

Aldous Huxley (1894-1963)

Aldous Huxley was a prominent novelist and essayist of his time. His works are wide-ranging as he had all significant literary genres to his credit- novels, non-fiction, essays, narratives and poems. He was nominated for Nobel Prize in literature seven times and was elected companion of literature by the Royal Society of literature in 1962.

English literature has produced a variety of essayists, each having a style of their own thus distinctive from others. Bacon's essays were terse, pithy and full of concentrated wisdom. In an essay by Addison, the thought is thin and diluted with a tendency towards personal gossip, sometimes. Charles Lamb's essay is composed of a medley of reflections, questions and personal anecdotes. In comparison, Huxley's essays are on topical subjects peppered with wit and intellect of the author. In his preface to his Collected essays, Huxley talks about essays having "three poles of reference". The first one is personal and autobiographical; the second is the objective, the concrete one based on facts; the third one deals with the abstract universal. Huxley didn't use autobiographical details much in his essays but a reader would see some snippets of his life here and there lending grace to his essays. In the second category, Huxley has written essays on bombs, drugs and different cultures of the world. The third kind of essays, he rather wrote late in his life.

Huxley had a huge repertoire of knowledge gained from travelling, voracious reading and meeting with intellectuals of his period. He had a full mind and

insatiable spirit of inquiry. His essays are relevant to the situation in his time and ours and give us a real view of the intellectual life of the western man during the period in which they were written. Huxley believed that behind all the appearances there is reality; that reality, for him, was the unitive knowledge of God. All his works lead to that, and his essays record the search and the affirmation. Huxley is nearly always easy to read, though sometimes he expects close attention to an abstract argument. He is never trivial for the world is too wonderfully exciting to permit any triviality. However, some of his essays are as gay and light as a short story. And the endings may be rounding off the subject into a clam finale, or an unexpected flash of wit, or a jest. The final gesture was part of his style.