

Aldous Huxley

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Aldous Leonard Huxley (/ˈɔːldəs ˈhʌksli/; 26 July 1894 – 22 November 1963) was an English writer, novelist, philosopher,^{[1][2][3][4]} and prominent member of the Huxley family. He graduated from Balliol College at the University of Oxford with a first-class honours in English literature.

He was best known for his novels including *Brave New World*, set in a dystopian London; for non-fiction books, such as *The Doors of Perception*, which recalls experiences when taking a psychedelic drug; and a wide-ranging output of essays. Early in his career Huxley edited the magazine *Oxford Poetry* and published short stories and poetry. Mid career and later, he published travel writing, film stories, and scripts. He spent the later part of his life in the U.S., living in Los Angeles from 1937 until his death. In 1962, a year before his death, he was elected Companion of Literature by the Royal Society of Literature.^[5]

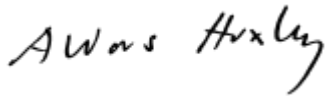
Huxley was a humanist, pacifist, and satirist. He later became interested in spiritual subjects such as parapsychology and philosophical mysticism,^{[6][7]} in particular universalism.^[8] By the end of his life, Huxley was widely acknowledged as one of the pre-eminent intellectuals of his time.^[9] He was nominated for the Nobel Prize in Literature in seven different years.^[10]

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Aldous Huxley

Born	<div>Aldous Leonard Huxley</div> <div>26 July 1894</div> <div>Godalming, England</div>
Died	<div>22 November 1963 (aged 69)</div> <div>Los Angeles, California</div>
Resting place	Compton, Guildford, England
Occupation	Writer, novelist
Education	Eton College
Alma mater	Balliol College, Oxford
Notable works	<div><i>Brave New World</i></div> <div><i>Island</i></div> <div><i>Point Counter Point</i></div> <div><i>The Doors of Perception</i></div> <div><i>The Perennial Philosophy</i></div>
Spouses	<div>Maria Nys (m. 1919–55)</div> <div>Laura Huxley (m. 1956–63)</div>

Signature	
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Early life

Huxley was born in Godalming, Surrey, England, in 1894. He was the third son of the writer and schoolmaster Leonard Huxley, who edited *Cornhill Magazine*,^[11] and his first wife, Julia Arnold, who founded Prior's Field School. Julia was the niece of poet and critic Matthew Arnold and the sister of Mrs. Humphrey Ward. Aldous was the grandson of Thomas Henry Huxley, the zoologist, agnostic, and controversialist ("Darwin's Bulldog"). His brother Julian Huxley and half-brother Andrew Huxley also became outstanding biologists. Aldous had another brother, Noel Trevelyan Huxley (1891–1914), who committed suicide after a period of clinical depression.^[12]

As a child, Huxley's nickname was "Ogie", short for "Ogre".^[13] He was described by his brother, Julian, as someone who frequently "[contemplated] the strangeness of things".^[13] According to his cousin and contemporary, Gervas Huxley, he had an early interest in drawing.^[13]

Huxley's education began in his father's well-equipped botanical laboratory, after which he enrolled at Hillside School, Malvern. He was taught there by his own mother for several years until she became terminally ill. After Hillside, he went on to Eton College. His mother died in 1908 when he was 14. In 1911 he contracted the eye disease (keratitis punctata) which "left [him] practically blind for two to three years".^[14] This "ended his early dreams of becoming a doctor."^[15] In October 1913, Huxley went up to Balliol College, Oxford, where he read English Literature.^[16] In January 1916, he volunteered to join the British Army in the Great War, but was rejected on health grounds, being half-blind in one eye.^[16] His eyesight later partly recovered. In 1916 he edited *Oxford Poetry* and in June of that year graduated BA with First Class honours.^[16] His brother Julian wrote:

I believe his blindness was a blessing in disguise. For one thing, it put paid to his idea of taking up medicine as a career ... His uniqueness lay in his universalism. He was able to take all knowledge for his province.^[17]

