East and West in Aldous Huxley's Travel Writings

Daniela Nadia MACOVEI*

Abstract

Writing has always been, inter alia*, an effective means of manipulation or, at least, of forming opinions. Travel writing is one form of writing by means of which authors relate their impressions about places and people they visited, about societies and cultures they encountered; some of them, if not all, also create certain images and strong opinions in the minds of the readers about the things they read of, all the more so if the readers have never had the chance to visit the places themselves. We are all, therefore, subject to influence, we are the product of what we read and, generally, of the things and ways we are taught.*

The present article will try to explore Aldous Huxley's travel writing in order to understand how much of it is fiction, and how much are the writer's real subjective impressions and opinions, on the one hand; and, on the other hand, the fiction part will be scrutinized in order to identify clichés, i.e. 'the rhetorical figures one keeps encountering in [...] descriptions of the ''mysterious East'', as well as the stereotypes about the African (or Indian or Irish or Jamaican or Chinese) mind', as Edward Said (1994: xi) so rightfully puts it. At the same time, one is to be aware of the fact that, even if Huxley's travel writing is, to some extent, subject to such stereotyped thinking, he nevertheless alters to some degree both this typical thinking and the reality itself through his subjective perceptions (which continuously modified themselves all along his life and career) - a reason why his travel writing is congenially different from one stage to another.

Key words: travelogues, stereotype, culture, authority/power, imperialism

Introduction

Travelling has always been one of humankind's top interests – as a necessity or/and pleasure. And telling about their travelling has always come as an attachment, as a natural follow-up. This paper sets out to explore Aldous Huxley's travel essays, since they form the main focus of our interest in the East and West encounters discernible in his works. His travel writings are relevant to this kind of encounters because most of his journeys took place in the East, which is indicative of the fact that he had a great interest in it. What is of interest for us is the follow-up of his travelling experiences. Firstly, it is important to establish what

*PhD Student, "Dunărea de Jos" University of Galați, Daniela.Macovei@ugal.ro

precisely travel essays are, since we need to discern how much fact and how much fiction exist in them in order to decide whether they are a reliable source of representation of the things they account for or not. To this end, a number of suggestions will be further considered.

Between fact and fiction

From a literary point of view, writing about travelling is part of any literature. In addition, it has enormous significance, since it is through this type of writing that people get to find out about unknown places and people, about new discoveries and new experiences. It has been argued that travel writing is fore and foremost a rendering of the facts of the travel, which is inevitably accompanied by the impressions of the author on what happened during his experience. Whether, indeed, travel writing is based only on facts or not is still an open discussion and in this paper we would like to approach this issue from the following points of view: one is Tzvetan Todorov's structuralist perspective, and the other is Jacques Derrida's. Using Todorov's idea of 'general poetics' (those widely recognised rules and norms that we understand to be generic) we may identify "coherent generic criteria of travel writing, and illustrate how those rules and regulations operate in a particular text" (Lisle 2006: 36).

For example, one of the manners in which travel writers authorise their texts by means of facts is to ensure the readers that they have actually been there and seen that with their own eyes. In "Primitive Minds" Huxley adds a comment in parentheses which is meant to this exact purpose – to ensure factual authorisation to his text: "He can never be more than a time-tourist, looking on from outside at a spectacle which, however curious and beautiful (and, having just come down from Guatemala highlands, I can vouch for its strangeness and beauty), remains essentially alien."(2002: III, 360). Not only that he himself was there, but also the fact that the experience is fresh (he *just* came) is meant to reinforce the fact that his impressions may under no circumstance be compromised.

