SELF-REPRESENTATION AND PUBLIC REPRESENTATION OF SELF THROUGH DIALOGUE IN ALDOUS HUXLEY'S *POINT COUNTER POINT*

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Abstract

The paper takes into consideration the concept of identity, trying to explore the relationship between self-representation (or personal identity) and public representation (or social identity) in everyday dialogue, as illustrated by Aldous Huxley in *Point Counter Point*. Literary criticism has largely emphasized the satirical dimension of this novel, which depicts English high society and intelligentsia in the 1920s. The main objective of our paper is to demonstrate that the essential source of the comical and satirical dimension of Huxley's novel consists in the discrepancy between the culturally mediated image that characters want to project in social life and the representation that the others have of them.

The theoretical framework used refers mainly to Goffman's sociology, which described the individual within social ritualistic interaction, and the sociolinguistic theories of politeness, including Brown and Levinson's (1978/1987) seminal theory, and especially Spencer-Oatey's (2007) point of view regarding the concepts of face and identity.

Keywords: *self-representation*; *public representation*; *identity*; *face*; *fictional dialogues*; *Aldous Huxley's* Point Counter Point

1. Introduction

The paper takes into consideration the concept of identity, trying to explore the relationship between self-representation (or personal identity) and

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public representation (or social identity) in everyday life through dialogue. For this purpose, we have chosen Aldous Huxley's novel *Point Counter Point*. The issue of identity in Huxley's novel is related to the modernist reflections of split consciousness between internal *versus* external ego (see Allen 1979). In all his literary work, but particularly in this novel, Huxley seems deeply preoccupied with the problem of how cultural discourse influences, transforms or perverts the real human nature, in its essential attributes. The reflection on the dichotomous nature of human being, as an individual being, who has personal needs and genuine aspirations, and a socio-cultural being, who must fit into a generally accepted culturally mediated representation, is peculiar to Huxley's vision and is what made his work distinctive and representative for the modernist thinking (see, among others, Bode 1990; Reichmann 2012).

Criticism has largely emphasized the satirical dimension of Huxley's novel, which depicts English high society and intelligentsia in the 1920s (see Baker 1982; Firchow 1972; Meckier 1969, 2006, 2010). The main objective of our paper is to demonstrate that the essential source of the comical and satirical dimension of the novel consists in the discrepancy between the culturally mediated image that characters want to project in social life and the representation that the others have of them. Huxley's narrative technique in *Point Counter Point*, based on multiple juxtaposed perspectives, polyphonic interferences of characters' stream-of-consciousness thoughts, verbal exchanges and metanarrative insertions, enables a dynamic and complex view of the English upper-class society. Consequently, Huxley's novel allows us to observe the cohesive or, on the contrary, the dissociating role of the dialogue in promoting one's personal and social image, as well as to grasp to what extent the sympathy or antipathy as emotional responses of individuals depend on the others' projections about them. It also enables us to explore to what extent the concrete projection and perception of face and identity interfere with the politeness constraints in the ongoing dialogues.

The theoretical framework of our paper is mainly represented by Goffman's sociology, which describes the individual within the social ritualistic interaction and which imposed the concept of face as an essential analytical tool. As Goffman (1956: 6) outlines:

> "Society is organized on the principle that any individual who possesses certain social characteristics has a moral right to expect that others will value and treat him in a correspondingly appropriate way. Connected with this principle is a second, namely that an individual who implicitly or explicitly signifies that he has certain social characteristics ought to have this claim honoured by others and ought in fact to be what he claims he is. In consequence, when an individual projects a definition of the situation and thereby makes an implicit or explicit claim to be a person of a particular kind, he automatically exerts a moral demand upon the others, obliging them to value and treat him in the manner that persons of his kind have a right to expect".

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It is exactly this fluid boundary between personal expectations and social perception that we want to scrutinise in Aldous Huxley's novel.

We shall also take into consideration the pragmatic theories of politeness, including Brown and Levinson's (1978/1987) seminal theory, and especially Spencer-Oatey's theoretical point of view regarding the concepts of face and identity in relation to politeness. Lending from psychological theories of identity a triadic perspective of self-representation, Spencer-Oatey (2007: 641) distinguishes between *personal*, *relational*, and *collective level* of identity. She claims that in cognitive terms, "face and identity are similar in that both relate to the notion of 'self'-image (including individual, relational and collective construals of self), and both comprise multiple self-aspects or attributes". However, contrary to Goffman's assumption, who associates the concept of face with "approved social attributes", Spencer-Oatey considers that faces "vary dynamically in interaction" and "interactionally, face threat/loss/gain will only be perceived when there is a mismatch between an attribute claimed (or denied, in the case of negatively-evaluated traits) and an attribute perceived as being ascribed by others" (Spencer-Oatey 2007: 644).

The discursive analysis developed in this paper thus involves the understanding of ritual practices from a relational perspective and outlines the role of emotions in the performance and the perception of im/politeness in dialogue (for this approach, see also Spencer-Oatey 2011).