Following his years at Balliol, Huxley, being financially indebted to his father, decided to find employment. From April to July 1917, he was in charge of ordering supplies at the Air Ministry for the Royal Air Force.^[18] He taught French for a year at Eton, where Eric Blair (who was to take the pen name George Orwell) and Steven Runciman were among his pupils. He was mainly remembered as being an incompetent schoolmaster unable to keep order in class. Nevertheless, Blair and others spoke highly of his brilliant command of language.^[19]

Significantly, Huxley also worked for a time during the 1920s at Brunner and Mond, a high-tech chemical plant in Billingham, North East England. According to the introduction to the latest edition of his great science fiction novel *Brave New World* (1932), the experience he had there of "an ordered universe in a world of planless incoherence" was an important source for the novel.^[20]

Career

Huxley completed his first (unpublished) novel at the age of 17 and began writing seriously in his early 20s, establishing himself as a successful writer and social satirist. His first published novels were social satires, *Crome Yellow* (1921), *Antic Hay* (1923), *Those Barren Leaves* (1925), and *Point Counter Point* (1928). *Brave New World* was Huxley's fifth novel and first dystopian work. In the 1920s he was also a contributor to *Vanity Fair* and British *Vogue* magazines.^[21]

Bloomsbury Set

During World War I, Huxley spent much of his time at Garsington Manor near Oxford, home of Lady Ottoline Morrell, working as a farm labourer. There he met several Bloomsbury figures, including Bertrand Russell, Alfred North Whitehead,^[22] and Clive Bell. Later, in *Crome Yellow* (1921) he caricatured the Garsington lifestyle. Jobs were very scarce, but in 1919 John Middleton Murry was reorganising the *Athenaeum* and invited Huxley to join the staff. He accepted immediately, and quickly married the Belgian refugee Maria Nys, also at Garsington.^[23] They lived with their young son in Italy part of the time during the 1920s, where Huxley would visit his friend D. H. Lawrence. Following Lawrence's death in 1930, Huxley edited Lawrence's letters (1932).^[24]



Left to right: Bloomsbury Group members – Lady Ottoline Morrell, Maria Nys, Lytton Strachey, Duncan Grant, and Vanessa Bell

Works of this period included important novels on the dehumanising aspects of scientific progress, most famously *Brave New World*, and on pacifist themes (for example, *Eyeless in Gaza*). In *Brave New World*, set in a dystopian London, Huxley portrays a society operating on the principles of mass production and Pavlovian conditioning. Huxley was strongly influenced by F. Matthias Alexander and included him as a character in *Eyeless in Gaza*.

Starting from this period, Huxley began to write and edit non-fiction works on pacifist issues, including *Ends and Means*, *An Encyclopedia of Pacifism*, and *Pacifism and Philosophy*, and was an active member of the Peace Pledge Union.^[25]

United States

In 1937, Huxley moved to Hollywood with his wife Maria, son Matthew, and friend Gerald Heard. He lived in the US, mainly in southern California, until his death, but also for a time in Taos, New Mexico, where he wrote *Ends and Means* (published in 1937). The book contains illuminating tracts on war, religion, nationalism and ethics.

Heard introduced Huxley to Vedanta (Upanishad-centered philosophy), meditation, and vegetarianism through the principle of ahimsa. In 1938, Huxley befriended Jiddu Krishnamurti, whose teachings he greatly admired. He also became a Vedantist in the circle of Hindu Swami Prabhavananda, and introduced Christopher Isherwood to this circle. Not long after, Huxley wrote his book on widely held spiritual values and ideas, *The Perennial Philosophy*, which discussed the teachings of renowned mystics of the world. Huxley's book affirmed a sensibility that insists there are realities beyond the generally accepted "five senses" and that there is genuine meaning for humans beyond both sensual satisfactions and sentimentalities.

Huxley became a close friend of Remsen Bird, president of Occidental College. He spent much time at the college, which is in the Eagle Rock neighbourhood of Los Angeles. The college appears as "Tarzana College" in his satirical novel *After Many a Summer* (1939). The novel won Huxley a British literary award, the 1939 James Tait Black Memorial Prize for fiction.^[26] Huxley also incorporated Bird into the novel.

