

KÖNIGS



ERLÄUTERUNGEN

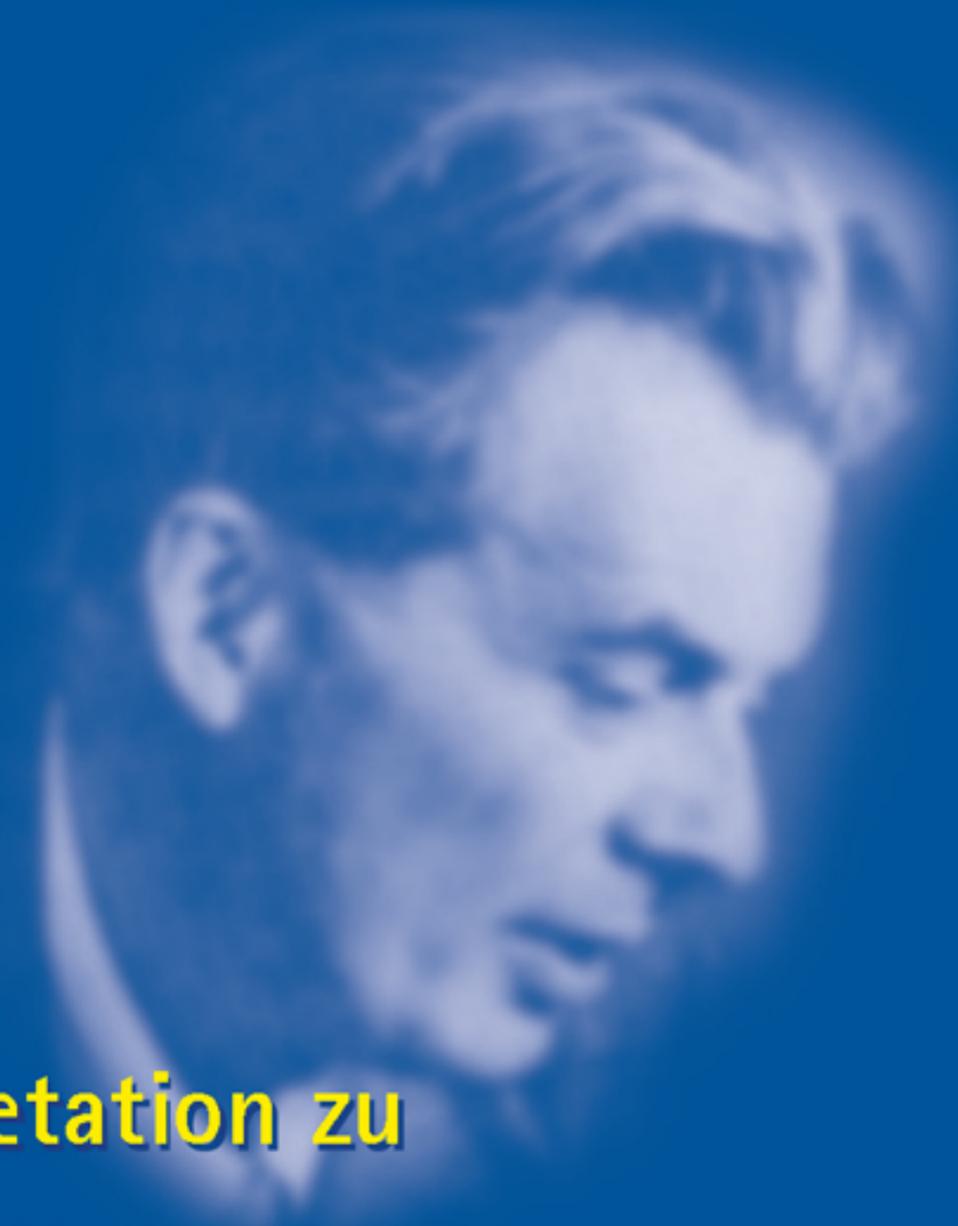
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ERFOLG
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Interpretation zu
Aldous Huxley

Brave New World
(in englischer Sprache)



