*. Whether with the attraction of a fetish or the repulsion of a taboo, the ubiquity of smells exerts an overwhelming influence on the cognitive-affective functions of the novel's central characters. Little Anthony is reminded, during his mother Maisie's funeral service, of being cautioned by her now deceased mother against inhaling the germ-infected air of enclosed spaces such as a church. Similarly, an also younger Helen is revolted by all sorts of strong effluvia, whether emanating from raw meat at a butcher's shop or a village congregation on a wet Sunday morning.[11] Mark Staithes, Anthony's former schoolmate, has made a fortune selling expensive perfumes, whose origins, smell, and users he detests and despises. On entering his brother John's house, the protagonist's uncle James reacts with the revulsion of the repressed homosexual which "positively reeked of matrimony" (HUXLEY, 1955, p. 207). Before that, John Beavis himself seeks to keep the memory of his dead spouse alive by indulging in rituals of sniffing at Maisie's garments – an episode worthy of closer examination as seen below.

One prominent feature of the various sense-evoked recollections described in *Eyeless in Gaza* is their mostly negative emotional quality. As suggested by the predominance of pejorative terms of olfaction (the word "reek" appears exactly three times more frequently than the term "odour" in *Eyeless*), smells are rarely pleasant for the characters in Huxley's novel – whether inhaling them drags the given character back to his or her, mostly shameful or painful past, or traps them in a usually uncomfortable, stuffy and claustrophobic present. In *Eyeless*, pungent odours are most often associated with deeply disturbing

[11] That unpleasant olfactory experiences are repeatedly associated with church interiors in *Eyeless* and elsewhere in the Huxley oeuvre (see young Walter Bidlake's similar olfactory recollections in *Point Counter Point*) may be attributable to Huxley's peculiarly anti-ecclesiastic transcendentalism, but a deliberate swipe at the near-compulsive recurrence in Proust's *Search* of nostalgic memories of churches in Combray, Martinville and elsewhere cannot be ruled out either.

memories dominated by physical or moral decay often culminating in death. Beside the contrast in terms of the *range* of sensory functions – olfaction as opposed to the primary senses of seeing, hearing and touching – in the respective novels, the *valence* of the sense-evoked memory is thus the second striking difference setting Huxley's treatment of sensation-induced remembering apart from the typical Proustian "reminiscence." For the narrator and the central characters of *Search,* the emotional colouring of smell-cued memories is mostly that of nostalgic yearning. Even painful memories – occasional rejection by the mother or the habitual severity of the father for the child Marcel, betrayal at the hands of the lover and humiliation by his social inferiors for Swann and then for the adult Marcel – tend to be recalled in a spirit of forgiveness and reconciliation. In fact, most sense-evoked reminiscences have a positively soothing or vitalising effect in *Search*. Nostalgic remembering invariably follows whether the trigger is the taste and smell of the famous madeleine cookie soaked in herbal tea conjuring up the beautiful "waterlilies on the Vivonne and the good folk of the village and their little dwellings and the parish church" (PROUST, 1992, p. 54) or the "humanised, domesticated, snug, and exquisite" smells – "linen smells, morning smells, pious smells" – of aunt Léonie's rooms filling the narrator with a reassuring sense of predictable sameness and protective security even in retrospect. For Marcel, the recalled joys of yore are thus made sharper and the remembered sorrows of yesteryear blunter by the knowledge of their very pastness. Sense-dependent memories may, as Julia Kristeva aptly puts it, be painful, but they are nevertheless "rapturous" (2004, p. 18).

It may be worth asking whether Proust or Huxley is right in terms of real-life predominance where the valence of memory events triggered by somatosensory stimuli is concerned. Do sense-evoked memories tend to be rewarding, as they are with Proust, or are most of them repellent, as Huxley implies? As a survey article published in *Psychology Today* concludes, studies of post-traumatic

stress disorder (PTSD) have demonstrated that the valence of odour-cued memories is often negative (Lewis, 2015). The laboratory findings introduced in the article are confirmed by neuroanatomy, which locates the centre of anxiety in the brain's limbic system and within that in the amygdalas, a pair of almond-shaped clusters related to the transmission of olfactory stimuli as well as being "critical to fear memory" (NALBANTIAN, 2 3, 155). Such evidence seems to prove dark-browed Huxley right and serenely nostalgic Proust wrong.

