

Aldous Huxley - Biography

Aldous Huxley, was a British writer. He was born on July 26, 1894 and died on November 22, 1963. He would become most specifically known to the public for his novels, and especially his fifth one, *Brave New World*, written in 1931 and published in 1932. Aldous Huxley was born on July 26th 1894 in Godalming in the Surrey county in southern England. He would be the son of the English schoolteacher and writer Leonard Huxley (1860 - 1933) and of Julia Arnold (1862 - 1908). More than literature, however, Aldous Huxley would in fact be born into a family of renowned scientists, with two of his three brothers, Julian and Andrew, who would be eminent biologists and a grandfather, Thomas Henry Huxley, who would be a famous, controversial naturalist in his time, nicknamed as "Darwin's Bulldog".

Aldous Huxley would come to be known mostly as a novelist and essayist but he would also write some short stories, poetry, travelogues and even film scripts. In his novels and essays Aldous Huxley would always play the role of a critical observer of accepted traditions, customs, social norms and ideals. Importantly, he would be concerned in his writings with the potentially harmful applications of so-called scientific progress to mankind.

At the age of 14 Aldous Huxley would lose his mother and he himself would subsequently become ill in 1911 with a disease that would leave him virtually blind. As if all of this was not enough, his other brother, Noel, would kill himself in 1914. Because of his sight he would not be able to do the scientific research that had attracted him earlier. Aldous Huxley would then turn himself to literature. It is important to note that in spite of a partial remission, his eyesight would remain poor for the rest of his life. This would not, however prevent him from obtaining a degree in English literature with high praises.

While continuing his education at Balliol College, one of the institutions at Oxford University in England, Aldous Huxley would not longer be financially supported by his father, which would make him having to earn living. For a brief period in 1918, he would be employed as a clerk of the Air Ministry, which would convince him that he does not want a career in either administration or business. As result, his need for money would lead him to apply his literary talents. It is around those days that he would become friends with the famous writer D.H. Lawrence (1885 - 1930) at Oxford.

Aldous Huxley would finish his first novel, which he would never publish, at the age of seventeen, and he would decisively turn to writing at the age of twenty. At that point he would publish poems and also become a journalist and art critic. This would allow him to frequently travel and mingle with the European intelligentsia of the time. He would meet surrealists in Paris and would as a result of all of this write many literary essays. Aldous Huxley were to be deeply concerned about the important changes occurring at the time in Western civilization. They would prompt him to write great novels in the 1930s about the serious threats posed by the combination of power and technical progress, as well as about what he identified as a drift

in parapsychology: behaviorism (as in his *Brave New World*). Additionally he would write against war and nationalism, as in *Eyeless in Gaza* (1936), for example.

One of his most known novels, and arguably his most important, would be *Brave New World*. Aldous Huxley would write it in only four months. It is important to note that at that time Adolf Hitler (1889 - 1945) was not yet in power in Germany and that the Stalinist purges had not yet begun. Aldous Huxley had therefore not been able to tap into the reality of his time the dictatorial future he would have the foresight to write about before it had happened. Indeed here Aldous Huxley imagined a society that would use genetics and cloning in order to condition and control individuals. In this future society all children are conceived in test tubes. They are genetically conditioned to belong to one of the five categories of populations, from the most intelligent to the stupidest.

Brave New World would also delineate what the perfect dictatorship would look like. It would have the appearance of a democracy, but would basically be a prison without walls in which the prisoners would not even dream of escaping. It would essentially be, as Aldous Huxley tells us, a system of slavery where, through entertainment and consumption the slaves “would love their servitude”. To many this would and still does resonate with the contemporary status quo. The title of the book comes from Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* (1610 - 1611), Act 5 Scene 1. Aldous Huxley’s novel would in fact eventually be made into a film in 1998. Although this one contains many elements from the book, the film would however portray a rather different storyline.

In 1937 he would write a book of essays entitled *Ends and Means: an Enquiry Into the Nature of Ideals and Into the Methods Employed for Their Realization* in which he would explore some of the same themes:

“A democracy which makes or even effectively prepares for modern, scientific war must necessarily cease to be democratic. No country can be really well prepared for modern war unless it is governed by a tyrant, at the head of a highly trained and perfectly obedient bureaucracy.”

In 1958 Aldous Huxley would publish *Brave New World Revisited*, a collection of essays in which he would think critically about the threats of overpopulation, excessive bureaucracy, as well as some hypnosis techniques for personal freedom. While Aldous Huxley’s early works would clearly be focused on defending a kind of humanism, he would become more and more interested in spiritual questions. He would particularly become interested in parapsychology and mysticism, which would be a subject matter on which he would also write a lot about. It is not really surprising, therefore, that in 1938 Aldous Huxley would become a friend of religious philosopher Jiddu Krishnamurti (1895 - 1986), considered by some to be a mystique himself, largely because of his early association with the Theosophical Society, from which he would powerfully break away from. In any case, Huxley would become a great admirer of this one’s teachings and would encourage him to put his insights in writings. Aldous Huxley would even write the forward for Jiddu Krishnamurti’s *The First and Last Freedom* (1954). Tellingly, Huxley would state after having listened to one of Krishnamurti’s talks:

“... the most impressive thing I have listened to. It was like listening to a discourse of the Buddha - such power, such intrinsic authority...”

In 1937, the writer would move to California and became a screenwriter for Hollywood. At the same time he would continue writing novels and essays, including the satirical novel *After Many a Summer* (1939) and *Ape and Essence* (1948). In 1950 the American Academy of Arts and Letters would award him the prestigious Award of Merit for the Novel, a prize that had also been bestowed to illustrious writers such as Ernest Hemingway (1899 - 1961) and Thomas Mann (1875 - 1955). Aldous Huxley would also be the author of an essay on the environment that would greatly inspire future ecological movements.

The 1950s would be a time of experiences with psychedelic drugs for him, especially LSD and mescaline, from which he would write the collection of essays *The Doors of Perception* (1954), which would become a narrative worshipped by hippies. The book would also inspire the famous singer Jim Morrison (1943 - 1971), to call his band “The Doors”. Aldous Huxley himself had found the title of the book in William Blake’s (1757 - 1827) *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*:

“If the doors of perception were cleansed everything would appear to man as it is, infinite.”

By the end of his life Aldous Huxley would be considered by many as a visionary thinker. The so-called “New Age” school of thought would often quote his mystical writings and studies of hallucinogens, and in fact it continues to do so today. Considered one of the greatest English writers having written 47 books, Aldous Huxley would die at the age of 69 in Los Angeles on November 22 1963, the same day as President John F. Kennedy’s assassination. Aldous Huxley would be cremated and his ashes would be buried in the family vault in the UK.

<http://www.egs.edu/library/aldous-huxley/biography/>