Huxley considered that fictional literature is an extension of philosophical and scientific thinking. His fictionalised characters are created starting from real-life prototypes (see, among others, Cushman n.d.: 3). Consequently, his personal view and original synthesis can contribute to a better understanding of the complex relationships that govern social life. Ultimately, our purpose is to demonstrate how efficient the pragmatic and discourse analysis tools are in interpreting fictional literature and how fictional literature, beyond its claimed aesthetic purpose, remains an important device for reflecting the individual psychology, as well as people's social interactional rituals. Our approach is aligned to a certain extent with the contemporary interdisciplinary research that sustains and tries to demonstrate, on the one hand, the intrinsic function of narrative, whether factual or fictional, in the (historical) representation of reality[2] and, on the other hand, the cognitive value of fictional literature (see especially Adamson/Freadman/Parker (eds.) 1998; White 1999; Mikkonen 2013).

[2] In Hayden White's terms, his method of questioning metahistory and figural realism consists "in trying to show the literariness of historical writing and the realism of literary writing" (White 1999: *ix* (preface)).

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2. The Narrative Technique Used in *Point Counter Point*

Point Counter Point develops a counterpoint musical technique for structuring the narrative. The novel comprises several plots which intersect and complement each other. A theme, for example love, is described in various ways by different characters who experienced it. This technique of reduplicating situations and characters allows the writer to present various aspects of the same theme, to modulate it, and to reflect its particular nuances. *Point Counter Point* is also conceived as a novel of ideas, each character embodying not only a psychological and social type, but also an ideology or at least a philosophy of life (see also Cushman n.d.; Grosvenor n.d.; Hobby n.d.; Roston 1977; Watt 1977).

As mentioned before, Huxley creates characters starting from his personal experience. Criticism has detected many correspondences between his heroes and actual people of his time, writers, publicists and politicians, and has often regarded *Point Counter Point* as a *roman à clé* [*novel with a key*] (see Cushman n.d.: 3; Grosvenor n.d.: 11-12). He himself has a fictional *alter ego*, Philip Quarles, a writer preoccupied to find a proper formula for his projected novel, which could enable him to disseminate his ideas. Philip Quarles' considerations included in *Point Counter Point* as fragments of his journal open a way to read and analyse the actual novel itself:

> "Novel of ideas. The character of each personage must be implied, as far as possible, in the ideas of which he is the mouthpiece. Insofar as theories are rationalizations of sentiments, instincts, dispositions of soul, this is feasible. The chief defect of the novel of ideas is that you must write about people who have ideas to express – which excludes all but about 01 per cent of the human race. Hence the real, the congenital novelists don't write such books. But then I never pretended to be a congenital novelist.
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> *
>
> The great defect of the novel of ideas is that it's a made-up affair. Necessarily; for people who can reel off neatly formulated notions aren't quite real; they're slightly monstrous. Living with monsters becomes rather tiresome in the long run" (*Point Counter Point*, Chapter XXII, *From Philip Quarles's Notebook*, p. 351).

This technique of *mise en abyme* (which means that the novel contains its own criticism and interpretation) was inaugurated by the French writer André Gide in his famous *Les Faux Monnayeurs* [*The Counterfeiters*]. The dual perspective, one internal, fictional, and another external, metafictional, made the reading perspective more relativistic and ultimately more dynamic and complex. This kind of duality of the literary artwork has been associated with irony, since the artistic fictional projection on the novel and the actual achievement of it do not fit together and are often contradictory. The same mobile perspective is also adopted by the narrator to present the characters. By means of the *stream of consciousness* technique, each personage is described

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through his/her internal vision, which is opposed to other personage's internal perspective. The dialogue between heroes depicts not only their verbalised replies, but also the interaction of self-consciousness, the thoughts and evaluations that heroes do not actually state and that are often in a comical opposition with their expressed words. The narrator's role is to organise and oppose these points of views, so that they become more relevant and suggestive for each character and for the whole thematic of the novel. It is a modernist technique that illustrates the theory of plurivocality and polyphony in the novelistic discourse, as described by Mihail Bakhtin. Baktin's dialogism, or intertextuality, to use the French structuralist term imposed by Julia Kristeva, expresses in fact a genuine and mandatory trait of the novel in general:

> "In Dostoevsky's polyphonic novel we are dealing not with ordinary dialogic form, that is, with an unfolding of material within the framework of its own monologic understanding and against the firm background of a unified world of objects. No, here we are dealing with an ultimate dialogicality, that is, a dialogicality of the ultimate whole. The dramatic whole is, as we have pointed out, in this respect monologic; Dostoevsky's novel is dialogic. It is constructed not as the whole of a single consciousness, absorbing other consciousnesses as objects into itself, but as a whole formed by the interaction of several consciousnesses, none of which entirely becomes an object for the other; this interaction provides no support for the viewer who would objectify an entire event according to some ordinary monologic category (thematically, lyrically or cognitively) – and this consequently makes the viewer also a participant" (Bakhtin 1984: 18).

The multi-perspectivism and polyphony, very well managed and organised, generate in *Point Counter Point*, like in other literary masterpieces, the impression of realism, as proved by the sharp insights into the English high society of the 1920s, on the one hand, and the ironical/satirical effect, on the other hand (*satire* is understand herein as an irony that has a social target)[3]. Moreover, the plurality of equally authoritative ideological positions allows the (polyphonic) novel as genre to actually overpass the scientific works, which may ultimately sustain only a monologic position. It is the reason for which Huxley prefers the novel form to express his ideas.

The influence of Gide and Dostoievsky is manifested not only at the formal, narrative level, but also at the ideational level, the author reflecting on the same moral fundamental issues that the above-mentioned writers had previously approached (see especially Hobby n.d.: 3-4).