On the other hand, neuroscientists Chu and Downes report that "odour-cued memories were rated" by participants in their experiment "as more pleasant" than memories called forth otherwise (CHU and DOWNES, 2 2, p. 511). The conclusion of their article is that data obtained from their "experiments exploring naturally occurring olfactory-cued autobiographical memories have shown convergent support for the Proust phenomenon" (CHU and DOWNES, 2 2, p. 517). In any case, the general assumption that odour-cued memories are accompanied by strong emotions of whatever hedonistic value is supported by the cumulative findings of a range of recently conducted experiments reviewed by Rachel S. Herz. This cognitive neuroscientist opens her article with the anticipatory claim that "odor-triggered memories evoke more emotional and evocative recollections than memories triggered by any other cue" (HERZ, 2016, p. 2). Although Herz's opening statement is fully supported by the specific data cited in her article, her general conclusion is somewhat qualified by the observation that "odor-evoked memories can *also* elicit unpleasant emotions," which can be "exceptionally potent triggers in post-traumatic stress disorder" (2016, p. 4, italics mine). This, however, might appear to be the pathological exception rather than the healthy rule, as a group of researchers cited in the article had "found that nostalgic scents elicited three times more positive emotions than negative emotions" (HERZ, 2016, p. 4). The evaluation

encapsulated in the playfully polysemic title of Chu & Downes' article thus seems to be validated by subsequent experiments: "Proust Nose Best."[12]

Caution is advised, however. It is not without a reason that Haviland-Jones and her co-authors collaborating on the chapter about olfaction and affect in the *Handbook of Emotions*, a major contribution to the field, speak with tangible reservations of the "long history of popular wisdom and naïve psychology, a history that often dismisses odor's importance while basking in its delights and distancing from its 'other side'" (p. 203). What seems to strengthen the case exemplified by the shocking smell-related episode of *Eyeless in Gaza* discussed above is, to quote the same handbook, "the observation that people exposed to chemical compounds traumatically, later may have serious reactions to chemosignal levels thought to be below threshold" (HAVILAND-JONES et al., 2016, p. 203). Weighing both types of scientific evidence in relation to the typical prevalence of smell-cued emotion, one is inclined to accept Haviland-Jones's closing observation. It must indeed be the case that "the exact mechanism" of how odours impact mood and emotional behaviour "has yet to be fully elucidated" (HAVILAND-JONES et al., 2016, 203). In light of the less than encyclopaedic knowledge of such mechanisms – or indeed any consensual interpretation of the existing evidence – no definitive, "scientifically sound," answer seems to be available for the question "Who knows best?" with regard to our two novelists' general evaluations of sense-triggered autobiographical memories.

While I prefer to leave the question of relative valence open for now, I have little doubt that Huxley was fully convinced that where it *really* matters, he knew better than Proust. Huxley's reasons for assuming that he was right and Proust in a way wrong had at least as much to do with ethics as they did with

[12] The fact that both "malodors" and smell-triggered emotions of a negative valence play a very marginal role in yet another major survey adds further evidence to support Chu & Downs' claims (see LARSSON et al., 2014).

science – Kierkegaard came before Pavlov or Freud. To clarify what this means, an episode from *Eyeless in Gaza* referred to above should be reviewed – the episode in question being less dramatic than the smashed-dog incident, but just as enlightening. This more "domestic" sequence, coming at a later point in the narration but chronologically predating the seaside episode by decades, involves Anthony's recently widowed father deliberately evoking odour-cued memories as he sniffs his dead wife's wardrobe. Nothing could be more nostalgic in Proust's way than the beginning of the widower's bedroom ritual: "Closing his eyes, he breathed the perfume [that Maisie's dresses] exhaled, the faint sweet essence of her body from across the widening abyss of time" (HUXLEY, 1955, p. 194). Soon after, however, the description takes a decidedly bizarre turn as we leave behind the elder Beavis's lyrical recollections of his late wife Maisie's "rounded flesh softly swelling and sinking" on "those Roman nights" of the couple's shared, romantic past (HUXLEY, 1955, p. 128). The nightly sessions of odour-induced remembrance of times past are replaced with the widower masochistically calling up the gruesome image of his dead wife's yawning tomb in order that he can go "to bed with yet another sword in his heart" (HUXLEY, 1955, p. 195). As the elder Beavis's smell-induced recollections, the masochistic as well as the nostalgic memories, all fade with the passing of time, morbidity itself is overcome by the frustrations of memory fatigue: "recently, it seemed, the sword had grown blunter. It was as though her death, till now so poignantly alive, had itself begun to die" (HUXLEY, 1955, p. 128).

