

## 50 Shades of the Future

By Matias Ahrens Dorf

Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* and George Orwell's *1984* depict dramatically different, yet fundamentally similar futuristic societies. Both dystopian societies diverge and resemble one another in respect to, language, family, religion, entertainment, control, and history. Sex is one of the areas that stands out the most between the two because it plays such a large and important role in both societies, yet each one uses sex for different purposes. The society Huxley created in *Brave New World* uses sex purely for pleasure since babies are made in test tubes. In Orwell's society the government discourages sex for pleasure and demands that it be used purely for sexual reproduction for the good of the party.

In *Brave New World*, Huxley envisions a future society that creates human life artificially and assigns each child to a certain class. Sexual activity is not necessary for reproduction in this society and yet sex is highly encouraged as a source of pleasure. When the Director is speaking to his students he explains that, "For a very long period before the time of Our Ford, and even for some generations afterwards, erotic play between children had been regarded as abnormal (there was a roar of laughter); and not only abnormal, actually immoral (no!): and had therefore been rigorously suppressed." (Huxley 32). Even children are taught at a young age to treat sex casually and are encouraged to play amongst each other sexually. The state encourages such sexual familiarity and promiscuity in order to discourage romantic attachment. When Lenina confides in Fanny about a man she has been dating, Fanny warns her, "I really do think you ought to be careful. It's such horribly bad form to go on and on like this with one man." (Huxley 41). Fanny here expresses the general view of this society, that sexual relationships among

citizens should be purely physical and that citizens should have multiple partners rather than remain faithful to an individual they may truly love. The world described by the novel treats sexual promiscuity as perfectly appropriate and conventional. Lenina seeks to reassure Fanny that she will not be faithful to Henry Foster by telling her, “[The Director] patted me on the behind this afternoon” (Huxley 42). Her friend replies, “‘There, you see!’ ... ‘That shows what he stands for. The strictest conventionality.’” (Huxley 42). In our world what would usually be frowned upon as sexual looseness and even sexual harassment is celebrated in this world as healthy and even “conventional.” In the society depicted by *Brave New World* the use of sex is dictated by a government that insists that the naturally private and meaningful act of erotic intercourse should be viewed as a public and meaningless act of casual pleasure.

Orwell’s novel *1984* portrays a world in which every action taken by any person is supposed to be wholly for the good of “the party” (Orwell 1). Sexual intercourse is one of these actions and therefore should be used only for sexual reproduction so that the party can obtain more members. The party condemns any enjoyment in the act of sex; indeed, “Its real, undeclared purpose was to remove all pleasure from the sexual act” (Orwell 37). In contrast to the government described in *Brave New World*, the party in *1984* fears that sexual pleasure will naturally lead to romantic attachment. By stripping sex of all pleasure, the party aims to teach its members that the sex act should only be engaged in out of a sense of duty to the party and more broadly aims to induce its members to care only about party rather than one another. Accordingly, even marriage between people is tightly controlled by the party: “All marriages between Party members had to be approved by a committee appointed for the purpose, and – though the principle was never clearly stated – permission was always refused if the couple concerned gave the impression of being physically attracted to one another” (Orwell 37). Since

the party worries that physical attraction might lead to love, it forbids any marriage whose purpose is not exclusively the production of children, and preaches that “Sexual intercourse [is] to be looked on as a slightly disgusting minor operation, like having an enema” (Orwell 37). The women in this society are especially prudish and even scared of sex because of what the party teaches. As Orwell explains, “The Party was trying to kill the sex instinct, or, if it could not be killed, then to distort it and dirty it”, so that, by denaturing the people in this way, the party alone would inspire their loyalty (Orwell 37). While the government in *Brave New World* seeks to weaken the power of romantic love by distracting and even intoxicating its citizens with the pleasures of casual sexual promiscuity, the party in *1984* seeks to reach the same goal by denuding the sex act of any pleasure whatsoever.

On the surface, Huxley and Orwell appear to portray sex in opposite ways. In *Brave New World*, society separates sexual activity entirely from reproduction, celebrating sexual pleasure, and encouraging its members to indulge their desire for such pleasure from childhood on. In *1984*, the party identifies sexual activity exclusively with reproduction, condemns sexual pleasure, and seeks to discourage its members from cherishing any desire for such pleasure at all. Upon more careful examination, however, the societies depicted by both authors share the common goal of achieving absolute control over the citizens by weakening and even eliminating the power of love over the human heart. In both novels, the government seeks to remove love completely from the act of sex. In *1984* the party only permits loveless marriages whose sole purpose is the creation of children for the sake of the party. In *Brave New World* the government promotes sexual activity, but only as a form of pleasure and entertainment, and it emphatically discourages anything resembling romantic devotion and attachment. Love is the enemy of each totalitarian regime, for it contains within it the seeds of rebellion.

The sex act is of central importance in the political societies described by the novels of Orwell and Huxley. Only by preventing sexual desire from growing into a passionate love for another human being, either by repression in *1984* or distraction in *Brave New World*, can these governments achieve the complete social control they crave. Love is the true enemy of tyranny in these novels, and Orwell and Huxley suggest that even the mightiest governments must devote considerable energy and ingenuity to effectively defeat this formidable foe.

### Sources/Works Cited

Huxley, Aldous. *Brave New World*. New York: Harper & Bros., 1946. Print.

Orwell, George. *1984*. Ed. Erich Fromm. New York: Harcourt, 1949. Print.