Another element that is part of the logistics of factual authorisation of travel writing is the one through which the information comes from a native. In this way the reader is reassured that he is given first-hand data, uncompromised by a non-native's ignorance, misunderstanding or wrong interpretation. In "Tibet", Huxley makes use of a native who is also supposed to be a well-knower of the state of affairs in the area: "My informant about Tibetan civilization is a certain Japanese monk of the name of Kawaguchim who spent three years in

Tibet at the beginning of the present century" (2002: I, 419). A lot of other details follow on this monk and his experience which are intended, obviously, to throw a good light on him, imposing him to the readers as an authority:

> His account of the experience has been translated into English, and published, with the title Three Years in Tibet, by the Theosophical Society. It is one of the great travel books of the world, and, so far as I am aware, the most interesting book on Tibet that exists. Kawaguchi enjoyed opportunities in Tibet which no European traveller could possibly have had. He attended the University of Lhasa, he enjoyed the acquaintance of the Dalai Lama himself [...]. He knew his Tibet intimately; [...] (Huxley 2002: I, 419).

This account goes on and on for over another page and at the end of reading it is, indeed, impossible not to look up to this monk and not to trust every word he utters. These kinds of methods through which a travel writer authorises his work are completed by an extremely rich range of details regarding the place and people they are supposed to have visited. This is also meant to create as vivid a tableau vivant as possible in order to make the account attractive to the public. To the same purpose it is highly probable that the writer also embellishes things with his imagination (and he thus invents things), as well as altering the account by means of methods specific to the fictional writing. If it were not so, we would probably read only guidebooks and historical recordings. Travel writers are aware of the fact that "the audience wants to have it both ways - it wants to have adventures in faraway lands, but 'at the same time wants to feel itself within a world declared real by such up-to-date studies as political science, sociology, anthropology, economics and contemporary history" (Lisle 2006: 38). Consequently, inscribing travel writings in a certain genre and attempting to circumscribe its characteristics within sharp contours seem a rather unprofitable affair. And, to our peace of mind, we can remember Derrida's standpoint vis-a-vis genres. "Every text participates in one or several genres, there is no genreless text; there is always a genre and genres, yet such participation never amounts to belonging". For Derrida, the principle of contamination requires only participation in a discursive economy but never membership. "Although genres work to organise texts, they also resist their own self-identification as a genre during the process of organisation." In his view, a genre should not be understood as a law or a limit, but rather as a 'floodgate' (2013: 14).

Modernism – the shift from inside out

So much now for the dilemma of the category of travel writings. What we are more interested in is that, no matter how much fact or fiction Huxley put in his travel essays, the core is that he did write them with a purpose. And it is this intention that stirs our curiosity. For the beginning, we should bear in mind that Huxley belongs to the era of modernism – that is a time when a crucial switch happened: the attention turns completely from the outside to the inside. Records of this shift may be found in many diverse fields, from psychology and biology to literature and science. This change is felt also in travel writing – writers are themselves more attracted to rendering their own impressions and feelings as these were unleashed by the experience of travelling rather than to just telling the story of the adventure. Moreover, this alteration brought about with it another one, as well, which was beautifully expressed by Lisle Debbie: "social and psychological issues are more important than facts about places and events. [...] It is as if travel writers have recognised that what readers really want is a gripping tale full of instinctive and often "taboo" judgements about other places and people" (2006: 46).

This turn to the self and to the others, at the same time, is indicative of an extremely important stage in the evolution of humankind which coincides and, we dare say, is in fact triggered by, the beginning of globalisation. The fact that people start to be able to have quite easy access to other places and people has a tremendous impact on their curiosity and their opening to others. This opening is translated by their interest in knowing others, in exploring others, in comprehending others. In this respect, we share the same feeling as Todorov, who sensibly remarks that:

> …travelogues are politically important because they provoke self-reflexivity: they force us to ask questions about difference, questions about our own encounters with otherness and, ultimately, questions about ourselves and our identities in relation to difference. His hope is that travel writers can 'discover other men and women whose vision of the world is different, even if only slightly, from theirs. This, in turn, could change them and lead them to be a little more just (1995: 66).