During this period, Huxley earned a substantial income as a Hollywood screenwriter; Christopher Isherwood, in his autobiography *My Guru and His Disciple*, states that Huxley earned more than \$3,000 per week (an enormous sum in those days) as a screenwriter, and that he used much of it to transport Jewish and left-wing writer and artist refugees from Hitler's Germany to the U.S. In March 1938, his friend Anita Loos, a novelist and screenwriter, put him in touch with Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer who hired Huxley for *Madame Curie*, which was originally to star Greta Garbo and be directed by George Cukor. (Eventually, the film was completed by MGM in 1943 with a different director and cast.) Huxley received screen credit for *Pride and Prejudice* (1940) and was paid for his work on a

number of other films, including *Jane Eyre* (1944). Huxley was commissioned by Walt Disney in 1945 to write a script based on *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and the biography of the story's author, Lewis Carroll. The script was not used, however.^[27]

Huxley wrote an introduction to the posthumous publication of J. D. Unwin's 1940 book *Hopousia or The Sexual and Economic Foundations of a New Society*.^[28]

On 21 October 1949, Huxley wrote to George Orwell, author of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, congratulating him on "how fine and how profoundly important the book is". In his letter to Orwell, he predicted:

Within the next generation I believe that the world's leaders will discover that infant conditioning and narco-hypnosis are more efficient, as instruments of government, than clubs and prisons, and that the lust for power can be just as completely satisfied by suggesting people into loving their servitude as by flogging them and kicking them into obedience.^[29]

Huxley had deeply felt apprehensions about the future the developed world might make for itself. From these, he made some warnings in his writings and talks. In a 1958 televised interview conducted by journalist Mike Wallace, Huxley outlined several major concerns: the difficulties and dangers of world overpopulation; the tendency toward distinctly hierarchical social organisation; the crucial importance of evaluating the use of technology in mass societies susceptible to wily persuasion; the tendency to promote modern politicians to a naive public as well-marketed commodities.^[30]

Post World War II

After World War II, Huxley applied for United States citizenship. His application was continuously deferred on the grounds that he would not say he would take up arms to defend the U.S. He claimed a philosophical, rather than a religious objection, and therefore was not exempt under the McCarran Act.^[31] He withdrew his application. Nevertheless, he remained in the country; and in 1959 he turned down an offer of a Knight Bachelor by the Macmillan government.

Association with Vedanta

Beginning in 1939 and continuing until his death in 1963, Huxley had an extensive association with the Vedanta Society of Southern California, founded and headed by Swami Prabhavananda. Together with Gerald Heard, Christopher Isherwood, and other followers he was initiated by the Swami and was taught meditation and spiritual practices.^[8]

In 1944, Huxley wrote the introduction to the "Bhagavad Gita: The Song of God",^[32] translated by Swami Prabhavanada and Christopher Isherwood, which was published by The Vedanta Society of Southern California.

From 1941 until 1960, Huxley contributed 48 articles to *Vedanta and the West*, published by the society. He also served on the editorial board with Isherwood, Heard, and playwright John van Druten from 1951 through 1962.

Huxley also occasionally lectured at the Hollywood and Santa Barbara Vedanta temples. Two of those lectures have been released on CD: *Knowledge and Understanding* and *Who Are We?* from 1955. Nonetheless, Huxley's agnosticism, together with his speculative propensity, made it difficult for him to fully embrace any form of institutionalized religion.^[33] In spring of 1953, Huxley had his first, supervised, experience with psychedelic drugs

(in this case, mescaline). After the publication of *The Doors of Perception*, in which he recounted this experience, Huxley and Swami Prabhavanada disagreed about the meaning and importance of the psychedelic drug experience, which may have caused the relationship to cool, but Huxley continued to write articles for the society's journal, lecture at the temple, and attend social functions.

