

BOOKS BY  
ALDOUS HUXLEY

POINT COUNTER POINT  
PROPER STUDIES  
ESSAYS NEW AND OLD  
JESTING PILATE  
TWO OR THREE GRACES  
ALONG THE ROAD  
THOSE BARREN LEAVES  
YOUNG ARCHIMEDES  
ANTIC HAY  
ON THE MARGIN  
MORTAL COILS  
CROME YELLOW  
LIMBO  
LEDA: AND OTHER POEMS



## Point Counter Point

*by*

ALDOUS HUXLEY

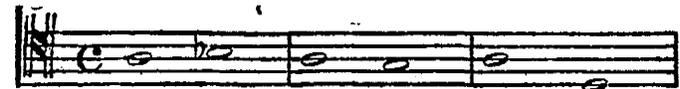
“Oh, wearisome conditions of humanity!  
Born under one law, to another bound,  
Vainly begot and yet forbidden vanity:  
Created sick, commanded to be sound.  
What meaneth Nature by these diverse laws—  
Passion and reason, self-division’s cause!”

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foul means as well as fair. Travelling about, being unfixed, being a spectator—that was like you. You're being compelled to do what's like you." There was a silence. "And living in a kind of dust-heap," Spandrell added, "that's like me. Whatever I do, however hard I try to escape, I remain on the dust-heap. I suppose I always shall." Yes, always, he went on thinking. He had played the last card and lost. No, not the last card; for there was one other. The last but one. Would he also lose with the last?

## CHAPTER XXXVII.

SPANDRELL was very insistent that they should come without delay. The *heilige Dankgesang eines Genesenen an die Gottheit, in der lydischen Tonart* simply must be heard.

"You can't understand anything until you have heard it," he declared. "It proves all kinds of things—God, the soul, goodness—inescapably. It's the only real proof that exists; the only one, because Beethoven was the only man who could get his knowledge over into expression. You *must* come."

"Most willingly," said Rampion. "But . . ."

Spandrell interrupted him. "I heard quite by accident yesterday that the A minor Quartet had been recorded for the gramophone. I rushed out and bought a machine and the records specially for you."

"For me? But why this generosity?"

"No generosity," Spandrell answered laughing. "Pure selfishness. I want you to hear and confirm my opinion."

"But why?"

"Because I believe in you, and if you confirm, I shall believe in myself."

"What a man!" mocked Rampion. "Ought to join the Church of Rome and have a confessor."

"But you *must* come." He spoke earnestly.

"But not now," said Mary.

"Not to-day," her husband echoed, wondering as he spoke why the man was so strangely insistent. What was the matter with him? The way he moved and spoke, the look in his eyes . . . So excited. "I have innumerable things to do this afternoon."

"Then to-morrow."

As though he were drunk, Rampion was reflecting. "Why not the day after?" he said aloud. "It would be much easier for me. And the machine won't fly away in the interval."

Spandrell uttered his noiseless laugh. "No, but *I* may," he said. "I shall probably be gone by the day after to-morrow."

"You hadn't told us you were going away," said Mary. "Where?"

"Who knows?" Spandrell answered, laughing once more. "All I know is that I shan't be here any more."

"All right," said Rampion, who had been watching him curiously, "I'll make it to-morrow." Why is he so melodramatic? he wondered.

Spandrell took his leave.

"What was wrong with him?" said Rampion, when he was gone.

"I didn't notice anything particularly wrong with him," Mary answered.

Rampion made a gesture of impatience. "You wouldn't notice the Last Judgment," he said. "Didn't you see that he was holding down his excitement. Like the lid of a saucepan on the boil—holding it down. And that melodramatic way of laughing. Like the conscious villain in the play. . . ."

"But was he acting?" said Mary. "Was he playing the fool for our benefit?"

"No, no. He was genuine all right. But when you're genuinely in the position of the conscious villain in the melodrama, you inevitably begin to behave like the conscious villain. You act in spite of yourself."

"But what's he being a conscious villain about?"

"How on earth should I know?" said Rampion impatiently. Mary always expected him, by some mysterious and magical intuition, to know everything. Her faith sometimes amused and sometimes pleased, but sometimes also annoyed him. "Do you take me for Spandrell's father confessor?"

"There's nothing to fly in a rage about."