Imperialism in travel writings

Unfortunately, this curiosity is also connected to another state of affairs. The era we are talking about is the one of the great expansion of the West to territories outside West. The era of modernism is also the era of

colonialism and imperialism, of the great projects of conquest and exploration, on the one hand, but of exploitation and aggressiveness, on the other hand, as well. Therefore, we again find Todorov´s reasoning on journey narratives sensible; in his opinion, this is underlined by a convergence with otherness; at the same time, we must understand the newly modified process taking place within the writer – between his interior and exterior – as being part of the global spectrum of transcultural relations. And when adding the new politics of colonialism, it turns out that Todorov was correct when insinuating that travel writing is related to a colonial history. „In order to ensure the tension necessary to the travel narrative, the specific position of the colonizer is required: curious about the other, and secure in his own superiority" (Todorov 1995: 69).

This idea of difference and superiority leads us to the next level of our analysis. Since the self becomes aware of itself only through encounters with otherness and since Western travel writing cannot escape its colonial characteristic, we have to question what is it that keeps the situation unaltered. The reason is to be found partly in what Mary Louise Pratt calls the "imperial order". She explains that this order was given to the Europeans by the travel books that they themselves wrote about the non-European world, offering to their audience "a sense of ownership, entitlement and familiarity with respect to the distant parts of the world that were being explored, invaded, invested in, and colonized" (2008: 3). Furthermore, as Lisle Debbie (2006: 73) argues following Edward Said, "the logic of identity/difference operated through the more general coding of East and West," which made it possible for the travel writer to be "constructed as the typical Western scholar, adventurer and explorer", and all others to be "constructed as variously uncivilised, dangerous, mysterious, untrustworthy and so on". The existence of this "moral disengagement" which allowed travel writers to classify the people and places they encountered during their journeys is motivated by the existence of an a priori assumed Oriental secondariness. Besides, it is also the spirit of the modern era that adds a stronger shade of detachment and Huxley is fully aware of it:

> The men of earlier cultures were tactually aware of external reality. Their relations with it were, so ta say, marital; the world was their wife, and a wife is the full enjoyment of her conjugal rights. Whereas the moderns are voyeurs. A squint through the binoculars and then goodbye (2002: III, 535)

At first sight, we may be easily induced the impression that Huxley himself may be one of the "beneficiaries" of this mentality, when we read such comments like "Frankly, try how I may, I cannot very much like primitive people. They make me feel uncomfortable. 'La betise n'est pas mon fort'" (2002: III, 513

All through his travel essays, and also on different and numerous occasions in his novels, he is very critical about Indians, whom he considers underdeveloped, and he does not hesitate in expressing his most profound disgust with their dirty and barbarian conditions of living.

In "Srinagar", part of *India and Burma*, he renders in detail the extremely disgusting manner in which people use water:

> The Kashmiris are proverbial throughout India for the filthiness of their habits. Wherever a choice is offered them between cleanliness and dirt, they will infallibly choose the latter. They have a genius for filthiness (2002: II, 423).

He then gives details about the fact that there is a tap through which pure filtered water from the mountains came and was collected in a reservoir. And continues:

> The fresh water ran sparkling from the tap; but their instinct was to take only the standing fluid in the uncovered tank. [...] looking out in the morning, we could see our sweeper crouching on the brink to perform his ablutions. First he washed his hands, then his feet, then his face; after that he thoroughly rinsed his mouth, gargled, and spat into the tank. Then he douched his nose. And when that was finished, he scooped some water in his hands and took a drink. A yard away was the tap. He preferred the tastier water from the tank (II, 423).

The vivid details and storytelling have the tremendous power to make us believe every word we read and to believe that Huxley's impressions are first-hand and absolutely correct. Moreover, in the above paragraph he actually recounts facts, pure facts and we thus find no reason not to believe them. But as much as we would like to imagine that travel essays are full of fiction, too, we still find it difficult to think that these accounts are just fiction. This is why we find it adequate to consider these accounts first-hand and rendering reality, but at the same time to look for a reason why the author would render them in this way. To this purpose, we had better pay more attention to Edward Said who identifies that "authors are [...] very much in the history of their

societies, shaping and shaped by that history and their social experience in different measure" (1994: xxii).