Eyesight

There are differing accounts about the details of the quality of Huxley's eyesight at specific points in his life. About 1939, Huxley encountered the Bates method for better eyesight, and a teacher, Margaret Darst Corbett, who was able to teach the method to him. In 1940, Huxley relocated from Hollywood to a 40-acre (16 ha) *ranchito* in the high desert hamlet of Llano, California, in northernmost Los Angeles County. Huxley then said that his sight improved dramatically with the Bates Method and the extreme and pure natural lighting of the southwestern American desert. He reported that, for the first time in more than 25 years, he was able to read without glasses and without strain. He even tried driving a car along the dirt road beside the ranch. He wrote a book about his successes with the Bates Method, *The Art of Seeing*, which was published in 1942 (U.S.), 1943 (UK). The book contained some generally disputed theories, and its publication created a growing degree of popular controversy about Huxley's eyesight.^[34]

It was, and is, widely believed that Huxley was nearly blind since the illness in his teens, despite the partial recovery that had enabled him to study at Oxford. For example, some ten years after publication of *The Art of Seeing*, in 1952, Bennett Cerf was present when Huxley spoke at a Hollywood banquet, wearing no glasses and apparently reading his paper from the lectern without difficulty: "Then suddenly he faltered — and the disturbing truth became obvious. He wasn't reading his address at all. He had learned it by heart. To refresh his memory he brought the paper closer and closer to his eyes. When it was only an inch or so away he still couldn't read it, and had to fish for a magnifying glass in his pocket to make the typing visible to him. It was an agonising moment."^[35]

On the other hand, Huxley's second wife, Laura Archera Huxley, would later emphasise in her biographical account, *This Timeless Moment*: "One of the great achievements of his life: that of having regained his sight." After revealing a letter she wrote to the *Los Angeles Times* disclaiming the label of Huxley as a "poor fellow who can hardly see" by Walter C. Alvarez, she tempered this: "Although I feel it was an injustice to treat Aldous as though he were blind, it is true there were many indications of his impaired vision. For instance, although Aldous did not wear glasses, he would quite often use a magnifying lens."^[36] Laura Huxley proceeded to elaborate a few nuances of inconsistency peculiar to Huxley's vision. Her account, in this respect, is discernibly congruent with the following sample of Huxley's own words from *The Art of Seeing*: "The most characteristic fact about the functioning of the total organism, or any part of the organism, is that it is not constant, but highly variable." Nevertheless, the topic of Huxley's eyesight continues to endure similar, significant controversy, regardless of how trivial a subject matter it might initially appear.^[37]

American popular science author Steven Johnson, in his book *Mind Wide Open*, quotes Huxley about his difficulties with visual encoding: "I am and, for as long as I can remember, I have always been a poor visualizer. Words, even the pregnant words of poets, do not evoke pictures in my mind. No hypnagogic visions greet me on the verge of sleep. When I recall something, the memory does not present itself to me as a vividly seen event or object. By an effort of the will, I can evoke a not very vivid image of what happened yesterday afternoon ..." ^{[38][39]}

Personal life

Huxley married Maria Nys (10 September 1899 – 12 February 1955), a Belgian he met at Garsington, Oxfordshire, in 1919. They had one child, Matthew Huxley (19 April 1920 – 10 February 2005), who had a career as an author, anthropologist, and prominent epidemiologist.^[40] In 1955, Maria died of cancer.^[15]

In 1956, Huxley married Laura Archera (1911–2007), also an author as well as a violinist and psychotherapist.^[15] She wrote *This Timeless Moment*, a biography of Huxley. Laura felt inspired to illuminate the story of their marriage through Mary Ann Braubach's 2010 documentary, "Huxley on Huxley".^[41]

In 1960, Huxley was diagnosed with laryngeal cancer and, in the years that followed, with his health deteriorating, he wrote the Utopian novel *Island*,^[42] and gave lectures on "Human Potentialities" both at the University of California's San Francisco Medical Center and at the Esalen Institute. These lectures were fundamental to the beginning of the Human Potential Movement.^[43]

Huxley was a close friend of Jiddu Krishnamurti and Rosalind Rajagopal and was involved in the creation of the Happy Valley School (now Besant Hill School of Happy Valley) in Ojai, California.