However, beyond the original synthesis of the narrative formula and the ideas developed in the novel, as mentioned before, what we are interested in is the way in which heroes interact on the public stage, by exhibiting and defending their face. The original formula of psychological and social realism in Huxley's novel consists particularly in showcasing the verbal and non-verbal

[3] For a functional and pragmatic distinction between irony and satire, see Hutcheon (1981). See also Hutcheon (1994) for a theoretical and applied approach of literary irony.

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(social) interaction between characters, through which the heroes oppose their intimate thoughts, opinions, and ideology.

3. The Case Study

The examples under scrutiny are taken from the scenes describing the musical soirée held by Lady Tantamount. The party episode reaches down to chapters II-V and VII of the novel and allows the novelist to introduce the most important characters. The hostess, Lady Tantamount, is the wife of Lord Edward Tantamount, a very rich aristocrat, who is completely disinterested in money, a reputable scientist whose passion for biology competes with his passion for classical music. Lady Tantamount, who comes from Canada, likes to mock English high society of the 1920th and to make jokes and play tricks on everybody except for her close friends, like the famous painter John Bidlake. As the narrator points out:

> "Throughout the world in which she moved her exploits were proverbial. People laughed. But there were too many victims; she was feared, she was not liked. But her parties were always thronged; her cook, her wine merchant and caterer were of the first class. Much was forgiven her for her husband's wealth. Besides, the company of Tantamount House was always variously and often eccentrically distinguished. People accepted her invitations and took their revenge by speaking ill of her behind her back. They called her, among other things, a snob and a lion hunter. But a snob, they had to admit to her defenders, who laughed at the pomps and grandeurs for which she lived. A hunter who collected lions in order that she might bait them. Where a middle-class Englishwoman would have been serious and abject, Lady Edward was mockingly irreverent. She hailed from the New World; for her the traditional hierarchies were a joke – but a picturesque joke and one worth living for" (*Point Counter Point*, Chapter IV, pp. 45-46).

Lady Edward likes to test people's reactions in embarrassing situations. With an ingenuous seriousness, she acts like a scientist (a psycho-sociologist) who experiences the limits of social rules and conventions. Lady Tantamount's face-to-face interactional behavior is uncommon: she has an intentional unprotective orientation toward saving others' face, while manifesting a defensive orientation towards saving her own face (Goffman 1967: 14). She pretends to have acted innocently but as her game is very well known by the others, she is perceived as an offending person, who acts maliciously or spitefully.

During the party, she interacts with other characters, among whom Everard Webley, a politician with fascist views, and Illidge, a young biologist, the working class assistant of Lord Tantamount (see below, example 1a). Webley is the leader of the fascist party *The Brotherhood of British Freemen*. He takes himself very seriously and wants to be treated accordingly by the others. The image he projects of himself is that of a soldierly, disciplined and

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rigorous man who inspires respect and even fear. Webley constructs this public image and often simulates an authoritative appearance that actually does not correspond to his real nature. In Goffman's terms, in interaction, Webley performs the role of a far right politician and emphasizes the traits that dramatically confirm his social status (Goffman 1956: 19). On the contrary, Illidge embodies rather the social antithesis of Webley. Since he is poor, Illidge has diffuse resentments of the aristocratic class and seeks to transfigure his feelings into reformatory social ideas. He is a left-wing political activist, namely a member of a communist club. He constructs for himself the image of an intellectual, a superior person who disdains the facility and superficiality of aristocrats. During the party, feeling ignored by the other guests, he adopts a Byronic pose, trying to look indifferent and slightly contemptuous of the rich and sophisticated world that he envies in the depths of his soul. However, his studied attitude is incompatible with his physical appearance and it results in a comical contrast. The author commissions another character, Walter Bidlake, to reflect on the mismatch between the image that Illidge projects of himself and the impression that he leaves to an objective observer:

> "Looking over the heads of the people who surrounded him, he [Walter] saw Frank Illidge, alone, leaning against a pillar. His attitude, his smile were Byronic, at once world-weary and contemptuous; he glanced about him with a languid amusement, as though he were watching the drolleries of a group of monkeys. *Unfortunately, Walter reflected, as he made his way through the crowd towards him, poor Illidge hadn't the right physique for being Byronically superior. Satirical romantics should be long, slow-moving, graceful and handsome. Illidge was small, alert and jerky. And what a comic face!* Like a street Arab's, with its upturned nose and wide slit of a mouth; a very intelligent, sharp-witted street Arab's face, but not exactly one to be languidly contemptuous with. Besides, who can be superior with freckles? Illidge's complexion was sandy with them. Protectively coloured, the sandy-brown eyes, the sandy-orange eyebrows and lashes disappeared, at a little distance, into the skin, as a lion dissolves into the desert. From across a room his face seemed featureless and unregarding, like the face of a statue carved out of a block of sandstone. *Poor Illidge! The Byronic part made him look rather ridiculous*" (*Point Counter Point*, Chapter V, p. 61; italics emphasis added).

However, Walter Bidlake, the reflector character in this scene, is described as a nice, decent young man involved in two complicated love affairs, not at all malicious to undermine the other people's self-confidence. As mentioned before, this is the social vocation of Lady Edward Tantamount. Let's notice, in example (1a), the dialogue between Lady Tantamount, Webley and Illidge, which reveals the intersection between what a person believes to be and wants to be seen as and what other person considers he/she actually is.