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1.2 Historical context

The areas of Huxley's life which have been influential in shaping the ideology, subject matter and style of his work are relatively easy to determine: family and friends, distinguished personalities and experiences gained from travelling around the world, the arts, the sciences, religion and philosophy. Of the many people he met³, the author David Herbert Lawrence and Doctor F. Matthias Alexander stand out in particular. Of equal importance, however, are the insights he gained from his encounters with spiritual worlds of a quite different nature (including Far-Eastern religions and Native American mythology). With his thirst for knowledge, he made these discoveries for himself and incorporated them into his own increasingly compact view of the world and humanity. One of the most significant events was his experiences with intoxicating drugs, which influenced both his perception and his writing. Obviously, as a highly educated writer, Huxley felt quite at home in the world of (English) literature. *Brave New World* bears testimony to the roots of this author. However, it is not just Shakespeare who has been given a special place (see chapter 2.7); Huxley was also very familiar with other works by English authors and he continued the tradition of utopian novels which, right up to the beginning of the twentieth century, had very much been influenced by English writers.

The easiest approach it seems would be to remove one by one the individual layers of Huxley's intellect which define his spiritual cosmos and therefore his literary works. However, things

3 The list of authors who were acquaintances or friends of Huxley's from around 1915 onwards is long. Amongst the more famous are Katherine Mansfield, Virginia Woolf, T[homas] S[tearns] Eliot, John Middleton Murry, Osbert Sitwell, Ottoline and Philip Morell, Bertrand Russell and D. H. Lawrence.

become considerably more difficult when you try to reduce these individual threads to a common denominator. This is when cracks and inconsistencies become evident. They are both part of Huxley and a hallmark of his biography and his literary career. Allow me to cite a quotation which in my opinion best sums up Aldous Huxley as a personality and artist:

*'An intellectual with a mistrust of mind and language, an artist who prefers unpopular truth to artistic effect and whose search in art for standards to live by is accompanied by a mistrust of art, a lifeworshipper (...), an alleged mystic who is always clear and rational, and a knowledgeable scientist who has written a century's severest critiques of science ...'*⁴

The wealth of life-changing and influential moments described below are too numerous to analyze in detail in this study guide. Each and every aspect of them should be of equal interest to the reader.

Aldous Huxley's childhood and youth was that of a carefree 'gentleman', if you disregard his severe eye problems which prevented him from becoming a scientist. He was born into a well-off family who were very conscious of their unusually cultured background: Previous generations on both his mother's and father's side had been dominated by scientists and writers.⁵ From an early age onwards, his vibrantly intellectual surroundings, at home as well as in the schools he attended, shaped his interest in the arts and culture, as well as in questions on life, which were approached and discussed from differ-

Intelligent young man from educated family – globetrotter

4 Jerome Meckier: *Aldous Huxley*, as quoted from Reiner Poppe, p. 44 (cf. Bibliography)

5 Thomas Henry Huxley (1825–1895), Aldous Huxley's grandfather, was a highly respected biologist and advocate of Darwin's Theory of Evolution. On his mother's side, there was Thomas Arnold (1795–1842), a famous educator, among a number of other prominent Arnold family members.

1.2 Historical context

ent viewpoints (such as biology and philosophy). The sentence 'it is language and culture that we owe our humanity'⁶ best characterizes Huxley's intellectual position, which was already embedded in him before he had even experienced anything of the world. In *Brave New World*, this sentence becomes the central point of polarization between Mustapha Mond and John the Savage.

Inspiration for life:

D. H. Lawrence; The world of literature – first and foremost: William Shakespeare

Aldous Huxley and D. H. Lawrence had known each other since 1915⁷, however, it was only after their second encounter that they formed a friendship which lasted up until Lawrence's death (1930). David Herbert Lawrence was from a miner's family

that came from Nottingham in the industrial north of England. He was largely the product of this social environment. He became a teacher before he was able to earn a meagre living from writing. In 1912, having barely recovered from a serious lung disease, he ran away to Italy with the German-born Frieda von Richthofen, the wife of a certain Ernest Weekley. They married following the Weekleys' divorce. Their marriage was turbulent throughout up to David Herbert Lawrence's premature death. – From Lawrence, Huxley learned the technique of 'breathing in and out', the meditative withdrawal into the self. He also took up painting, a hobby which Lawrence pursued passionately throughout his life. By the time the two couples met again in Italy in 1926, Lawrence had already published several books: *Sons and Lovers* (1913), *The Rainbow* (1915), *Women in Love* (1920). *The Plumed Serpent*, which also influenced Huxley's *Brave New World*, was published that same year. At nearly ten years his junior, Huxley was fascinated by his older friend's phi-