At the same time, it would be sensible of us to remember that Huxley lived in the heyday of the imperial era and therefore his writings bear the marks of this phenomenon. We also take into consideration the fact that Said might be right when arguing that he is of the opinion that:

> All the energies poured into critical theory, into novel and demystifying theoretical praxes like the new historicism and deconstruction and Marxism have avoided the major, I would say determining, political horizon of modern Western culture, namely imperialism (1994: 60),

and also that although "in much recent theory the problem of representation is deemed to be central, yet rarely is it put in its full political context, a context that is primarily imperial" (1994: 56).

It is clear now that taking imperialism into consideration, especially when analysing texts written during that period, is of paramount importance. Over and over again, Huxley behaves like an imperialist and refers to the Easterners as to the subject ones, the secondary ones, the subordinates with "their humiliating and gravely ludicrous relations with the English", even when it is about "some Rajput descendant of the Sun going out of his way to be agreeable to the official who, though poor, insignificant, of no breeding, is in reality his master" (2002, II, 487).

In this respect, Huxley may have hardly escaped the strong influence of the policy of empire, as "the empire functions for much of the European nineteenth century as a codified, if only marginally visible, presence in fiction" (Said 1994: 63). Even though not stated clearly, it goes without saying that the empire is the authority. Its presence is confirmed by reality in the colonies, for example by such "curious unwritten law which decrees that European women shall dance in public with no Indian below the rank of Raja" (Huxley 2002, II, 488).

Said (1977: 3) also asserts that:

> So authoritative a position did Orientalism have that I believe no one writing, thinking, or acting on the Orient could do so without taking account of the limitations on thought and action imposed by Orientalism. In brief, because of Orientalism "the Orient" was not (and is not) a free subject of thought or action.

In consequence, probably everything we read about the Orient is subject to this authority. And indeed, Huxley's writings abound in remarks that emphasize the power that this authority gave to the Westerners.

> Talking with Europeans who live and work in the East, I find that, if they love the East (which they mostly do), it is always for the same reason. In the East, they say, a man is somebody; he has authority and is looked up to; he knows all the people who matter and is known. At home, he is lost in the crowd, he does not count, he is nobody. Life in the East satisfies the profoundest and most powerful of all instincts – that of self-assertion. [...] he has slavish servants to order about, dark-skinned subordinates to whom it is right and proper to be rude. Three hundred and twenty million Indians surround him; he feels incomparably superior to them [...] (2002: III, 488).

The domination over the colonies turns out to be extremely efficacious since the subject peoples have got the habit of reacting so promptly with servitude and recognition of the authority of the Europeans: "Our race allied us to the authorities; in this country a white skin is almost an official uniform" (Huxley 2002: III, 537). And besides the efficiency of the system that rules them, it is the subject peoples who reinforce the Europeans' power:

> I remember so many other pregnant trifles. The pathetic gratitude of a young man in an out-of-the-way place, to whom we had been ordinarily civil, and his reluctance to eat a meal with us, for fear that he should eat it in an un-European fashion and so eternally disgrace himself in our eyes. The extraordinarily hearty, back-slapping manner of certain educated Indians who have not yet learned to take for granted their equality with the ruling Europeans and are forever anxious loudly to assert it. The dreadfully embarrassing cringing of others (II, 488).

These attitudes, the humble one from the part of the Indians, on the one hand, and the pretentious one from the part of the Europeans, on the other hand, go together for centuries.

> … driving out of Bombay along one of these populous highways, I felt (but more acutely) that amazement [...] at my own safety and comfort, at the security of my privileges, at the unthinking and almost unresentful acceptance by millions of my less fortunate fellow-beings of my claim to be educated, leisured, comparatively wealthy. [...] our pretensions [...] are still higher in India than in Europe [...] (II, 413).