(1a) "Turning away from the two discomfited young girls, Lady Edward was almost run down by a very tall and burly man, who was hurrying with dangerous speed across the crowded room.

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'Sorry,' he said without looking down to see who it was he had almost knocked over. His eyes were following the movements of somebody at the other end of the room; he was only aware of a smallish obstacle, presumably human, since all the obstacles in the neighbourhood were human. He checked himself in mid career and took a step to the side, so as to get round the obstacle. But the obstacle was not of the kind one circumvents as easily as that.

Lady Edward reached out and caught him by the sleeve. 'Webley!' Pretending not to have felt the hand on his sleeve, not to have heard the calling of his name, Everard Webley still moved on; he had no wish and no leisure to talk to Lady Edward. But Lady Edward would not be shaken off; she suffered herself to be dragged along, still tugging, at his side.

'Webley!' she repeated. 'Stop! Woa!' And her imitation of a country carter was so loud and so realistically rustic that Webley was compelled to listen, for fear of attracting the laughing attention of his fellow guests.

He looked down at her. 'Oh, it's you,' he said gruffly. 'Sorry I hadn't noticed.' ***The annoyance, expressed in his frown and his ill-mannered words, was partly genuine, partly assumed. Many people, he had found, are frightened of anger; he cultivated his natural ferocity. It kept people at a distance, saved him from being bothered.***

'Goodness!' exclaimed Lady Edward with an expression of terror that was frankly a caricature.

'Did you want anything?' he demanded in the tone in which he might have addressed an importunate beggar in the street.

'You *do* look cross.'

'If that was all you wanted to say to me, I think I might as well ...'

Lady Edward, meanwhile, had been examining him critically out of her candidly impertinent eyes.

'You know,' she said, interrupting him in the middle of his sentence, as though unable to delay for a moment longer the announcement of her great and sudden discovery, 'you ought to play the part of Captain Hook in *Peter Pan*. Yes, really. You have the ideal face for a pirate king. Hasn't he, Mr. Babbage?' She caught at Illidge as he was passing, disconsolately alien, through the crowd of strangers.

'Good evening,' he said. The cordiality of Lady Edward's smile did not entirely make up for the insult of his unremembered name.

'Webley, this is Mr. Babbage, who helps my husband with his work.' Webley nodded a distant acknowledgment of Illidge's existence. 'But don't you think he's like a pirate king, Mr. Babbage?' Lady Edward went on. 'Look at him now.'

Illidge uncomfortably laughed. 'Not that I've seen many pirate kings,' he said.

'But of course,' Lady Edward cried out, 'I'd forgotten; he *is* a pirate king. In real life. Aren't you, Webley?'

Everard Webley laughed. 'Oh, certainly, certainly.'

'Because, you see,' Lady Edward explained, turning confidentially to Illidge, 'this is Mr. *Everard* Webley. The head of the British Freemen. You know those men in the green uniform? Like the male chorus at a musical comedy.'

Illidge smiled maliciously and nodded. So this, he was thinking, was Everard Webley. The founder and the head of the Brotherhood of British Freemen – the B.B.F's, the 'B----y, b--ing, f--s,' as their enemies called them. Inevitably; for as the extremely well-informed correspondent of the *Figaro* once remarked in an article devoted to the Freemen, '*les initiales B.B.F. ont, pour le public anglais, une signification plutôt péjorative*.'

Webley had not thought of that, when he gave his Freemen their name. It pleased Illidge to reflect that he must be made to think of it very often now.

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> 'If you've finished being funny,' said Everard, 'I'll take my leave.'
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> '***Tinpot Mussolini,' Illidge was thinking. 'Looks his part, too. [He had a special personal hatred of anyone who was tall and handsome, or who looked in any way distinguished. He himself was small and had the appearance of a very intelligent street Arab, grown up.] Great lout!***'
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> 'But you're not offended by anything I said, are you?' Lady Edward asked with a great show of anxiety and contrition.
>
> Illidge remembered a cartoon in the *Daily Herald.* 'The British Freemen,' Webley had had the insolence to say, 'exist to keep the world safe for intelligence.' The cartoon showed Webley and half a dozen of his uniformed bandits kicking and bludgeoning a workman to death. Behind them a top-hatted company-director looked on approvingly. Across his monstrous belly sprawled the word: INTELLIGENCE.
>
> 'Not offended, Webley?' Lady Edward repeated.
>
> ***'Not in the least. I'm only rather busy. You see,' he explained in his silkiest voice, 'I have things to do. I work, if you know what that means.'***
>
> ***Illidge wished that the hit had been scored by someone else. The dirty ruffian! He himself was a communist***" (*Point Counter Point*, Chapter IV, pp. 46-48; italics in the original, bold italics emphasis added).