"On the contrary," said Rampion, "there's practically nothing not to fly in a rage about. If one keeps one's temper, it's because one lives most of the time with one's eyes shut, half asleep. If one were always awake, my God! There wouldn't be much crockery unsmashed." He stalked off to his studio.

Spandrell walked slowly eastward from Chelsea along the river, whistling to himself over and over again the opening phrases of the Lydian melody from the *heilige Dankgesang*. Over and over again. The river stretched away into the hot haze. The music was like water in a parched land. After so many years of drought, a spring, a fountain. A watering cart rumbled past trailing its artificial shower. The wetted dust was fragrant. That music was a proof, as he had said to Rampion. In the gutter a little torrent was hurrying a crumpled cigarette packet and a piece of orange peel toward the drain. He stopped whistling. The essential horror. Like carting garbage; that was what it had been. Just nasty and unpleasant, like cleaning a latrine. Not terrible, so much as stupid, indescribably stupid. The music was a proof;

God existed. But only so long as the violins were playing. When the bows were lifted from the strings, what then? Garbage and stupidity, the pitiless drought.

In the Vauxhall Bridge Road he bought a shilling packet of writing paper and envelopes. For the price of a cup of coffee and a bun he hired a table in a tea shop. With a stump of pencil he wrote. "To the Secretary General, Brotherhood of British Freemen. Sir, To-morrow, Wednesday, at five p. m. the murderer of Everard Webley will be at 37, Catskill Street, S.W. 7. The flat is on the second floor. The man will probably answer the bell in person. He is armed and desperate."

He read it through and was reminded of those communications (written in red ink, to imitate blood, and under the influence of the serial stories in *Chums* and the *B.O.P.*) with which he and Pokinghorne Minor had hoped, at nine years old, to startle and terrify Miss Veal, the matron of their preparatory school. They had been discovered and reported to the head master. Old Nosey had given them three cuts apiece over the buttocks. "He is armed and desperate." That was pure Pokinghorne. But if he didn't say it, they wouldn't carry revolvers. And then, why, then it wouldn't happen. Nothing would happen. Let it go. He folded the paper and put it into the envelope. There was an essential silliness, as well as an essential nastiness and stupidity. He scribbled the address.

"Well, here we are," said Rampion, when Spandrell opened his door to them the next afternoon. "Where's Beethoven? Where's the famous proof of God's existence and the superiority of Jesus's morality?"

"In here." Spandrell led the way into his sitting room. The gramophone stood on the table. Four or five records lay scattered near it. "Here's the beginning of the slow movement," Spandrell went on, picking up one of them. "I won't bother you with the rest of the quartet. It's lovely. But the *heilige Dankgesang* is the crucial part." He wound up the clockwork; the disc revolved; he lowered the needle of the sound box onto its grooved surface. A single violin gave out a long note, then another a sixth above, dropped to the fifth (while the second violin began where the first had started), then leapt to the octave, and hung there suspended through two long beats.

More than a hundred years before Beethoven, stone deaf, had heard the imaginary music of stringed instruments expressing his inmost thoughts and feelings. He had made signs with ink on ruled paper. A century later four Hungarians had reproduced

from the printed reproduction of Beethoven's scribbles that music which Beethoven had never heard except in his imagination. Spiral grooves on a surface of shellac remembered their playing. The artificial memory revolved, a needle travelled in its grooves, and through a faint scratching and roaring that mimicked the noises of Beethoven's own deafness, the audible symbols of Beethoven's convictions and emotions quivered out into the air. Slowly, slowly, the melody unfolded itself. The archaic Lydian harmonies hung on the air. It was an unimpassioned music, transparent, pure, and crystalline, like a tropical sea, an Alpine lake. Water on water, calm sliding over calm; the according of level horizons and waveless expanses, a counterpoint of serenities. And everything clear and bright; no mists, no vague twilights. It was the calm of still and rapturous contemplation, not of drowsiness or sleep. It was the serenity of the convalescent who wakes from fever and finds himself born again into a realm of beauty. But the fever was "the fever called living" and the rebirth was not into this world; the beauty was unearthly, the convalescent serenity was the peace of God. The interweaving of Lydian melodies was heaven.