Later on he refers to the Arabs who once ruled Sicily as "anything but

trespassers on that classical ground" and he admits that he felt "quite indignant" because "it was asking too much" of him to be expected to look upon Sicily as a piece of "unredeemed Arabia." (II, 415).

Examples of commentaries in which "we" is ostentatiously used in opposition with "they" are also very frequent:

> We, who were brought up on open windows, clean shirts, hot baths, and sanitary plumbing, find it hard to tolerate twice-breathed air and all the odours which crowded humanity naturally exhales. Our physical education has been such that the majority of our fellow-beings, particularly those less fortunately circumstanced than ourselves, seem to us slightly or even extremely disgusting (II, 431)

So much emphasis is put on the inferior condition of the non-Europeans that we feel almost ashamed by so much arrogance and intolerance:

> To the Westerner all Indians seem old men of Thermopylae. In the ordinary affairs of life I am a bit of a Thermopylean myself. But even I am puzzled, disquieted, and rather exasperated by the Indians. To a thoroughly neat-minded and efficient man, with a taste for tidiness and strong views about respectability and the keeping up of appearances, Indians must be literally maddening. [...]They fail „to do anything properly". He is struck by their "extraordinary "sloppiness" and inefficiency of the symbolical performances. The sublime is constantly alternated with the ridiculous and trivial, and the most monstrous incongruities are freely mingled (II, 464).

But we may be able to understand such stances of aggressiveness if we understand the influence of Orientalism. In Edward Said's words, "Orientalism is a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between 'the Orient' and (most of the time) 'the Occident'" (1977: 3). "It is in relation to their opposites that things have significance for us," (2002: II, 464), Huxley himself argues in an essay, and this seems to come as a reinforcement of the theory which says that the self (the Occident's in this case) comes to construct or identify itself (in opposition to the Orient's). That the process of self- and cultural construction is based upon binaries may be exemplified by *Cawnpore,* part of the essay *India and Burma* in volume 2 of *Complete Essays*, which is the best example that comes in handy as relevant for the two-sided constructions of the mentality common at that time and the writings that stand as relevant for such thinking, as it is structured plainly in two distinct paragraphs in which Huxley speaks punctually about the two

worlds in juxtaposition – our world with our mentality and their world with their mentality. The first part begins like this: "In the West we admire [...]," and the second like this: "In India things are different."

In Hulme's and Youngs's opinion, Edward Said's 'Orientalism' has come to represent:

> the single most influential paradigm in studies of travel writing and of colonial cross-cultural exchanges. Orientalism is an academic tradition, a style and, most importantly, a way of 'making sense' of the Middle East that draws on a binary epistemology and an imaginary geography that divides the world into two unequal and hierarchically positioned parts: the West and the East, the Occident and the Orient, Christianity and Islam, rationalism and its absence, progress and stagnation (2002: 107).

We, therefore, may excuse Huxley for his attacks, as it is also needless to say that he, like all other writers contemporary with him, wrote "with an exclusively Western audience in mind". But admitting this actually reinforces the accusation – he speaks so disparagingly about people in absence that we cannot help but blame him of malevolence and even rudeness. For example, since he made it clear that Indians' odours disgust him completely, we become convinced of the other consequences of this disgust after we read his argument on this topic in another essay:

> Physical stink is a symbol, almost a symptom, of intellectual and moral inferiority. All the members of a certain group stink physically. Therefore, they are intellectually and morally vile, inferior, and, as such, unfit to be treated as equals (2002: V, 330).

What we inevitably infer is that he also considers the Indians an inferior race, just as good to be treated as inferiors. Moreover,

> 'Orientalism' denotes a discourse of power that is always and inescapably systematic, repetitive, and unchanging. It perpetuates stereotypes of the Middle East and Middle-Eastern people that, Said and others have argued, hardly changed over a millennium. [...] Real Orientals are denied humanity, history, and the authority to speak about and represent themselves, an authority which Orientalist travel writing reserves for occidentals (Hulme and Youngs 2002: 107).