6 *Culture and the Individual*, quoted from the internet (see Bibliography)

7 Robert Lucas: *Frieda von Richthofen*, p. 155

losophy on the beauty and purity of life, in which sexuality, too, seemed to be almost sacred. Others considered Lawrence to be a writer who glorified uninhibited sexuality. This accusation has now long been discounted by literary critics. Lawrence was interested in portraying physical love as an expression of the union of the sexes experienced in its entirety, completely aside from pornography, embarrassment and prudery. As the British literary scientist Frank Kermode pointed out: 'Lawrence was always, whatever he might seem to be doing, a most moral writer'.⁸ No other person or artist had been such an inspiration to Huxley in such a relatively short space of time as D. H. Lawrence. –

It was a stroke of good fortune that following his friend's death, whose letters he felt called upon to publish⁹, Huxley met another person who was to play a decisive role in his life: F. M. Alexander. The Australian scientist convinced him of the advantages of a holistic approach to medicine, which most happily coincided simultaneously with the writer's perception of a holistic view of the world. Through him, Huxley obtained confirmation of Lawrence's ideas, which were now based on empirical study rather than on the enthusiastic whims of his deceased friend. – 'Travel broadens the mind' is a popular saying. Huxley was almost always travelling somewhere. Accordingly, the fount of knowledge and experiences which he had acquired and made in foreign countries was almost inexhaustible. He travelled to Europe repeatedly, in particular to Italy and France, but also to South East Asia and Mexico, Egypt and the Mediterranean. When the Huxleys left their house in Sanary-sur-Mer to move to America, it was the start of a particularly restless period in the writer's life with ever changing scenery. However, his stay

⁸ Frank Kermode: *Lawrence*, p. 135

⁹ The publication of these letters was Aldous Huxley's last service for his deceased friend: *The Letters of D. H. Lawrence. Edited and with an introduction by Aldous Huxley (1932)*. Huxley continued to remain friends with Frieda Lawrence in the succeeding years.

there also brought him a step closer to finding himself. In Hollywood, where he assisted in film projects, he gained an insight into Vedantic Philosophy (see also p. 22 f. of this guide), found in early Hinduism, and he also spent a great deal of time studying Buddhism.¹⁰ He was now able to perceive the spiritual centre of life more and more clearly and he began to narrow the circle surrounding this.

Throughout his life, Huxley remained spiritually at home in the English Renaissance. He felt closely connected to it. To him, the people of that age (sixteenth and seventeenth century) were not simply living a form of self-realization which was almost ruthless. The extreme contradictions in their temperaments corresponded at the same time to the ordered chaos of the universe.¹¹ William Shakespeare (1564–1616), as the later representative of this age in world literature, took and takes a special position. Huxley already became familiar with his works during his childhood. His love of Shakespeare and the depth of his penetration into the almost immeasurable universe of this playwright are best demonstrated by the fact that on his death bed he wrote his essay on *Shakespeare and Religion*. With this essay, Huxley brought the circles of his thoughts and life to a conclusion. He did not consider Shakespeare to be a man of religious dogma, yet he had made religion into one of the main themes in his work. Huxley saw each and every one of us on our way to an 'existential religion of mysticism'¹² at whose beginning Shake-

10 Vedanta, meaning the culmination of knowledge. There is no dogma in Hinduism. The divine soul (*brahman*) is reflected in the individual human soul (*atman*). See also Theo Schumacher: *Aldous Huxley*, p. 82–85

11 The Englishman living in the age of the Renaissance understood and perceived the world as a universal, hierarchically ordered whole based on the Creation. This whole had been shattered (through the fall of mankind). The resulting cracks and devastations were reflected in the individual people. Nevertheless, the actions undertaken throughout this entire era were marked by a bold optimism which put an end to the Medieval thinking for ever.

12 *Shakespeare and Religion*, quoted from the internet. The essay was first published in the *Show Magazine* (1964). See also Julian Huxley (ed.): *Aldous Huxley zum Gedächtnis*. Munich 1969