Even during the soirée, Webley does not cease to promote his public image of a very serious, busy man, by acting accordingly. On the other hand, Lady Edward contests the public status that he ascribed himself by all means. The major symptom of this contestation is to ridicule Webley. It is a common intuition, theorized by philosophers and aestheticians like Emmanuel Kant, according to which the opposite of greatness is ridiculousness. Webley wants to avoid Lady Edward, by invoking his serious occupations and his disdain for a mere courteous conversation. His rough manners, partly genuine, partly assumed, as the narrator says, are means of expressing his social attributes, which enable him to perform his role. Webley proposes a definition of his public image, so that his apparent impoliteness, even hostility, is (perceived as) a reaction to what he considers to be a form of disrespect for his assumed identity. Lady Edward's attitude is also programmatic: she constantly makes people wonder if their self-image corresponds to their social image or, at least, to the image that she ascribed to them. There are many different strategies used by Lady Tantamount to undermine the image that is socially projected by Webley. Firstly, she stops him by means of a country carter's rustic interjection: "Stop, Whoa!", which associates him with a stubborn beast in a very unflattering way. Webley stops only for fear of attracting the laughing attention of the guests. Secondly, Lady Edward simulates an expression of terror and also notices his actual frowning expression, thus emphasising something obvious in order to draw attention to the fact that it is just a histrionic pose: "'Goodness!' exclaimed Lady Edward with an expression of terror that was frankly a caricature. 'You do look cross'". Besides, she critically examines him and interrupts him in the middle of the sentence where

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he pretended being extremely busy, in order to announce him that he ought to play the role of Captain Hook in *Peter Pan*. The ridiculous comparison is candidly made as a great revelation, and pinpoints the intention of bantering him.

As Illidge "was passing, disconsolately alien, through the crowd of strangers", Hilda rhetorically requests his agreement to support her comparison. At this point, the narrator intersects Illidge's internal perspective on Webley with Lady Edward's external perception and Webley's internal and verbalized self-perception. Even without being informed about Webley's political views, Illidge couldn't possibly sympathize with him, as a result of his personal hatred of anyone who is tall and handsome. As he is short, Illidge thinks he has a social handicap that intelligence can barely compensate for. He feels he is condemned to be an anarchist. In fact, his social path and ideological views are predetermined by his own prejudices and feelings of inferiority. By designating Webley as "tinpot Mussolini", Illidge not only maliciously agrees with Lady Edward, but also starts to sincerely admire her. Eventually, Webley asks permission to leave, not before assuring Lady Edward that he had understood her jokes and bantering her in turn. "'You see,' he explained in his silkiest voice, 'I have things to do. I work, if you know what that means'". Webley implicitly conveys the image that he ascribed to Lady Edward: a lazy rich aristocrat woman, who has no respect for others' work and time. The verbal exchange reflects a reciprocal disdain, which is dissimulated by social verbal conventions. Ending the conversation with a joke, Webley comes out of the scene in a rather honourable way. His public (positive) face is not actually affected, in spite of Hilda's repeated FTAs, because he neutralises them by performing the same FTAs. Illidge, who considers himself a communist, ought to admit that the irony was to his taste, which describes Lady Edward very accurately, but this tacit agreement does not diminish his natural aversion towards Webley. "Illidge wished that the hit had been scored by someone else. The dirty ruffian! He himself was a communist".

As one can see, identity is a mobile and dynamic dialogic construct, which is shaped in interaction. It is highly connected to the personal and social background and is also influenced by emotional factors. The balance between sympathy and antipathy is not triggered by the agreement or disagreement, but by personal preconception and self-confidence. Webley is not affected by Lady Tantamount's ironies, because of his high self-confidence. Instead, Illidge is more sensitive to irony (see below, the section 1b).

(1b) "Webley left them. Lady Edward watched him ploughing his way through the crowd. 'Like a steam engine,' she said. 'What energy! But so touchy. These politicians – worse than actresses. Such vanity! And dear Webley hasn't got much sense of humour. He wants to be treated as though he were his own colossal statue, erected by an admiring and grateful nation.' (The r's roared like lions.) Posthumously, if you see

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what I mean. As a great historical character. I can never remember, when I see him, that he's really Alexander the Great. I always make the mistake of thinking it's just Webley.'

Illidge laughed. He found himself positively liking Lady Edward. She had the right feelings about things. She seemed even to be on the right side, politically.

'Not but what his Freemen aren't a very good thing,' Lady Edward went on. ***Illidge's sympathy began to wane as suddenly as it had shot up. 'Don't you think so, Mr. Babbage?'***

He made a little grimace. 'Well ...' he began.

'By the way,' said Lady Edward, cutting short what would have been an admirably sarcastic comment on Webley's Freemen, 'you must really be careful coming down those stairs. They're *terribly* slippery.'

Illidge blushed. 'Not at all,' he muttered and blushed still more deeply – a beetroot to the roots of his carrot-coloured hair – as he realized the imbecility of what he had said. His sympathy declined still further.

'Well, rather slippery all the same,' Lady Edward politely insisted, with an emphatic rolling in the throat. 'What were you working at with Edward this evening?' she went on. 'It always interests me *so* much.'

Illidge smiled. 'Well, if you really want to know,' he said, 'we were working at the regeneration of lost parts in newts.' Among the newts he felt more at ease; a little of his liking for Lady Edward returned.

'Newts? Those things that swim?' Illidge nodded. 'But how do they lose their parts?'

'Well, in the laboratory,' he explained, 'they lose them because we cut them off.'

'And they grow again?'

'They grow again.'

'Dear me,' said Lady Edward. 'I never knew that. How fascinating these things are. Do tell me some more.'

She wasn't so bad after all. He began to explain. Warming to his subject, he warmed also to Lady Edward. He had just reached the crucial, the important and significant point in the proceedings – the conversion of the transplanted tail-bud into a leg – when Lady Edward, whose eyes had been wandering, laid her hand on his arm.

