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| Huxley, Aldous (1894-1963) |
| Huxley, Leonard Aldous |
| Aldous Huxley is best known for his dystopian novel *Brave New World* (1932), and his disquisition on psychedelic substances, *The Doors of Perception* (1954). In the inter-war years, Huxley commanded a formidable reputation, and his work was considered alongside the leading modernists. He was impressively prolific and wrote in a variety of genres, producing poetry, short stories, essays, novels, plays, biography and travel writing. His work appeared in many of the modernist Little Magazines, such as *Coterie*, *The Egoist* and *Wheels*. Huxley was a zealous individualist: while he socialised with Virginia Woolf, Roger Fry and Clive Bell (among others), he was never part of the Bloomsbury Group. Likewise, though a regular guest at Garsington Manor, the home of society hostess Lady Ottoline Morrell, he was not regarded as a member of her pacifist coterie that included Lytton Strachey and Bertrand Russell. After moving to America, Huxley became increasingly concerned with mysticism, and his reputation declined; however, the work he produced during this period was championed by key figures in the New Age and counter-culture movements, and he played a vital part in popularising Eastern religions in the West, such as Buddhism, Tantra and Advaita Vedanta. |
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After moving to America, Huxley became increasingly concerned with mysticism, and his reputation declined; however, the work he produced during this period was championed by key figures in the New Age and counter-culture movements, and he played a vital part in popularising Eastern religions in the West, such as Buddhism, Tantra and Advaita Vedanta.  Aldous Huxley was born on 26 July 1894, near Godalming in Surrey. He came from a distinguished intellectual lineage: his grandfather was T. H. Huxley, who was nicknamed 'Darwin's bulldog' for his advocacy of evolutionary theory; and his great-uncle was the poet and critic Matthew Arnold. His childhood was marked by three traumatic episodes that helped shape him as a writer: in 1908, his mother Julia died of cancer; three years later, at the age of sixteen, he contracted an eye infection that permanently impaired his eyesight; and in 1914, his brother Trevenen committed suicide.  After attending Eton, Huxley read English at Balliol College, Oxford. He attempted to enlist during World War I, but was rejected due to his poor eyesight. Through the hospitality of Ottoline Morrell and her husband Philip, Huxley met many eminent artists and intellectuals, as well as the Belgian refugee Maria Nys, whom he married in 1919.  His first published book was a volume of poetry, *The Burning Wheel* (1916). Despite the modernist experimentation of poets such as Ezra Pound, Huxley's poetry was fairly conventional and favoured traditional forms. Likewise, Huxley's first novel, *Crome Yellow* (1921), eschewed the formal experimentation of his modernist contemporaries and drew comparisons with the work of Thomas Love Peacock (1785-1866). On the other hand, Huxley's London-based novels of the 1920s, *Antic Hay* (1923) and *Point Counter Point* (1928), vividly captured the post-war mood of anomie, amorality and empty hedonism. Moreover, Huxley was a novelist of ideas whose work serves as a barometer of the intellectual atmosphere of his era. For instance, in his early work he satirised psychoanalysis, examined the impact of quantum physics, deplored the standardisation that was occurring in art as well as industry, explored mysticism, advocated eugenics, and propounded a philosophy loosely based on the *Weltanschauung* of his friend D. H. Lawrence. Huxley's classic novel *Brave New World* (1932) was a baleful vision of what the world would look like if the mechanistic ideas of J. B. Watson, Sigmund Freud, Henry Ford and H. G. Wells were given free reign.  