



Aldous Huxley: A Biography

Sybille Bedford

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In this dazzling conjunction of subject and author, the great English novelist Aldous Huxley, the wholly civilized man, is brought wholly alive in a magnificent full-scale biography by the brilliant English novelist Sybille Bedford, an intimate friend of the Huxleys through four decades. With a pointillistic richness of moment, place, and talk, she re-creates not only the private Huxley and the literary Huxley but the entire intellectual and social era to which he was central. Despite the almost total loss of his sight at age sixteen, Huxley became a titan and cultural hero of the decades after World War I, on terms with the outstanding writers and artists of his day, from D. H. Lawrence to Stravinsky and Auden. He had two separate and large careers as *Crome Yellow* and *Point Counter Point*, flag-bearer of England's Bright Young People through the 1920s, and romancer of glittering women; and later, in America, as the increasingly philosophical and utopian thinker, and a pioneering explorer of the frontiers of the human mind. Drawing on his letters and diaries, the memories of his intimates, and her own sharp and sensitive comprehension of Huxley's writings, Mrs. Bedford has written a masterful biography. "Her novelist's eye," writes V. S. Pritchett, "brings the writer to life. Huxley becomes a living, deeply attractive presence, while his great contemporaries flash through these pages in memorable and moving encounters. Mrs. Bedford's biography stands as the major work on a major figure in the literary and intellectual history of the twentieth century."

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From Reader Review Aldous Huxley: A Biography for online ebook

katie says

Exhaustive. Not the most amazing writing style, but CERTAINLY packed full of info on Aldous and anyone he was close with. I enjoyed it to the very end. But then again, I am a die hard Huxley fan (read : loser).
haha.

Lizzie says

I don't know if this is the best or most objective bio of Huxley, since the author was a friend and doesn't have much bad to say about him, but it was certainly interesting. He was an interesting guy. I'd read and loved *Island* and *Brave New World*, and knew he'd taken LSD. I hadn't known he'd had such a hard childhood (he lost his mother and eyesight in the same year) or that he was interested in Dianetics, or was such a committed pacifist. It was time well spent.

Steve says

Big Huxley fan, so for me it was a must

Sam Schulman says

It's hard to remain interested in Aldous Huxley through this long, respectful biography, but it must be read because - shyly revealed in the course of the telling - Sybille Bedford was a troubled teenager taken in by the Huxleys in the 30s - and she actually make the reader (or at least this reader) fall completely and actually in love with Laura Huxley as you read. It's a completely unique experience - perhaps unique to me - to have this experience with a real person (I certainly had it with Tess Darbyfield of *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* but that's different). Bedford wrote "A Legacy," which is another of the great fictional reconstructions of what it's like to be a German - so truthful-to-life that for a long time I thought it must have been a translation. But the fact is that Bedford can do things with prose that no one else can do.

Greg says

I enjoyed the first half more than the second. There's lots of interesting trivia. The book is as much about Huxley's first wife Maria as it is with Huxley. The author had a long and close friendship with them. The narrative is often confusing when quoting from letters from various people, (mostly by Maria), Bedford dropping in brief passages of her own. When describing Huxley's final illness and taking LSD as he was dying, the author didn't explain or mention why Huxley took LSD as he was exiting this world. He thought the state of mind and being one is experiencing, i.e, higher spiritual state and at peace with no fear,

determines the spiritual state one enters in the next life.

The book is a wealth of interesting information and facts, but clearly needed an editor. Far too long and tedious in parts but a good description of the long life of one of the great minds of the twentieth century. A mind that seemed to know no bounds of interest or subject.

Mark says

Well I will personally dispense with reading the early part of this, simply because Woodcock's book covered it very well, and this is more a hagiography albeit by a personal friend. But already one thing I never knew, and I am sure most of you did not, either, is that Huxley's famous "grey flannel trousers" seen as "miraculous" beneath the expansion valve of the mescaline experience, were actually *blue jeans*. Just think how many *more* pairs of Levi's they could have sold! (yuk, yuk.) Were it not for Mrs. Huxley's editorial primness, hoping to reach a more highbrow audience. Well it's just one of the fascinating trivia available in this version of the man's biography. But I'd put the emphasis here more on the trivia, as, unlike Woodcock, she focuses on the human being and his trials, than on the literature and the message. Not that they were few, nor un-noteworthy. Her insights as to the message of his book *Island* (a culmination of the better part of his life's work) is off a little, but perhaps only because she had no particular part to play in the psychedelic movement- which would have given the author a wider range of understanding, as well, for some of Huxley's conclusions regarding the proper social role of these substances. And yes, he was very annoyed with Tim Leary's "marketing schemes"- as in retrospect I am myself. Some things just aren't for everyone, and if such interesting and "out of self" experiences can be induced naturally in certain people, it might do them a world more good than tripping. (There's lots more I could say about that, but, I like keeping reviews to the point...)

Colin says

I am really interested in the life of Huxley. However I did not like the style of this biography.