The most substantial collection of Huxley's few remaining papers (following the destruction of most in a fire) is at the Library of the University of California, Los Angeles.^[44] Some are also at the Stanford University Libraries.^[45]

On 9 April 1962, Huxley was informed he was elected Companion of Literature by the Royal Society of Literature, the senior literary organisation in Britain, and he accepted the title via letter on 28 April 1962.^[46] The correspondence between Huxley and the society are kept at the Cambridge University Library.^[46] The society invited Huxley to appear at a banquet and give a lecture at Somerset House, London in June 1963. Huxley wrote a draft of the speech he intended to give at the society; however, his deteriorating health meant he would not be able to attend.^[46]

Death

On his deathbed, unable to speak due to advanced laryngeal cancer, Huxley made a written request to his wife Laura for "LSD, 100 µg, intramuscular". According to her account of his death^[47] in *This Timeless Moment*, she obliged with an injection at 11:20 a.m. and a second dose an hour later; Huxley died aged 69, at 4:20 p.m. (Los Angeles time), on 22 November 1963.^[48]

Media coverage of Huxley's passing — as with that of the author C. S. Lewis — was overshadowed by the assassination of U.S. President John F. Kennedy on the same day.^[49] This coincidence served as the basis for Peter Kreeft's book *Between Heaven and Hell: A Dialog Somewhere Beyond Death with John F. Kennedy, C. S. Lewis, & Aldous Huxley*, which imagines a conversation among the three men taking place in Purgatory following their deaths.^[50]

Huxley's memorial service took place in London in December 1963 which was led by his older brother Julian, and his ashes were interred in the family grave at the Watts Cemetery, home of the Watts Mortuary Chapel in Compton, Guildford, Surrey, England.^[51]

Huxley had been a long-time friend of Russian composer Igor Stravinsky, who later dedicated his last orchestral composition to Huxley. Stravinsky began *Variations* in Santa Fé, New Mexico, in July 1963, and completed the composition in Hollywood on 28 October 1964. It was first performed in Chicago on 17 April 1965, by the Chicago Symphony Orchestra conducted by Robert Craft.^{[52][53]}

Awards

- 1939 James Tait Black Memorial Prize (for *After Many a Summer Dies the Swan*)

- 1959 American Academy of Arts and Letters Award of Merit (for *Brave New World*).
- 1962 Companion of Literature (Royal Society of Literature)^[54]

Film adaptations of Huxley's work

- 1968 *Point Counter Point* (BBC mini-series by Simon Raven)
- 1971 *The Devils* (*The Devils of Loudun* adapted by Ken Russell)
- 1980 *Brave New World* (US TV adaptation)
- 1998 *Brave New World* (US TV adaptation)

Works

Novels

- 1921 *Crome Yellow*
- 1923 *Antic Hay*
- 1925 *Those Barren Leaves*
- 1928 *Point Counter Point*
- 1932 *Brave New World*
- 1936 *Eyeless in Gaza*
- 1939 *After Many a Summer*
- 1944 *Time Must Have a Stop*
- 1948 *Ape and Essence*
- 1955 *The Genius and the Goddess*
- 1962 *Island*

Short story collections

- 1920 *Limbo*
- 1922 *Mortal Coils*
- 1924 *Little Mexican* (US title: *Young Archimedes*)
- 1926 *Two or Three Graces*
- 1930 *Brief Candles*
- 1944 *Collected Short Stories*
- *Jacob's Hands: A Fable* (co-written with Christopher Isherwood; discovered 1997)

Poetry collections

- 1916 *Oxford Poetry* (magazine editor)
- 1916 *The Burning Wheel*
- 1917 *Jonah*
- 1918 *The Defeat of Youth and Other Poems*
- 1920 *Leda*
- 1925 *Selected Poems*
- 1929 *Arabia Infelix and Other Poems*
- 1931 *The Cicadas and Other Poems*
- 1971 *Collected Poems*