In 1934-35, Huxley suffered from insomnia and depression and made some decisive changes to his life as a result. Encouraged by his friend and fellow polymath Gerald Heard, Huxley began to meditate and joined what would become the Peace Pledge Union. Having been alternately attracted and repelled by mysticism in the 1920s, Huxley began to espouse a mystical philosophy, both in his work with the Peace Pledge Union (under whose auspices he wrote the 1936 pamphlet *What Are You Going to Do About It? The Case for Constructive Peace*) and in his fiction. He drew on many of these experiences in his novel *Eyeless In Gaza* (1936), which charts the spiritual journey of Anthony Beavis, who grows disillusioned with his cynical life of loveless affairs and ivy-tower elitism, and becomes an exponent of mysticism and pacifism.  In 1937, Huxley undertook a lecture tour of America and ended up settling in California. Here he consolidated his knowledge of Eastern mysticism through his association with Swami Prabhavananda, the head of the Vedanta Society for Southern California, and the Indian sage and former Theosophist Jiddu Krishnamurti. His fiction became a vehicle for his mystical insights, most notably *After Many a Summer* (1939), *Time Must Have a Stop* (1944) and *The Genius and the Goddess* (1954). He also wrote a biography of the Catholic mystic Father Joseph, *Grey Eminence* (1941), and a book about the demonisation of the seventeenth-century priest Urbain Grandier, *The Devils of Loudon* (1952). In 1945, Huxley published an anthology of mystical writings, *The Perennial Philosophy*, in which he argued that while mystics from the Christian, Buddhist, Hindu and Sufi traditions conceived of God differently, their experiences of union with the godhead, or what Huxley termed the Divine Ground, and the insights they derived from this, were essentially the same. For Huxley, this constituted empirical evidence that there was a unified metaphysical realm beyond the phenomenal world of diversity. His experiments with mescaline and LSD were conducted in order to apprehend this metaphysical dimension for himself. The books *The Doors of Perception* (1954) and *Heaven and Hell* (1956) record his psychedelic experiences and the conclusions he drew from them. Despite Huxley's commitment to mysticism, he never abandoned his faith in science, and in his later work, such as *Island* (1962) and *Literature and Science* (1963), he argued that if we want to realise our 'human potentialities' we need to embrace both.  Huxley died of throat cancer on the day of John F. Kennedy's assassination, 22 November 1963. His essays have been collected in the *Complete Essays* (6 vols., 2000-02), edited by James Sexton and Robert S. Baker; and two separate volumes of his correspondence have been published, edited by Grover Smith (1969) and James Sexton (2007) respectively. List of Works:Novels *Crome Yellow* (1921)  *Antic Hay* (1923)  *Those Barren Leaves* (1925)  *Point Counter Point* (1928)  *Brave New World* (1932)  *Eyeless in Gaza* (1936)  *After Many a Summer* (1939)  *Time Must Have a Stop* (1944)  *Ape and Essence* (1948)  *The Genius and the Goddess* (1954)  *Island* (1962) Short Story Collections *Limbo* (1920)  *Mortal Coils* (1922)  *Little Mexican* (1924)  *Two or Three Graces* (1926)  *Brief Candles* (1930) Poetry *The Burning Wheel* (1916)  *Jonah* (1917)  *The Defeat of Youth* (1918)  *Leda* (1920)  *Arabia Infelix* (1929)  *The Cicadas* (1931) Biography *Grey Eminence* (1941)  *The Devils of Loudon* (1952) Travel Writing *Along the Road* (1925)  *Jesting Pilate* (1926)  *Beyond the Mexique Bay* (1934) Anthologies *Texts and Pretexts* (1932)  *The Perennial Philosophy* (1945) Essays *On the Margin* (1923)  *Proper Studies* (1927)  *Do What You Will* (1929)  *Music at Night* (1931)  *The Olive Tree* (1936)  *Themes and Variations* (1950)  *Adonis and the Alphabet* (1956)  *Brave New World Revisited* (1958) Non-Fiction Books *Ends and Means* (1937)  *The Art of Seeing* (1942)  *The Doors of Perception* (1954)  *Heaven and Hell* (1956)  *Literature and Science* (1963) Drama *The World of Light* (1931) Posthumous Books *Letters of Aldous Huxley* (1969)  *The Human Situation* (1978)  *Aldous Huxley's Hearst Essays* (1994)  *The Hidden Huxley: Contempt and Compassion for the Masses 1920-36* (1994)  *Jacob’s Hands* (1998)  *Now More than Ever* (2000)  *Aldous Huxley: Complete Essays, 6 Vols.* (2000-02)  *Selected Letters of Aldous Huxley* (2007) |
| Further reading: Key Biographies of Aldous Huxley (Bedford)  (Murray)  (Sawyer) |