



THIS MAY BE MY LAST CUP OF TEA

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The Aldous Huxley text:
The Doors of Perception, Harper Perennial, NY, 2009.

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In his book, *The Doors of Perception*, Aldous Huxley claims each one of us is potentially Mind at Large. By exploring his specific mind, he finds mescaline to be a way to “cleanse the doors of perception” and, thereby, enter this Mind of the universe. The phrase, “cleanse the doors of perception” comes from William Blake’s *Marriage of Heaven and Hell*: “If the doors of perception were cleansed everything would appear as it is Infinite. For man has closed himself up, til he sees all things thro’ narrow clinks of his cavern.” This idea echoes Plato’s “Allegory of the Cave” (*Republic* 514a–520a).

One way the “Allegory” can be interpreted is epistemologically. What can we know? And how do we know it? Plato contends that we are limited in our knowledge because we only see shadows of the real world. In the cave, prisoners see the flickering images of objects projected onto the cave wall by the light of a fire. One prisoner breaks away from his fellows and ventures outside the cave. He is overwhelmed by the intensity of the true light and the intellectual satisfaction he receives from the display of forms he experiences in the real world; he returns to the cave to tell of his vision; here, no one believes him; and the group convince him he has been mistaken.

On his mescaline trip, Huxley experiences something of the true light, the drab being bright, the inside being outside, the insignificant being important:

Mescaline raises all colors to a higher power and makes the percipient aware of innumerable fine shades of difference, to which, at ordinary times, he is completely blind (p.27)

and

It was odd, of course, to feel that “I” was not the same as these arms and legs “out there,” as this wholly objective trunk and neck and even head (52)

and, finally, he realizes that

Today the percept had swallowed up the concept. I was so completely absorbed in looking, so thunderstruck by what I actually saw, that I could not be aware of anything else. Garden furniture, laths, sunlight, shadow these were no more than names and notions, mere verbalizations for

utilitarian or scientific purposes, after the event (53).

My own experience corresponds to Huxley's. I took peyote and had a rush of superpowers granted by Mescalero, wild colors, crazy movements, significant encounters. Here are my field notes from this peyote trip.

I finish my reading Hydiat's *Blind Owl* and ingest eight capsules of peyote. August 1964, I await what a writer of an article in Time claims will be the strangest experience of my life. My patience wavers, so I take another eight caps, light up a joint, and drink a beer. Then, I walk to the corner druggist and sign for two bottles of codeine cough syrup, knocking them off at the end an alleyway. A door slams shut behind me.

Streaks of purple light, raw as butchered beef, flood in on a high tide of effulgent hallucination, as one solitary child stands upon the brink of knowing the Meaning of the Universe, partially seeing—furry clouds modulating in confusing colors—the essence as if always known, what does essence mean?—the primary substance emerging in eclamptic convulsions, granted by Divine Sophia *a priori* understanding, a fateful step into the opaque transparency of contradiction, where death is relative to absolute birth, an aftermath of rhythm and sound contrasting with shades of fuming gray, curling, covering, uncovering the piano of Armageddon.

I lean against the alley wall. Currents of mist form and play in and out between the fence slats—a child's first sight of unrecognizable twinkles of bronze light, a partial appearance in one dusty corner of desolate shapes of undulating turmoil, fluctuating figments of remorse and fear, a paraphrase of past captured, held in wonder, accepted as the fragrant blossom of fragmented eternal fruition—an epiphany of my mortal nature draped in flowing lavender—but as I look closer, my clothes are wrinkled, my hands are wrinkled, and as these synapses fire, an abundance of paisley swirls are saturated in green and then drip from gashes in my fingertips.

I reach the street, the sidewalk heaving, parking meters drooping like

sunflowers, people moving in ectoplasmic quivers—can they see the ecstasy and nightmare of tremulous trepidation on my face?—the street a sulfurous plane of carrion, the sky is yellow, and at my feet an abyss of weird, wild delight and grizzly horror, butterflies of gas and putrid phantoms nourished on tortured prayers.

My heart twists like a snake in hot water, ice-blue blood in my nerves, animal blood cursed and coursing, translucent blood trapped in a fiery alchemical casement, even as this alchemy, converting each moment to the next, fashions freeways in my heart—my life in seaward ruin, retreads bare, a mummy cloth stuffed in my blood-clotted soul, breaking full tilt to the moon.

I sit in the Mediterranean Café drinking double espressos, listening to ethereal voices, then to the Garden Spot for a pack of Gauloises, stop by Mario's for a plate of rice and beans, decide to take in *Battleship Potemkin* at the Cinema Guild—but when Mother Russia comes down the Steps of Odessa, I freak-out and head down Dwight Way to the Steppenwolf where I can drink and blaspheme in peace—*Abandon All Hope Ye Who Enter Here* and below that, another sign—*For Madmen Only!*

A table of Hell's Angels are deep in their cups with Mahler's *Songs of a Wayfarer* accompanying their animated movement, strobed by candles in the deep shadows—Scorpio, Scorpio rising, I feel gladness linked to madness. I sit at a small table by the wall down range from the boisterous boys with their furious guise, and the wood grains form hieroglyphs, characters moving in rhythms syncopated to my breathing, waves of color, flowers whispering I am a special guest in this sad dream—knowing, when a moth flies out of my eye, the Dead will teach me to love.

A heavenly biker named Michael joins me, and I focus on what he is saying, but his words come out in slow motion—something about efficient work starts from idle, not from toil, or perhaps his motorcycle idles and he want me to pay the toll, so I project myself frame by frame through the flames onto an accelerating explosion of leather and chrome. Oh, God, I will keep on until I reach your blessed Paradise!

Like Dante, I returned from my trip to Paradise. There was laundry to do—I had to write my *100 Cantos* (D Press, Sebastopol, 2004). Like Plato's prisoner, I came back

to the cave. After my peyote trip, I knew there was another reality, and this solved my epistemological questions. However, a metaphysical question remained. Why is there a laundromat rather than emptiness? I spent four years in solitary retreat doing Tibetan yogic practices to reframe the question: Why is there emptiness that manifests as something rather than nothing?

Wonderfully trippy.
—John Keats

A trip that launched a thousand books.
—Neil Cassidy

Jampa doesn't need drugs. He is drugs.
—Salvador Dali



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