It becomes quite clear now that Huxley seems to be one of the beneficiaries and users of this discourse, and his Indian essays speak it loud: "Indian servants are scarcely more than pieces of furniture. They have obliterated themselves, and nothing remains in your presence but a

kind of abstract and un-individualized efficiency – or inefficiency, as the case may be" (Huxley 2002: II, 515). "These [stereotypes] include the image of the oriental despot, the corrupt prophet Muhammad, the religiously fanatic Muslim, the lascivious oriental female, and the somewhat different image of the noble Arab nomad studied in this chapter" (Hulme and Youngs 2002: 107). About Arabs, Huxley says:

> They have relapsed – all except those who are educated according to Western methods – into pre-scientific fatalism, with its attendant incuriosity and apathy. They are the "dull inquirers who, demanding an account of the phenomena of a watch, rest satisfied with being told that it is an engine made by a watchmaker." The result of their satisfaction with this extremely unsatisfactory answer is that their villages look like the ruins of villages, that the blow-flies sit undisturbedly feeding on the eyelids of those whom Allah has predestined to blindness, that half their babies die, and that, politically, they are not their own masters (2002: IV, 419).

However, as much as we would like to presume that Huxley is under the influence of such stereotyped thinking justified by the superiority conferred by the imperialistic policy of the time and Orientalism, we still cannot and do not want to imagine that he could exaggerate so much as to create such a degree of disgusting characters and actions exclusively because of this influence or completely out of his imagination. In support of this argument we find it useful to remark that even Edward Said, as a great critic of the Westerners who misrepresent the Orient, said that "none of this Orient is merely imaginative" (1977: 2).

We argue that, in spite of all influence of Orientalism, in spite of all fiction that is supposed to be inherent to travel writing, Huxley makes a correct point as to the non-European parts of the world that he visited – places and people alike. We argue that what may be interpreted as an influence of Orientalism (whose definition in this context is that it means a stereotyped system of thought based on misconceptions about the East created by the West in order to support the latter's policy of domination) is in fact merely Huxley's personal taste. That this taste is moulded by or within the framework of a system, it is true. But it is just that this system is not the Orientalist one since we consider that Huxley possesses enough qualities that make him be above such a malevolent system. We refer to his intelligence, to his humanistic spirit, to his orientations towards pacifism, to his craving for a harmonious philosophy of life. For example, if we are to find out what he thinks about systems of thinking – say, Orientalism – he is of the opinion that:

> [t]he real, the instinctive motives behind the activities of Right Thinkers (for little or nothing is done in this world for purely intellectual reasons and only an instinctive source can provide the energy required for vigorous action) are fear, envy, and self-assertiveness – fear of the unfamiliar and of that which violates the implicitly accepted taboos, envy of those who amuse themselves by doing things which the Right Thinkers have been brought up to consider immoral, and self-assertive, tyrannical desire to compel all men to conform to their own standards of belief and conduct. [...] Few human beings are prepared to admit in public the real motives which animate them. Few indeed will admit these motives to themselves. We rationalize our non-logical, instinctive actions; we invent reasons for whatever we do, however manifestly irrational (2002: II, 82).

and that, "Whatever is, is right. Becoming familiar, a dogma automatically becomes right" (II, 162).

If we are to refer to Orientalism as an institution, Huxley's remark may be clarifying:

> Our own institutions and habits seem to us to possess a peculiar reasonableness conspicuously absent from those of people belonging to other cultures. But that is due not so much to the intrinsic qualities of the institutions themselves as to the weakness of minds for which the familiar is inevitable and the indigenous the sacred and right (III: 419).