'Come with me,' she said, 'and I'll introduce you to General Knoyle. Such an amusing old man – if only unintentionally sometimes.'

Illidge's exposition froze suddenly in his throat. ***He realized that she had not taken the slightest interest in what he had been saying, had not even troubled to pay the least attention. Detesting her, he followed in resentful silence***" (*Point Counter Point*, Chapter IV, pp. 48-50; italics in the original, bold italics emphasis added).

During the exchange with Webley and following Lady Tantamount's appraisal of Webley as an ambitious politician who lacks the sense of humour, Illidge found himself positively liking Lady Edward. But when she admitted that the English Freemen Party is not actually such a bad thing, his sympathy suddenly decreased. Moreover, Lady Tantamount interrupts him (in an impolite manner) and also recommends him to be more careful when going down the stairs. The apparently affable advice, attesting to the hostess' kind care, is perceived by Illidge as almost an insult since it alludes to a previous troublesome episode. Following Lord Edward down the stairs and being too busy to adopt a superior expression of contemptuous amusement, Illidge had lost his balance and was on the verge of falling, under the curious and amused eyes of the guests, who were

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listening to the concert. He would have liked to remove the embarrassing episode, not only from his memory but also from the collective memory. The fact that Lady Edward remembers it is an attack at his positive face.

The example illustrates how a discursive strategy can contextually divert from its primary function, in such a way that a politeness strategy is being perceived as an impoliteness strategy. Lady Edward, whose cordiality did not entirely make up for the insult of not remembering Illidge's name (she calls him "Babbage"), seems to balance the interpersonal rapports again by showing interest in Illidge's work. "'Dear me,' said Lady Edward. 'I never knew that. How fascinating these things are. Do tell me some more'". Invited to depict himself in a more favorable way, since in his opinion intellectual qualities compensate for his social and physical complex, Illidge feels an increased sympathy for Lady Edward again. Yet, when invited to meet General Knoyle, he realizes that she did not pay the slightest attention to his presentation and he feels that he detests her.

Huxley manages to remarkably capture the emotional fluctuations that verbal exchanges engender, as well as the relative and contextual value of politeness strategies. Far from being predetermined in dialogue, sympathy and antipathy are rather variables, which are sensitive to any new aspects that update or modify the communicative context.

The cognitive underpinning of face has been also emphasized (see Spencer-Oatey 2007: 649-651). Face is associated with value judgments and especially with their social expression (Spencer-Oatey 2007: 649). From a cognitive point of view, values, appraisals, and expectations that influence both self-image and social image are deeply dependent on the interlocutors' common knowledge. The continuous dialogical re-definition of self is related to the way the speaker actualizes, interprets and assesses common presuppositions. Let's consider, in the example (1c), the subsequent dialogue between Lady Edward, General Knoyle and Illidge.

(1c) "General Knoyle was talking with another military-looking gentleman. His voice was martial and asthmatic. "'My dear fellow,' I said to him [they heard him as they approached], 'my dear fellow, don't enter the horse now. It would be a crime,' I said. 'It would be sheer madness. Scratch him,' I said, 'scratch him.' And he scratched him."

Lady Edward made her presence known. The two military gentlemen were overwhelmingly polite; they had enjoyed their evening *immensely.*

'I chose the Bach especially for you, General Knoyle,' said Lady Edward with something of the charming confusion of a young girl confessing an amorous foible.

'Well – er – really, that was very kind of you.' ***General Knoyle's confusion was genuine; he did not know what to do with the musical present she had made him.***

'I hesitated,' Lady Edward went on in the same significantly intimate tone, 'between Handel's Water Music and the B minor Suite with Pongileoni. Then I remembered you and decided on the Bach.' Her eyes took in the signs of embarrassment on the General's ruddy face.

'That was very kind of you,' he protested. 'Not that I can pretend to understand much about music. But I know what I like, I know what I like.' The

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> ***phrase seemed to give him confidence. He cleared his throat and started again. 'What I always say is ...'***
>
> 'And now,' Lady Edward concluded triumphantly, 'I want to introduce Mr. Babbage, who helps Edward with his work and who is a real expert on newts. Mr. Babbage, this is General Knoyle and this is Colonel Pilchard.' She gave a last smile and was gone.
>
> 'Well, I'm damned!' exclaimed the General, and the Colonel said she was a holy terror.
>
> 'One of the holiest,' Illidge feelingly agreed.
>
> The two military gentlemen looked at him for a moment and decided that from one so obviously beyond the pale the comment was impertinence. Good Catholics may have their little jokes about the saints and the habits of the clergy; but they are outraged by the same little jokes on the lips of infidels. The General made no verbal comment and the Colonel contented himself with looking his disapproval. ***But the way in which they turned to one another and continued their uninterrupted discussion of race horses, as though they were alone, was so intentionally offensive, that Illidge wanted to kick them***" (*Point Counter Point*, Chapter IV, pp. 50-51; italics in the original, bold italics emphasis added).

When Lady Tantamount declares that she had chosen Bach especially for him, General Knoyle is confused, like a person who has no musical culture. However, Lady Tantamount values his social image when she ascribes musical education to him. He protests against Lady Tantamount's generous appreciation, but his protest is ritualistic, linked to the modesty maxim of politeness and thus the positive value judgment is actually strengthened, not rejected. In fact, Lady Tantamount banters not general Knoyle's lack of musical taste, but his self-worth and presumptuousness that make him accept the compliment conveyed by the false presuppositions. "'That was very kind of you,' he protested. 'Not that I can pretend to understand much about music. But I know what I like, I know what I like.' The phrase seemed to give him confidence. He cleared his throat and started again. 'What I always say is ...'".