Essay collections

- 1923 *On the Margin*
- 1925 *Along the Road*
- 1926 *Essays New and Old*

- 1927 *Proper Studies*
- 1929 *Do What You Will*
- 1930 *Vulgarity in Literature*
- 1931 *Music at Night*
- 1932 *Texts and Pretexts*
- 1936 *The Olive Tree and other essays*
- 1937 *Ends and Means*
- 1940 *Words and their Meanings*
- 1942 *The Art of Seeing*
- 1945 *The Perennial Philosophy*
- 1946 *Science, Liberty and Peace*
- 1950 *Themes and Variations*
- 1954 *The Doors of Perception*
- 1956 *Heaven and Hell*
- 1956 *Adonis and the Alphabet* (US title: *Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow*)
- 1958 *Collected Essays*
- 1958 *Brave New World Revisited*
- 1960 *On Art and Artists*
- 1963 *Literature and Science*
- 1977 *Moksha: Writings on Psychedelics and the Visionary Experience 1931–63*
- 1977 *The Human Situation: Lectures at Santa Barbara, 1959*

Screenplays

- *Brave New World*
- *Ape and Essence*
- 1940 *Pride and Prejudice* (collaboration)
- 1943 *Madame Curie* (collaboration)
- 1944 *Jane Eyre* (collaboration with John Houseman)
- 1947 *A Woman's Vengeance*
- 1950 *Prelude to Fame*
- 1951 Original screenplay (rejected) for Disney's animated *Alice in Wonderland* ^[55]
- 1971 *Eyeless in Gaza* (BBC mini-series in collaboration with Robin Chapman) ^[56]

Travel books

- 1925 *Along The Road: Notes and essays of a tourist*
- 1926 *Jesting Pilate: The Diary of a Journey*
- 1934 *Beyond the Mexique Bay: A Traveller's Journey*

Children's fiction

- 1967 *The Crows of Pearblossom*

Drama

- 1924 *The Discovery* (adapted from Francis Sheridan)
- 1931 *The World of Light*
- 1948 *Mortal Coils – A Play* (stage version of *The Gioconda Smile*)
- 1958 *The Genius and the Goddess* (stage version, co-written with Betty Wendel)
- 1967 *The Ambassador of Captripedia*
- 2000 *Now More Than Ever* (Lost play discovered by the Department of English Literature, University of Münster, Germany)

Articles written for *Vedanta and the West*

- 1941 "Distractions" · "Distractions II" · "Action and Contemplation" · "An Appreciation" · "The Yellow Mustard" · "Lines" · "Some Reflections of the Lord's Prayer"
- 1942 "Reflections of the Lord's Prayer" · "Reflections of the Lord's Prayer II" · "Words and Reality" · "Readings in Mysticism" · "Man and Reality" · "The Magical and the Spiritual"
- 1943 "Religion and Time" · "Idolatry" · "Religion and Temperament" · "A Note on the Bhagavatam" · "Seven Meditations"
- 1944 "On a Sentence From Shakespeare" · "The Minimum Working Hypothesis" · "From a Notebook" · "The Philosophy of the Saints"
- 1945 "That Art Thou" · "That Art Thou II" · "The Nature of the Ground" · "The Nature of the Ground II" · "God in the World"
- 1946 "Origins and Consequences of Some Contemporary Thought-Patterns" · "The Sixth Patriarch" · "Some Reflections on Time"
- 1947 "Reflections on Progress" · "Further Reflections on Progress" · "William Law" · "Notes on Zen"
- 1948 "Give Us This Day Our Daily Bread" · "A Note on Gandhi"
- 1949 "Art and Religion"
- 1950 "Foreword to an Essay on the Indian Philosophy of Peace"
- 1952 "A Note on Enlightenment" · "Substitutes for Liberation"
- 1954 "The Desert" · "A Note on Patanjali"
- 1955 "Who Are We?"
- 1956 "Foreword to the Supreme Doctrine" · "Knowledge and Understanding"
- 1957 "The "Inanimate" is Alive"
- 1960 "Symbol and Immediate Experience"

Audio recordings

- 1955 *Knowledge and Understanding* ^[57]^[58]
- 1955 *Who Are We?* ^[58]^[59]

Other

- 1936 *Pacifism and Philosophy*
- 1937 *An Encyclopedia of Pacifism* (editor)
- 1941 *Grey Eminence*
- 1953 *The Devils of Loudun*
- 1962 *The Politics of Ecology*
- 2007 *Selected Letters*

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