Moreover, referring to sociologists, who are supposed to criticize and improve the existing social organizations, Huxley reproaches them that "they accept things as they are, but too uncritically; for along with the existing social institutions they accept that conception of human nature which the institutions imply" (II, 145)

Whether the institution of Orientalism, say, influenced him or not, or, to what extent, it is really hard to say. On the one hand, he gives reference about the East on a quite professional-like tone:

> The East. The common associations of this word in western minds are as follows: gorgeousness, mystery, wealth, wisdom. In point of fact, oriental life, so far from being gorgeous is mostly drab and uniform. It is mysterious only to those who do not know the languages of the natives and are not familiar with their customs. When you know him and make allowances for his upbringing, the Oriental proves to be exactly like the Westerner – just a man, good, bad, stupid or intelligent, first-rate or tenth-rate, as the case may be. [...] As for the wisdom of the East – it is patchy, curate's–egg sort of wisdom. Orientals are often wiser than we are, inasmuch as they do not wear themselves out in

> completely futile and aimless activity for activity's sake. They do not waste their lives piling up an unnecessary amount of money which they will never have the leisure to spend, nor sufficient knowledge of the art of living to spend well. But they are surely unwise in their complacent toleration of dirt, disease and remediable misery. [...] For many Westerners the word "East" brings with it emotions of uplift and religiosity, coupled with a hope, a vague belief that the solution of all our problems is implicit in it (II, 61).

On the other hand, his travel writings bear a more personal touch. This is why his own perception on India, for instance, is not to be ascribed altogether to Orientalism's influence, but rather to his own personal reaction to the conditions offered there. As a matter of fact, he explains:

> To tell the truth, I am glad to be leaving India. [...] I have seen many delightful and interesting things, much beauty, much that is strange, much that is grotesque and comical. But all the same I am glad to be going away. The reasons are purely selfish. What the eye does not see, the heart does not grieve over. It is because I do not desire to grieve that I am glad to be going. For India is depressing as no other country I have ever known. One breathes in it not air but dust and hopelessness. The present is unsatisfactory, the future dubious and menacing. The forces of the West have been in occupation for upwards of a century and a half. And yet five generations of peace and settled government have made the country, as a whole, no more prosperous than it was in the days of anarchy; according to some authorities, such as Digby, they have made it much poorer. Millions, at any rate, are still admittedly without enough to eat, all their lives. Custom and ancient superstition are still almost as strong as they ever were, and after a century and a half of Western government, nine Indians out of ten cannot read or write, and the tenth, who can, detests the European who taught him II, 497).

If this is the state of affairs regarding his impressions on the East, there is nothing to blame, since there are a number of reasons why things should be left as they are. One aspect that should be taken into consideration when judging people's reactions is the one dealing with truth (what truth is and what is actually true about one thing or another).

> To talk about truth as a relationship between human notions and things in themselves is an absurdity. Truth is internal. One psychological fact is as good as another. [...] The only facts of which we have direct knowledge are psychological facts. [...] Our views about the significance or meaningless of life will finally depend upon the events of our own personal existences and

> on the way our temperaments react to these events. [...] and each, so far as he himself is concerned, is right (II, 301-306).

Furthermore, not only does the truth of a specific situation depend on the individual reaction, but even when large corpuses of events and phenomena are considered, such as comparisons between the civilizations of Greece and China, evaluations are difficult to make:

> For measurements cannot be made without rulers [...] The difficulty of measuring and comparing civilizations consists in the fact that we have no rulers and no scales in terms of which to make our measurements. Or rather, we have no single ruler, no one scale; we are embarrassed by an almost indefinite wealth of possible measuring rods, by a multitude of vague and incommensurable scales. This is inevitable. For though "civilization" is a single word, the phenomena it connotes are very numerous and belong to a great variety of material and spiritual categories (II, 103).