The embarrassment and, possibly slight repulsion, that the episode may provoke in the queasier sort of reader is similar to the sentiment voiced by the elder Beavis's son Anthony as he treats Helen, at a point predating the falling-dog incident, to a satirical representation of "old Proust."[13] The writer of *À la*

[13] Whether the emotional response triggered by the clothes-sniffing incident in *Eyeless* is indeed closer to disgust than, say, to sadness or anger depends on the specific colouration of the individual reader's own "emotional memories" relevant to the given situation, as it is

recherche is patronizingly described by Anthony as "that asthmatic seeker of lost time […] for ever squatting in the tepid bath of his remembered past" (HUXLEY, 1955, p. 8). Helen's remark that Proust is like a personal enemy of her lover's is perfectly appropriate. The reason why Anthony "heaps such contumely" on the writer obsessed with the past also seems to be clear enough (FIRCHOW, 1972, p. 150). Most importantly for my argument, it is only the felicitous, mock-Shakespearean term contumely, rather than the vaguely postmodern conception of the self behind it, that I here borrow from Peter Firchow. What the American scholar argues in his study is the opposite of what I have in mind. For Firchow, it is the fragmented multiplicity of the self, rather than any supposedly deceptive unity or continuity, revealed by the character's own "superfluous memories" à la Proust, that Beavis would like to abandon for the sake of an artificially unified vision of himself as a detached philosopher. To my mind, it is precisely the unconnected, and hence inconsequential, multiplicity and discontinuity of the self that an as yet unreformed Beavis would desperately cling to, *pace* Proust. It is only in the course of his drawn-out and seemingly fragmented progress in the direction of an eventual acceptance of the ethical accountability deriving from the unity of selves past and present that Beavis labours first against and later towards. It must be the past revivified by memory – specifically the middle-aged protagonist's responsibility for his childhood friend's premature death and, in more general terms, his refusal to commit himself to a person, a cause, or a community: in short, to *respond* – that Beavis is desperately trying to evade.[14] That is why Marcel Proust, that

explained in another connection by Patrick Hogan (HOGAN, 2 3, p. 185). C. S. Ferns, one of Huxley's earlier monographers, certainly finds John Beavis's attempts to keep alive his wife's memory "distasteful" suggesting a masturbatory quality of the widower's closeted olfactory machinations. Being "the newest and most advanced in the pantheon of the six basic human emotions, […] disgust demands learning and deduction," as Herz convincingly argues (2013, p. 82) – hence the highly person-related quality of experiencing it.

[14] My understanding of Beavis's changing perception of his own past is closer to that of Jerome Meckier, who asserts, as I believe rightly, that "the unregenerate Beavis claims he is merely a succession of psychological states but the novel's structure, though chaotic at first, gradually reveals itself to be an *integral whole* in the Wordsworthian vein" (1969, p. 150, italics mine).

notorious reviver of bygone times, is Anthony Beavis's arch enemy. Reminding Huxley's unregenerate protagonist of the threatening implications of remembering, even apparently amoral Proust, stuck in the Kierkegaardian stage known as the aesthetic, can serve as an unwelcome harbinger of ethical awakening for Beavis.

Logical as the foregoing might appear to be, it would be a mistake to assume that Proust-despising Beavis is posited as all wrong and responsibly remembering, hence Proust-embracing Beavis is to be taken as all correct. For one thing, the protagonist's earlier swipes at Proust are nowhere in the later parts of the novel counterbalanced by any retractions whereby Beavis should make amends to Proust or whatever he thinks the French writer stands for. Also, while an unredeemed Beavis is certainly averse to letting himself be reminded by stray memories of his past omissions and turpitudes, and he rightly sees Proust and his creative method as the epitome of remembering as such, it does not follow that the implied author subscribes to Proust's perceived reasons for going in search of lost time. In this case, "the enemy of Huxley's enemy" – Proust as opposed to unregenerate, Proust-loathing Beavis – is not necessarily Huxley's "friend." Quite the contrary. If there is anything in this regard that Huxley shares with Beavis before *or* after the character's moral transformation, it is his deep aversion to the writer of *À la recherche*.

Huxley's own reservations concerning the French novelist and whatever he epitomised for him are set forth in his 1927 essay "Personality and the Discontinuity of the Mind." Here Huxley offers a detailed, and in its intention balanced, assessment of Proust's achievement. The meticulous subtlety and evocative power with which Proust's art captures "'the intermittences of the heart'" are duly acknowledged (HUXLEY, 1933, p. 240-41). However, the keen psychological observations made under such a heading in *Search* remain vacuous, as we are told. For Huxley, Proust is a "scientific voluptuary of the

emotions," lacking the ambition "to do more than know himself […] The idea of using his knowledge in order to make himself better never seems to have occurred" to the French novelist. This then is interpreted as a deficiency resulting in a "strange moral poverty" (HUXLEY, 1933, p. 247). Although there is less overt hostility here than in Beavis's acerbic remarks quoted above, the essay's image of the "retired invalid" savouring his memories in his sickroom is hardly more attractive than the picture of the naked androgynous figure rinsing his mouth with his own bath-water as Beavis sketches in his verbal caricature of Proust for the amusement of Helen.

