

## **Brave New World: A Critical Analysis**

A recommended read for anyone, a true eye-opener to our society's follies and rapid progress towards perfection

In the way that Margaret Atwood sets the tone before the novel with her marvellous introduction, I would like to take this opportunity to present this reader with an interesting idea. Despite the likely possibility that upon reading only a few pages into the novel, they will be tempted to reject the ideas of the novel, I would like to caution them against this. They will describe the details of this story where religion is completely obsolete, social class is predestined with a birthing/cloning process known as the "Bokanovsky Process" and dead humans are burned for energy, as excessively "far-fetched", or a gross "hyperbole" that accentuates the minor flaws of our society. I would like to caution them to avoid this, as although the ideas may seem foolish, it is simply a result of the genius of the author, Aldous Huxley. These ideas are presented in a world where everything is seemingly perfect, a utopia, yet this is only done to highlight his sincere beliefs about humanity's scary progress towards whatever end goal we see: a veritable dystopia. Furthermore, it is tempting to qualify this novel as science fiction, but it is veritably a comedy- a satire. It is truly his main idea that we must question our world in its current state, before it is too late. We must establish our definition of happiness, our definition of order and our picturesque perfect society before we become lost in the technological cave that is this brave new world. In the magical words of William Shakespeare in *The Tempest*, this is truly a mirror image with real individuals like ourselves, rather than a distant tale of science: "O brave new world, that has such people in't!"

### **Characterization and Conflict**

The biggest aspect of both characterization and conflict in this novel may be the lack thereof. It is difficult to find flaws or objectionable material in the World State found in this novel, as everyone is seemingly content in their position in society. Everything seems at ease, peace and balance, although not fair as some individuals are destined for lower caste positions and some for higher caste position (genetically predisposed to a caste and climate based on their conditioning in the bottles from which they are born). The only identifiable rift in the norm of characterization and conflict is the similar strife of Helmholtz Watson (who is ironically behind the state of perfection with his profession in creating the radio signals that control the mind's of society members while they sleep with sayings such as, "a gramme is better than a damn"), Bernard Marx (An Alpha male who fails to fit in because of his inferior physical stature. Bernard also holds unorthodox beliefs about sexual relationships, sports, and community events) and John (from the Savage Reservation). These characters are essentially us, trapped inside this futuristic prison, who do not fully comprehend the constant numbing of the mind with the Soma drug (which has a power embodied in the World Controller's quote: "And if ever, by some unlucky chance, anything unpleasant should somehow happen, why, there's always soma to give you a holiday from the facts"), the constant levels of controlled happiness by a government that has everything controlled to a picturesque appearance of beauty and belief from the novel that "everybody belongs to everybody," struggle to find a sense of imperfection/wholeness in this perfect society. When we look at the female population of this society, Lenina

Crowne is the only one we meet who refuses to accept her identity as an exchangeable product for men to “have”. The rest of the novel’s characters, rightfully so, have accepted their roles in society as a result of constant conditioning and brainwashing- they are simply automations, drones. The conflict is truly placed on the reader while they read to consider with fright and possible seducing if this is the type of world we want to live and how many similarities our present day society actually shares with this alien environment of the future.

### **Plot and Dialogue**

It will quickly be discovered by any reader of this tale, which it is not intended to be plot heavy to any extent; rather, the theme and setting were veritably the means the author wanted the reader to obtain from the novel. Nevertheless, certain elements of the plot are key to the validity and understanding this novel creates. First and foremost, the journey of Bernard and Lenina to the “Savage Reservation” and Bernard’s constant threat of being exiled to the dreaded Denmark island which he avoids temporarily by blackmailing a World Controller highlight the journey or individuals to become veritable individuals. They attempt to become different than the accepting majority who will never see or believe anything, and sadly will never even care. Furthermore, the final plot element is how the novel ends that is truly satirical and paradoxical. In the end, as punishment for their behaviour, Bernard and Helmholtz are exiled and John elects to live in isolation in the wild. Even as they are portrayed somewhat as the unlucky ones as John is treated as an animal in a zoo being gawked at for his individual values and customs, author Huxley truly illuminates that that they are the ones we should strive to be for they have truly found the definition of happiness and what it means to be an individual. Although they may suffer temporary suffering it is these characters that will realize the most tangible happiness in comparison to the drones that comprise the “World State”.

### **Quotes worth mentioning (ones that I believe worked) and the ideas they present**

#### **Page 5: “Community, Identity, Stability”**

These ideas, possessed by the “World State”, touch upon the validation of certain communist/socialist ideas with their belief that the good of the group is more important than the individual, a highly contrasting concept with modern America. This is the only one I feel did not work in persuading the reader, as these are values that are very distant to a traditional American teenager who knows nothing but freedom and consumerism.