Thirty slow bars had built up heaven, when the character of the music suddenly changed. From being remotely archaic, it became modern. The Lydian harmonies were replaced by those of the corresponding major key. The time quickened. A new melody leapt and bounded, but over earthly mountains, not among those of paradise.

"*Neue Kraft fuehlend*," Spandrell quoted in a whisper from the score. "He's feeling stronger; but it's not so heavenly."

The new melody bounded on for another fifty bars and expired in scratchings. Spandrell lifted the needle and stopped the revolving of the disc.

"The Lydian part begins again on the other side," he explained, as he wound up the machine. "Then there's more of this lively stuff in A major. Then it's Lydian to the end, getting better and better all the time. Don't you think it's marvellous?" He turned to Rampion. "Isn't it a proof?"

The other nodded. "Marvellous. But the only thing it proves, so far as I can hear, is that sick men are apt to be very weak. It's the art of a man who's lost his body."

"But discovered his soul."

"Oh, I grant you," said Rampion, "sick men are very spiritual. But that's because they're not quite men. Eunuchs are very spiritual lovers for the same reason."

"But Beethoven wasn't a eunuch."

"I know. But why did he try to be one? Why did he make castration and bodilessness his ideal? What's this music? Just a hymn in praise of eunuchism. Very beautiful, I admit. But couldn't he have chosen something more human than castration to sing about?"

Spandrell sighed. "To me it's the beatific vision, it's heaven."

"Not earth. That's just what I've been complaining of."

"But mayn't a man imagine heaven if he wants to?" asked Mary.

"Certainly, so long as he doesn't pretend that his imagination is the last word in truth, beauty, wisdom, virtue, and all the rest. Spandrell wants us to accept this disembodied eunuchism as the last word. I won't. I simply won't."

"Listen to the whole movement, before you judge." Spandrell reversed the disc and lowered the needle. The bright heaven of Lydian music vibrated on the air.

"Lovely, lovely," said Rampion, when the record was finished. "You're quite right. It is heaven, it is the life of the soul. It's the most perfect spiritual abstraction from reality I've ever known. But why should he have wanted to make that abstraction? Why couldn't he be content to be a man and not an abstract soul? Why, why?" He began walking up and down the room. "This damned soul," he went on, "this damned abstract soul—it's like a kind of cancer, eating up the real, human, natural reality, spreading and spreading at its expense. Why can't he be content with reality, your stupid old Beethoven? Why should he find it necessary to replace the real, warm, natural thing by this abstract cancer of a soul? The cancer may have a beautiful shape; but, damn it all, the body's more beautiful. I don't want your spiritual cancer."

"I won't argue with you," said Spandrell. He felt all at once extraordinarily tired and depressed. It had been a failure. Rampion had refused to be convinced. Was the proof, after all, no proof? Did the music refer to nothing outside itself and the idiosyncrasies of its inventor? He looked at his watch; it was almost five. "Hear the end of the movement at any rate," he said. "It's the best part." He wound up the gramophone. Even if it's meaningless, he thought, it's beautiful, so long as it lasts. And perhaps it isn't meaningless. After all, Rampion isn't infallible. "Listen."

The music began again. But something new and marvellous had happened in its Lydian heaven. The speed of the slow mel-

ody was doubled; its outlines became clearer and more definite; an inner part began to harp insistently on a throbbing phrase. It was as though heaven had suddenly and impossibly become more heavenly, had passed from achieved perfection into perfection yet deeper and more absolute. The ineffable peace persisted; but it was no longer the peace of convalescence and passivity. It quivered, it was alive, it seemed to grow and intensify itself, it became an active calm, an almost passionate serenity. The miraculous paradox of external life and eternal repose was musically realized.

They listened, almost holding their breaths. Spandrell looked exultantly at his guest. His own doubts had vanished. How could one fail to believe in something which was there, which manifestly existed? Mark Rampion nodded. "Almost thou persuaded me," he whispered. "But it's *too good*."

"How can anything be too good?"

"Not human. If it lasted, you'd cease to be a man. You'd die."

They were silent again. The music played on, leading from heaven to heaven, from bliss to deeper bliss. Spandrell sighed and shut his eyes. His face was grave and serene, as though it had been smoothed by sleep or death. Yes, dead, thought Rampion as he looked at him. "He refuses to be a man. Not a man—either a *dæmon* or a dead angel. Now he's dead." A touch of discord in the Lydian harmonies gave an almost unbearable poignancy to the beatitude. Spandrell sighed again. There was a knocking at the door. He looked up. The lines of mockery came back into his face, the corners of the mouth became once more ironic.