By crossing these internal and external perspectives, the reader construes the image of the characters in the novel. Even the fact that characters convey, or refrain from conveying their impressions of each other, most often in an implicit manner, is a means of self-characterization.

Illidge is very critical of others, but his critique is ideologically sublimated, reflected in his radical, socialist ideas. In face-to-face interaction with the members of the aristocracy, he keeps a reserved, falsely contemptuous attitude, in order to mask his injured feelings. Despite his efforts toward levelling interaction, the dialogue reflects his socially asymmetrical position. Nevertheless, he doesn't avoid the upper class society, despite the risk of threatening his face and undermining his personal identity. That because, in fact, in his eyes, this environment values his social identity. By his venturesome choice, he creates social disorder and disturbs the social interaction[4]. On the

[4] See Goffman (1967: 43): "Social life is an uncluttered, orderly thing because the person voluntarily stays away from the places and topics and times where he is not wanted and

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other hand, Lord Edward, Lady Tantamount, Walter Bidlake are people who do not care about class division or even banter the traditional social hierarchy indiscriminately. Lady Edward has the same malicious behavior towards all her acquaintances: if she can be malicious with Illidge, she is not quite different with persons from her class. Presenting and engaging Illidge in conversation with Webley and General Knoyle is a way of emphasizing this democratic attitude. Conversely, Webley and general Knoyle do not show the same lack of sensitivity regarding social hierarchy. Webley pays a distant acknowledgment of Illidge's existence, while general Knoyle ostentatiously ignores him.

As Goffman (1967: 15) notes, "The surest way for a person to prevent threats to his face is to avoid contacts in which these threats are likely to occur". For the old painter John Bidlake the criteria for avoiding people are very peculiar (see example 2):

(2) "Looking restlessly round the room, John Bidlake had suddenly caught sight of Mary Betterton. Yes, Mary Betterton – that monster! He put his hand under his chair, he touched wood. Whenever John Bidlake saw something unpleasant, he always felt safer if he could touch wood. He didn't believe in God, of course; he liked to tell disobliging stories about the clergy. But wood, wood – there was something about wood ... And to think that he had been in love with her, wildly, twenty, twenty-two, he dared not think how many years ago. How fat, how old and hideous! His hand crept down again to the chair leg. He averted his eyes and tried to think of something that wasn't Mary Betterton. But the memories of the time when Mary had been young imposed themselves upon him. He still used to ride then. The image of himself on a black horse, of Mary on a bay, rose up before him. They had often gone riding in those days. It was the time he was painting the third and best of his groups of 'Bathers'. What a picture, by God! Mary was already a little too plump for some tastes, even then. Not for his; he had never objected to plumpness. These women nowadays, wanting to look like drainpipes... He looked at her again for a moment and shuddered. He hated her for being so repulsive, for having once been so charming. And he was the best part of twenty years her senior" (*Point Counter Point*, Chapter II, pp. 30-31).
[...]
"'Of course [the picture] it's good,' said Lucy, and wondered why the old man's painting had fallen off so much of late. This last exhibition – it was deplorable. He himself, after all, had remained so young, comparatively speaking. Though of course, she reflected, as she looked at him, he had certainly aged a good deal during the last few months.
'Of course,' he repeated. 'That's the right spirit.'
'Though I must confess,' Lucy added, to change the subject, 'I always find your bathers rather an insult.'
'An insult?'
'Speaking as a woman, I mean. Do you really find us so profoundly silly as you paint us?'
'Yes, do you?' another voice enquired. 'Do you *really?*' It was an intense, emphatic voice, and the words came out in gushes, explosively, as though they were being forced through a narrow aperture under emotional pressure.

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where he might be disparaged for going. He cooperates to save his face, finding that there is much to be gained from venturing nothing".

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Lucy and John Bidlake turned and saw Mrs. Betterton, massive in dove grey, with arms, old Bidlake reflected, like thighs and hair that was, in relation to the fleshy cheeks and chins, ridiculously short, curly, and auburn. Her nose, which had tilted up so charmingly in the days when he had ridden the black horse and she the bay, was now preposterous, an absurd irrelevance in the middle-aged face. Real Bidlake had ridden with her, just before he painted these bathers. She had talked about art with a naïve, schoolgirlish earnestness which he had found laughable and charming. He had cured her, he remembered, of a passion for Burne-Jones, but never, alas, of her prejudice in favour of virtue. It was with all the old earnestness and a certain significant sentimentality as of one who remembers old times and would like to exchange reminiscences as well as general ideas, that she now addressed him. Bidlake had to pretend that he was pleased to see her after all these years. It was extraordinary, he reflected as he took her hand, how completely he had succeeded in avoiding her; he could not remember having spoken to her more than three or four times in all the quarter of a century which had turned Mary Betterton into a *momento mori.*