#### **Page 12: “And that is the secret of happiness and virtue- liking what you’ve got to do. All conditioning aims at that: making people like their inescapable social destiny.”**

This quote was truly depressing in illustrating the veritable truth of a perfect society, as although everyone is seemingly happy to a certain extent, there is no room for change, development and potential. Everything simply is the way it is and will always be so- a sad thing to believe, but one that we must consider before advancing further with our current society.

**Page 63 “But queer that Alphas and Betas won’t make any more plants grow than those nasty little Gammas and Deltas and Epsilons down there.”**

This quote truly embodied the voice and message of Aldous Huxley shining through one of the characters where it is said that regardless of your social standing in the world, we are all equal in death (when the bodies are produced in order to produce energy), so why should we not be equal in life?

**Page 156 “Well, I’d rather be unhappy that have the sort of false, and lying happiness you were having here.”**

It is this quote by Bernard Marx, a character that strongly differs from the norm of the “World State” in not accepting the strict order of social customs, that brings up a concept that is touched upon in plays such as Arthur Miller’s *Death of a Salesman*, and Plato’s allegory of the cave where individuals find their level of happiness through a metaphorical cave where they are unable to see things as they truly are. The commentary by the author here is that true happiness is not a result of illusion and ignorance, but rather self-acceptance and facing things as they are otherwise our happiness, too, will be equally as untrue.

**Page 167 “Some kinds of baseness are nobly undergone. I’d like to undergo something nobly.”**

This questions our current society’s pursuit of bigger, better and stronger. Although progress is an immaculate thing that is necessary for the survival of mankind, this quote from the novel invites the reader to appreciate a certain extent of simplicity as vital in achieving happiness. Sometimes, it is appreciating what you have, rather than constantly seeking an outward pursuit of happiness that is the most successful—sometimes baseness is the best situation.

**Page 186 “But do you like being slaves? Do you like being babies?”**

I honestly believe that this is truly the quote of the novel, the one that most significantly sends the message right into the conscience of the reader. Although our society may be far from this futuristic “World State”, we share many similar characteristics such as our consumer culture. This forces us to decide whether we would rather simply become automations, or individuals. Sadly, it is often easier to be a slave, or a baby.

**Page 194 “Actual happiness always looks pretty squalid in comparison with the over-compensations for misery. And, of course, stability isn’t nearly so spectacular as instability. And being contented has none of the glamour of a good fight against misfortune, none of the picturesqueness of a struggle with temptation, or a fatal overthrow by passion or doubt. Happiness is never grand.”**

This example highlights Huxley’s idea that happiness does not always coincide with beauty and potential, but rather control and restriction. This proposition by the World Controller suggests that an equilibrium or a point on a sliding scale will not enable humanity to achieve peace and happiness. It is said that it must be achieved through controlling our creativity and establishing a sense of simplicity that eliminates certain beauties of our world.

## **Setting and Theme**

Theme and setting are so tightly interwoven in the importance of this play as the scary nature of the perfection makes the characters lone for the imperfection existing in our current society. Specifically, the setting of a peaceful/perfect society where everyone accepts society's reality and their role within, as explained by the Controller Mustapha Mond as being the result of the truth being compromised to ensure constant happiness (essentially a society edified with a collection of carefully chosen lies), suggests the theme and possibility that truth, creativity, art(as all beauty and artistic creations have been removed to ensure the progress and consistence of consumerism) imperfection and freedom do not coincide with happiness. Through the constant use of Soma to drown out all pain characters experience to remove all unpleasant experience (characters even yearn for the return of these: "I want God, I want poetry, I want real danger, I want freedom, I want goodness. I want sin"), we get the sense that many characters in this society are simply automations- they are simply living and breathing, nothing more. This is a chilling thought that transcends all ways of life and cultures throughout our current world, forcing us to realize that we must accept a more active role in our society's progress. Conclusively, the general themes that arise out of the novel are that happiness may be the result of illusion, rather than truth, equality may only lead to conflict, therefore justifying social structure and how it is important for us to question our society as it is, rather than simply allowing our consumer culture and technological advancement to control our minds. There is one flaw that I would like to point out in Huxley's establishment of setting in the novel. I believe that it would have been more impactful on the reader's ego of our "world of modern technological perfection" in which we live and over which we marvel if it had been the one in the "Savage Reservation"- as opposed a Reservation containing somewhat barbaric cannibals. This would have truly sent a stronger message throughout Western civilization and removed the reader's sense of distance from the novel's setting and theme. Indubitably, this choice by Huxley would have thrown the reader's way of life into the satirical effect being established.