It is worth noting, in a quasi-medical context, that Huxley's own, less offensive but equally trenchant, criticism of Proust may well have been related to the conception of asthma as an essentially self-induced ailment seized upon by the patient as an escape from the hard realities of human existence. Proneness to asthmatic seizures is thus (mis)represented as the symptom of the neurotic at best and the vice of the hysteric at worst.[15] In any case, when speaking for his own, non-fictional self, Huxley insinuates the same judgment as more outspokenly proffered by the otherwise fallible Anthony Beavis: the Proustian character's undeniably vivid remembrances serve no purpose other than arousing pleasurable memory emotions.

Such a less than benevolent interpretation of Proust and his creation's respiratory ailment is part and parcel of the philosophy believed by Huxley to have underlain Proust's sense-triggered recollections. This philosophy, in short,

[15] As late as 1959, Proust's biographer George D. Painter spoke of the onset of Proust's asthma at age nine as the would-be writer's "original sin" (vol. 1, p. 7). Painter then goes on to explain, in pop-Freudian terms, that in Proust's "attacks of asthma the same causes were at work as in his childhood fits of hysterical weeping; his unconscious mind was asking for his father's pity and his mother's love" (vol. 1. 12). We are then informed by Painter that Proust was a hypochondriac of sorts "who unconsciously preferred his asthma, and the way of life it necessitated, to the health of ordinary beings" (vol. 2, p. 52). Thankfully, later biographies see the nineteenth and early twentieth-century medical lore branding asthma as "pure neurosis" for what it is: "a compendium of errors" (CARTER, 2 0, p. 220).

is that of the intellectual hedonist – the hedonist of knowing through remembering. For Huxley, who with *Eyeless in Gaza* had entered what could be described with Kierkegaard as the ethical, as opposed to the aesthetic, stage and was about to reach the religious phase, hedonism was certainly not enough. Neither was sheer knowledge. What the writer of *Eyeless in Gaza* wanted was psychic regeneration through sense-triggered remembering, which would then lead to near-religious guilt. As the novel is meant to teach us, psychic reclamation, or spiritual redemption, can only come at the price of accepting responsibility awakened by *unpleasant* memories, followed by a firm commitment to the good cause – the cause of universal peace as Huxley believed according to the testimony of his later pacifist writings from his major philosophical essay *Ends and Means* through the peace-pledge pamphlet "What Are You Going to Do About It" to his swan song, the utopian novel *Island*.

One may not subscribe to the quasi-religious mysticism that Huxley's vaunted moral essentialism eventually led him to, and neither should one accept the philosophy of appeasement related to the writer's unilateral pacifism, in order to appreciate the purity of the writer's motives and the goodwill informing his mid-career novel. Huxley's blindness to the full implications of his French fellow-writer's significance, that is, the ethical, as well as the epistemological and aesthetic value of Proust's contribution to our understanding of sense-triggered remembering is another matter. But farsighted as in many ways Huxley may have been in other matters, not even the writer of the medically and socially prophetic novel *Brave New World* could have foreseen what impersonal, and hence *a*moral, pathogens of the much-maligned asthma would later be discovered, or how the therapeutic potentials of nostalgic remembering would be experimentally verified half a century after his death.[16]

[16] Relevant medical research found that "the autobiographical memory odor promoted deeper, slower and more relaxed breathing compared to odors that did not evoke a memory" (HERZ, 2016, p. 5). Just how important that may have been for chronically asthmatic and anxiety-ridden Proust is suggested by an important accessory result of the experiment. The scientist conducting the tests reported that "the autobiographical memories triggered by odors and

But then, one cannot have it all. Huxley's intense concentration in his novel *Eyeless in Gaza* on olfaction, the sensory faculty that today's laboratory experiments have proved to be the one most powerful trigger of sense-evoked remembering, and his convincing demonstration of how the negative, as well as the much better known positive, valence of smell-cued remembering can eventually help one to live a better life, bears comparison with Marcel Proust's rightly praised achievement. It would not be farfetched to say that if Proust was a neuroscientist of the beautiful, then Huxley could be seen as the cognitive scientist of the good, and both of them seekers after the true. In more general terms, as science and literature can, should and indeed do talk to each other, so can the aesthete, the moralist and the religious believer enter into meaningful dialogue. Kierkegaard, Proust and Huxley do not have to be opposed to each other: the good, the beautiful and the true are, after all, aspects of the same inclusive body of human interests. To see these ancient "transcendentals" in relation to something as earthly as a taste or a smell is something that Huxley, an enthusiastic proponent of immanent, or somatic, transcendence as he was, would certainly have applauded.

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depth of breath were found to be greatest among individuals who scored high in trait anxiety, implying that the stress reducing benefits of odor-evoked memories may be strongest for those with the most need for it [sic]" (HERZ, 2016, p. 5). Remembering those church-towers, hawthorns, water-lilies, and peaceful interiors in and around the biographical models of Combray must have brought much-needed relief – something happily shared by the empathic reader with Marcel and his creator.

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