Dear Mrs. Betterton!' he exclaimed. 'This is delightful.' But he disguised his repugnance very badly. And when she addressed him by his Christian name – 'Now, John,' she said, 'you must give us an answer to our question,' and she laid her hand on Lucy's arm, so as to associate her in the demand – old Bidlake was positively indignant. *Familiarity from a memento mori – it was intolerable.* He'd give her a lesson. The question, it happened, was well chosen for his purposes; it fairly invited the retort discourteous. Mary Betterton had intellectual pretensions, was tremendously keen on the soul. Remembering this, old Bidlake asserted that he had never known a woman who had anything worth having beyond a pair of legs and a figure. Some of them, he added, significantly, lacked even those indispensables. True, many of them had interesting faces; but that meant nothing. Bloodhounds, he pointed out, have the air of learned judges, oxen when they chew the cud seem to meditate the problems of metaphysics, the mantis looks as though it were praying; but these appearances are entirely deceptive. It was the same with women. He had preferred to paint his bathers unmasked as well as naked, to give them faces that were merely extensions of their charming bodies and not deceptive symbols of a non-existent spirituality. ***It seemed to him more realistic, truer to the fundamental facts. He felt his good humor returning as he talked, and, as it came back, his dislike for Mary Betterton seemed to wane. When one is in high spirits****, memento mori's* ***cease to remind.***

'John, you're incorrigible,' said Mrs. Betterton, indulgently. She turned to Lucy, smiling. 'But he doesn't mean a word he says.'

'I should have thought, on the contrary, that he meant it all,' objected Lucy. 'I've noticed that men who like women very much are the ones who express the greatest contempt for them.'

Old Bidlake laughed.

'Because they're the ones who know women most intimately.'

'Or perhaps because they resent our power over them.'

'But I assure you,' Mrs. Betterton insisted, 'he doesn't mean it. I knew him before you were born, my dear.'

The gaiety went out of John Bidlake's face. The *momento mori* grinned for him again behind Mary Betterton's flabby mask" (*Point Counter Point,* Chapter IV, pp. 54-55; italics in the original, bold italics emphasis added)

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Feeling old and sick, John Bidlake has a superstition about age and thus avoids people who evoke him this condition. That is why his encounter with a younger yet prematurely aged female friend is very unpleasant and frustrating. Mary Betterton, who used to be beautiful in her youth, had put on weight, and her appearance had completely changed. In her degraded look, John Bidlake sees reflected the image of his own physical and creative collapse. Not only does he avoid her, but he also feels almost offended by her familiarity. Mary's friendly complicity and positive politeness are perceived on the contrary almost as forms of negative impoliteness: "'Familiarity from a *memento mori* – it was intolerable'".

John Bidlake dislikes Mary's familiarity and wants to teach her a lesson in order to discourage her from talking to him in the future. He directly opposes Mary Betterton's feminist ideas a very traditionalist and anti-modern vision regarding the intellectual vocation of women. His opinion is frankly and even bluntly expressed, so that the ideational disagreement may reflect his actual disagreement in attitude[5], which is related to his intimate repugnance. Mrs. Betterton indulgently takes his reply as a joke, as a simple interactional play, while Lucy Tantamount, a more insightful young lady, understands its conversational meaning very accurately. The exchange once again reveals the mobility and the relative character of politeness strategies. Direct disagreement, used as a strategy of impoliteness, is interpreted through the high society filter standards as a simple strategy of politeness, (a joke) meant to strengthen the relations among the members of the group.

In this example too, one can perceive the refinement of Huxley's psychosocial observations. Actually, people interpret politeness strategies in a subjective, often irrational way. The pleasure or the displeasure that one can feel with regard to the others does not always come from the attitude of others towards s/he, but from a diffused range of impressions and affective reactions that the common past redesigns within the interlocutor's mind. Moreover, one can deliberately ignore the face threatening force of some verbal acts provided that s/he puts in accordance his/her sympathy, social standards and ritualistic verbal behaviors.

4. Final Remarks

The (verbal) interaction between various characters in this novel, published in 1928, not only describes the upper class society and intelligentsia of 1920th in a very accurate way, but also allows us to grasp the individuals'

[5] See Stevenson (1963), for the distinction between "disagreement in beliefs" and "disagreement in attitude". "The term attitude designates any psychological disposition of being *for* or *against* something. Hence love and hate are relatively specific kinds of attitudes, as are approval and disapproval, and so on" (Stevenson 1963: 1-2).

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reactions on the public stage, long before the theorizing of the concepts of social ritual interaction. It also enables us to reflect upon the complexity of the face-to-face interactional behaviour and to extrapolate these observations to our communicative experience. Focusing on verbal exchanges, reflecting and commenting on them from multiple perspectives, associating ideas with individuals who generate and dispute them, Huxley seeks and ultimately succeeds to depict the social and ideological footprint of the 1920th more objectively and more realistically:

> "When asked by Henry S. Canby in 1929 why he did not write a treatise instead of a novel to express his ideas, Huxley responded that « the novel form is preferable to the treatise because the fictionally embodied idea is different from, and much more alive than, the 'same' idea in the abstract. My book contains both abstract and (more or less effectively) embodied ideas. It would have been less effective if the embodied ones had been omitted » (9 May 29; *Letters* 312)" (Marovitz n.d.: 7).

In fact, Huxley's method expresses the way in which the literary fiction can convey philosophical knowledge, while also providing valuable insights into the study of social interaction in a certain historical and cultural context. Consequently, his polyphonic novel of ideas continues to stimulate reflection on the genuine cognitive value of fictional literature as well as on the variable boundary between factual and fictional narrative in describing reality.

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