## **Relevance and Imagery:**

Although it is rather easy to read a few chapters into the novel, notice the futuristic landscape, and dismiss many of the ideas provided by the author, this novel actually achieves many surprising and shocking similarities that are highly relevant to our present day society. From my perspective, the idea of consumerism (such as the sayings that are implanted into the subconscious through "sleep teaching") being almost a system of using society through brainwashing hit home with the most force. Whether we like it or not, we are already living in this utopia, or as you read deeper into the novel, an actual dystopia. Another example of the relevance to our current society is the example of religion being questioned. It is proposed that religion is a dangerous thing because it only leads to conflict (i.e. the War on Terror in our present day society) and is unnecessary society's where individuals live life to the fullest without any suffering or longing. To the contrary, the concept of the social body persisting with constant emphasis placed on group activities such as gigantic orgies (that are one of the controversial topics that may offend younger audiences, yet are vital as they carry a prime lesson) and society being retained at a purely pragmatic level with customs such as "Death Conditioning" for the children are the biggest contrasts which I find hold the least relevance in our Western Society. The reason for this is because we place a

solemn, fearful label on death and preach the power of the individual to achieve concepts such as the “American Dream” as being the key to achieving happiness. Mocking the individualistic pursuit of the “American Dream” or speaking of death in a light manner in our society is borderline pornographic.

### **Diction and Style**

The level of vocabulary, in my opinion, was perfectly suited for the average grade twelve student to grasp. Nevertheless, the one stylistic choice of Aldous Huxley that was the most complimentary to the themes being discussed was the constant switching between scenes and discussions between characters in the middle chapters of the novel. This creates an effect of blindness for the reader who is forced to truly ignore their previous ideals in an attempt to comprehend the different discussions taking place at the current time. The sedimentation of their mind is powerfully disturbed as each of these conversations are based on controversial topics such the one between Lenina and her friend Fanny who discuss how she should become more promiscuous in order to avoid suspicion and standing out from the status quo where woman must be with many different men in order to be accepted (strikes a frightening semblance with our current society) and the one where the World Controller’s are instructing new students about foolish old ideals such as religion as well as the brand new birthing process known as the “Bokanovsky Process”.

### **Level of controversy:**

Controversy is an understatement in regards to this novel. Furthermore, it holds no punches about being so. It adamantly rejects, supported with adequate reasoning, many of the ideas that we take for granted in our present day society: mocking our ideal that marriage is a sacred and vital experience, denouncing the importance of art and creativity as they are said to be dangerous concepts to social stability, laughing at religion as if it is elementary and foolish and evening questioning the human process of allowing “people to be born”! Whether you are a pious religious follower(who would be offended the most, and would likely choose to not have their child read this novel), an optimist with a strong sense of faith in society’s traditions and institutions or a consumer who is strongly attached to the consumer culture that now is engulfed by the brainwashed consumerism system in this novel, you will be offended to some extent. Religion is replied by drugs: “Soma is Christianity without the tears.” It also becomes unnecessary because of constant happiness levels monitored by the government. Conflict is prevented by an all controlling world state that even monitors the ways in which individuals are brought into the world (their height, intelligence level and level of importance in society) and with institutions such as the “College of Emotional Engineering” that is discussed which truly forces the reader to contemplate and decide upon their definition of happiness. It truly spurs debate for the reason that individuals who read this novel must decide the lengths they are willing to go to be happy, and if it is so important that they are willing to sacrifice their control over their own lives to a governmental mind-controller, all in the name of an ideal of supposed “happiness”. With the placement of a Savage Reservation that possesses some (not all and to such an extent although) of the characteristics displayed by our society such as importance placed on monogamy and loyalty to those we love, our society is even compared to barbarism in comparison with new World State which pokes fun at all our current

societal institutions and status quo- questioning their validity in a powerful satire that is by no means comical.

**One professor from UBC said that, “if teenagers aren’t shocked now, they could be seduced by it later.” What does this mean? Discuss this quote with reference to the novel.**

Essentially, this quote explains the futility of ignorance and covering up of controversial reading material by our society and education system; in the way a bottle’s explosion of content is only augmented by putting a cap on it after shaking it, children, youth and adolescents must be forced to question most, if not all aspects of their society at this age for blind acceptance is one of the most contagious and volatile diseases existing in our present day society. If these concepts are avoided and oppressed, it only delays and worsens their inevitable appearance in society which may appear in the form of abuse, violence and general lack of happiness by individuals over a lifetime. Using *Brave New World* as an example, it is vital for youth to catch even a brief glimpse at this society that virtually criticizes, ignores and suppresses all facets of our society that we consider customary such as religion, the Shakespearean classics that we all take for granted, sacred rituals in our culture such as marriage and monogamy and freedom in a world where everything is not already pre-planned by an all controlling World State. We must be presented with this amazing piece of literature, regardless of whether or not we may agree with the ideas that the author presents to us, in order to create our own definitions of happiness and the “status quo” as teenagers in order to become true adults in our future.