

Aldous Huxley

Aldous Huxley, in full **Aldous Leonard Huxley**, (born July 26, 1894, Godalming, Surrey, England—died November 22, 1963, Los Angeles, California, U.S.), English novelist and critic gifted with an acute and far-ranging intelligence. His works are notable for their wit and pessimistic satire, though he remains best known for one novel, *Brave New World* (1932), a model for much dystopian science fiction that followed.



Aldous Huxley, 1959.
Robert M. Quittner/Black Star

Aldous Huxley was a grandson of the prominent biologist Thomas Henry Huxley and was the third child of the biographer and man of letters Leonard Huxley; his brothers included physiologist Andrew Fielding Huxley and biologist Julian Huxley. He was educated at Eton, during which time he became partially blind because of keratitis. He retained enough eyesight to read with difficulty, and he graduated from Balliol College, Oxford, in 1916. He published his first book in 1916 and worked on the periodical *Athenaeum* from 1919 to 1921. Thereafter he devoted himself largely to his own writing and spent much of his time in Italy until the late 1930s, when he settled in California.

Huxley established himself as a major author with his first two published novels, *Crome Yellow* (1921) and *Antic Hay* (1923); these are witty and malicious satires on the pretensions of the English literary and intellectual coteries of his day. *Those Barren Leaves* (1925) and *Point Counter Point* (1928) are works in a similar vein.

Brave New World (1932) marked a turning point in Huxley's career: like his earlier work, it is a fundamentally satiric novel, but it also vividly expresses Huxley's distrust of 20th-century trends in both politics and technology. The novel presents a nightmarish vision of a future society in which psychological conditioning forms the basis for a scientifically determined and immutable caste system that, in turn, obliterates the individual and grants all control to the World State. The novel *Eyeless in Gaza* (1936) continues to shoot barbs at the emptiness and aimlessness experienced in contemporary society, but it also shows Huxley's growing interest in Hindu philosophy and mysticism as a viable alternative. (Many of his subsequent works reflect this preoccupation, notably *The Perennial Philosophy* [1946].) In the novel *After Many a Summer Dies the Swan* (1939), published soon after he moved to California, Huxley turned his attention to American culture.

Huxley's most important later works are *The Devils of Loudun* (1952), a detailed psychological study of a historical incident in which a group of 17th-century French nuns

were allegedly the victims of demonic possession; and *The Doors of Perception* (1954), a book about Huxley's experiences with the hallucinogenic drug mescaline.

The author's lifelong preoccupation with the negative and positive impacts of science and technology on 20th-century life, expressed most forcefully in *Brave New World* but also in one of his last essays, written for Encyclopædia Britannica's 1963 volume of *The Great Ideas Today*, about the conquest of space, make him one of the representative writers and intellectuals of that century.

This article was most recently revised and updated by J.E. Luebering.

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