"There, he's the *dæmon* again," thought Rampion. "He's come to life and he's the *dæmon*."

"There they are," Spandrell was saying, and without answering Mary's question, "Who?" he walked out of the room.

Rampion and Mary remained by the gramophone, listening to the revelation of heaven. A deafening explosion, a shout, another explosion and another suddenly shattered the paradise of sound.

They jumped up and ran to the door. In the passage three men in the green uniform of British Freemen were looking down at Spandrell's body. They held pistols in their hands. Another revolver lay on the floor beside the dying man. There was a hole in the side of his head and a patch of blood on his shirt. His hands opened and shut, opened again and shut, scratching the boards.

"What *has* . . .?" began Rampion.

"He fired first," one of the men interrupted.

There was a little silence. Through the open door came the sound of the music. The passion had begun to fade from the celestial melody. Heaven, in those long-drawn notes, became once more the place of absolute rest, of still and blissful convalescence. Long notes, a chord repeated, protracted, bright and pure, hanging, floating, effortlessly soaring on and on. And then suddenly there was no more music; only the scratching of the needle on the revolving disc.

\* \* \*

The afternoon was fine. Burlap walked home. He was feeling pleased with himself and the world at large. "I accept the Universe," was how, only an hour before, he had concluded his next week's leader. "I accept the Universe." He had every reason for accepting it. Mrs. Betterton had given him an excellent lunch and much flattery. The *Broad Christian's Monthly* of Chicago had offered him three thousand dollars for the serial rights of his *St. Francis and the Modern Psyche*. He had cabled back demanding three thousand five hundred. The *Broad Christian's* answer had arrived that afternoon; his terms were accepted. Then there were the Affiliated Ethical Societies of the North of England. They had invited him to deliver four lectures each in Manchester, Bradford, Leeds, and Sheffield. The fee would be fifteen guineas per lecture. Which for England wasn't at all bad. And there'd be very little work to do. It would just be a matter of rehashing a few of his leaders in the *World*. Two hundred and forty guineas plus three thousand five hundred dollars. The best part of a thousand pounds. He would go and have a talk with his broker about the position and prospects of rubber. Or what about one of these Investment Trusts? They gave you a very safe six or seven per cent.

Burlap whistled softly as he walked. The tune was Mendelssohn's "On Wings of Song." The *Broad Christian* and the Affiliated Ethicals had made him spiritually musical. He whistled with no less satisfaction when he thought of the day's other triumph. He had definitely got rid of Ethel Cobbett. The moment had been auspicious. Miss Cobbett had gone away for her holiday. These things are easier to do by post than face to face. Mr. Chivers, the business manager, had written a business-like letter. For financial reasons a reduction of the staff of the *Literary World* was urgently necessary. He regretted, but . . . One month's notice would have been legally sufficient. But as a token of the directors' appreciation of her services he was enclos-

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ing a cheque for three months' salary. Any references she might require would always be forthcoming and he was hers faithfully. Burlap had tempered Mr. Chivers' business-likeness with a letter of his own, full of regrets, and friendship, and jeremiads against a public that wouldn't buy the *Literary World*, and lamentations over the defeat of God, incarnated in literature and himself, by Mammon in the person of Mr. Chivers and all business men. He had spoken of her to his friend Judd of the *Wednesday Review*, as well as to several other people in the journalistic world, and would, of course, do everything in his power to etcetera.

Thank goodness, he reflected, as he walked along whistling "On Wings of Song" with rich expression, that was the end of Ethel Cobbett so far as he was concerned. It was the end of her also as far as everybody was concerned. For some few days later, having written him a twelve-page letter, which he put in the fire after reading the first scaring sentence, she lay down with her head in an oven and turned on the gas. But that was something which Burlap could not foresee. His mood as he walked whistling homeward was one of unmixed contentment. That night he and Beatrice pretended to be two little children and had their bath together. Two little children sitting at opposite ends of the big old-fashioned bath. And what a romp they had! The bathroom was drenched with their splashings. Of such is the Kingdom of Heaven.

THE END.

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