All the more are we incapable of evaluating and understanding others, the more different we are from them. Huxley is not a naive who imagines that equality really exists; on the contrary, he asserts that:

> To me, at any rate, it seems in the highest degree unlikely that mankind will ever feel itself intimately and livingly one. The differences of race and place are too enormous. There is such a thing as absolute alienness – an absolute alienness which no amount of Esperanto and international government, of movies and thousand-miles-an-hour aeroplanes and standardized education will ever, it seems to me, completely abolish (II, 312).

He is also aware of the limits of the human mind, the source of people's incapability for empathy:

> The inadequacy of man's imagination and his immense capacity for ignorance are notorious. We act habitually without knowing what the more distant results of our actions are likely to be – without even caring to know. And our ability to imagine how other people think and feel, or how we ourselves should think and feel in some hypothetical situation, is strictly limited (III, 468).

Elsewhere, he tries to explain why people treat others badly:

> Evil may be defined as the refusal on the part of the evil doer to regard other men and women as persons. We do evil when we treat others as

> though they were not persons, like ourselves, but as though they were things. Cruelty, lust, rapacity, domineeringness – analyse any one of these deadly sins; you will always find that its essence consists in this: the treating of a person as though he were wholly or partly a thing. Judge them by this standard, and you must conclude that there is an element of it even in certain charitable organizations (III, 418).

Bottom line, people will always have this difficulty, by default, we may add, to understand and sympathize with others different from themselves: "To understand sympathetically, with one's whole being, the state of mind of someone radically unlike oneself is very difficult – is, so far as I am concerned, impossible" (II, 172-3). From his standpoint, this is the main and strongest reason for wrong-doing, low opinions and bad treatment. "All other people's prejudices are either idiotic or immoral," he maintains, "and their habits are generally disgusting. We are all other people to somebody. [...] Travel is valuable because it impresses on the mind of the traveller (that is, if he is willing to let himself impressed) the second half of the Great Truth stated above. "We are all other people to somebody" (II, 72).

This is why Huxley remains rather pessimistic about the future of the relations between people and peoples:

> The conclusion of all this is that we must not be too easily optimistic about the approaching millennium of international good will. That temperamental differences and dislikes should lead to warfare is deplorable; but, so long as actual slaughter can be prevented, it may be that such differences and dislikes are desirable and good. The world would indeed be a dismal place if everybody were like everybody else and humanity were one vast mutual admiration society (II, 102).

The solution he finds appropriate in order to settle things down or prevent them altogether is stated in the following terms*:*

> If two nations wish to remain at peace, the best thing they can do is not to strike up an acquaintance but to remain, if possible, in total ignorance of one another's existence. [...] In the days of good Queen Bess, England had no trouble with India for the good reason that Indians and Englishmen were absolute strangers to one another, they have made an intimate acquaintance since, with the result that the Indians dislike the English and the English are bothered to death by the Indians. It is the same with China (II, 99).

The explanation comes in just a few lines later, reinforcing the ideas exposed so far on the difference and the impossibility of empathy inherent in the human nature, due to this natural difference among people and peoples:

> Believers in *tout savoir c'est tout pardoner* will object that these misunderstandings between peoples are due to insufficient reciprocal knowledge. They are right in theory. If Englishmen knew the Indians so completely that they could feel exactly as Indians feel, they would identify themselves with the Indian cause, would give the country instant independence, and decline to sell another yard of Lancashire cotton on Indian soil. But the Englishman, if he has been born and brought up outside India, cannot in the nature of things know the Indians completely and cannot identify himself with them. That is why he continues to govern, and sell his cotton (II, 100).

In spite of his dim expectations, he still finds a positive side of the issue and puts it forward in his characteristically satirical manner:

> It is an absurd state of affairs. But I am glad it exists. How dull world would be, if uniformity were complete, if everyone perfectly understood everyone else and there were no mistakes, no injustices, no arguments at cross purposes! The fact that every nation is foreign to every other is one of the principal guarantees that humanity will never die of boredom. May the work of Babel never be undone! (II. 127).

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