

Obituary: *Francis Huxley* for: *The Daily Telegraph*

Pleasurable gossip mixed with titbits of Tribal wisdom were amongst the favourite pastimes of the inventive social anthropologist Francis Huxley, who recently passed away aged 93.

Francis, the second son of the Swiss native Juliette (nee Baillot) fathered by the renowned polymath, Sir Julian Huxley, grew up in Oxford and in a flat above the London Zoo, where his father reigned as director. As was the case for so many of his generation, he was ejected from the family's nest to both gain and suffer from a boarding school education. His luck was in when he found himself in Gordonstoun, where humanities were high on the list.

Being born into an intellectual dynasty made him heir to a wealth of knowledge as well as the benefactor of a spell of disguised madness. With A levels in his pocket and WWII raging he served on the Royal Navy's HMS *Ramilles* as a navigating lieutenant. From the horrors of war he ventured into anthropology, like Kurt Vonnegut. The renowned Meyer Fortes, provided him with a shining example of how to do ethnological field work. During 1951 and 1953 Huxley spent six months living with the Urubus, a tribe in the Amazon jungle of Brazil. He was a pioneer in social anthropology, allowing people not only to speak for themselves, but conjoining that with a deep reflexive awareness of his own position in relation to his story tellers. His work took in rituals, cooking and puberty rites with an emphasis on Shamanism and the grand stories which underpin tribal mythmaking and making sense of the human place in the cosmos.

Back from Brazil, Huxley became assistant Curator at the Liverpool Museum, a setting benefitting his stunning *Affable Savages* (1956). As a social anthropologist he also worked at the Weyburn Hospital, Canada, where he was a participant observer in Humphry Osmond's research on how LSD might help to mitigate alcohol addiction. Huxley met Albert Hofmann several times, who told him, it was not the acid but the base in LSD that plays the tune. To further his understanding in human quirks, he conducted fieldwork in Haiti (1959–60), asking whether Voodoo, as a place where individual and social forces met, could be seen as a way of coping with insanity, either by herbal or ritual means. He recounted his experiences in *The Invisibles* (1966) a deeply insightful examination of the rich Haitian lore of healing plants, voodoo ceremonies and the daily life of a priestess. Despite being mostly active outside of academia, he was a Research Fellow at St. Catherine's College Oxford (1962-68). In his *Peoples of the World* (1964) he traced the history and origin of peoples in each part of the world seeking to delineate the patterns of human practices on the frontier between mind and matter.

Huxley first met the maverick Scottish Psychiatrist, R. D. Laing at a conference on Ritualization, in 1965, organized by Julian Huxley. Laing was taken by Francis' eloquence and wit, while the latter was fascinated by this urban shaman's psychic aikido, hitting at the navel of insincerity. In due course Huxley was invited to join the Philadelphia Association, in London, founded by Laing and others, serving as director of studies from 1972-1982. He was on stage at the Dialectics of Liberation Conference, 1967, whose purpose was to demystify human violence in all its forms, to understand the social systems from which it emanates, and to explore new forms of political action.

In its wake Huxley was co-founder in 1969 of Survival International, which was to become an important NGO for the protection and rights of indigenous peoples. Another leading anthropologist of the day, Robin Hanbury-Tenison, became its first Chairman. Huxley was a member of the four person Brooks mission, sponsored by the Aborigines' Protection Society and aided by the Brazilian Government, to investigate, the plight of native Indian tribes. In their *Tribes of the Amazon Basin in Brazil* (1973) he stressed the importance of viewing the religions and ritual practices of indigenous people's as "a necessary safeguard of mental health."

As a private scholar, teacher, lecturer and supervisor his heyday was the 1970s, writing *The Way of The Sacred* (1974), *The Raven and the Writing Desk* (1976) and *The Dragon - Nature of spirit, spirit of nature* (1979) - literary adventures which addressed the dichotomy of mind and body through myth, and the role of riddle and paradox in sense making. Huxley challenged the conventions of Social and Structural Anthropology, bringing to the table a keen sensitivity to psychoanalysis, and ESP amongst other things. In the late 1980s he retired to Santa Fe, where he continued his writing on shamanic practices, leading to his final book, *Shamans through time* (2001). In 2006 he moved to California, where he lived in close quarters to his former spouse and friend Adele Getty and her husband Michael Williams, who looked after him to his dying day. Huxley was married and divorced three times and will be remembered as a splendid host, a fabulous cook, a sagacious thinker, excellent conversationalist and most affable of friends. As an early apprentice to him I once discussed his presence in my own dreams. "I am always at my best in other people's dreams" he said. His presence will continue to be felt in the earthly life and in dreams.

Francis Huxley, 28.08.1923 Oxford – died 29.10 2016 Sebastopol Ca.

Theodor Itten