

CAPONEU - The Cartography of the Political Novel in Europe

Aldous Huxley

Brave New World

Presented by: Elijah Butcher

Aldous Huxley's 1932 *Brave New World* sits on the highest shelf of dystopian novels with Orwell's *1984* and Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*. Its post-industrial depiction of a genetic caste system, eradication of the nuclear family and reproduction, and mandated hedonism forces readers to grapple with the questions that the evolution of technology presents. Huxley's response to the state of globalist capitalism and satire of a utopia that worships Henry Ford make it a quintessentially political novel. It marks an important place in the dystopian genre and heavily influenced all those to come after.

Huxley's novel is set in London in 2540 A.D., referred to as A.F. ("after Ford") 632, 632 years after Henry Ford introduced the Model T car. Technology has advanced so far as human reproduction is no longer necessary or even allowed, and identical embryos are chemically altered during development which occurs entirely outside of the womb. Humans are placed before birth in a Greek-letter caste system where Alphas are the cream of the crop of society and exist to maintain order and for their own pleasure, while the lowest rung, Epsilons, are severely mentally handicapped and perform only manual labor. Children are psychologically conditioned (in which context Ford is called Freud) from the moment of birth to hate books and memorize state slogans.

Individualism is a societal taboo, as one of the mantras of the "World State" is "every one belongs to every one else." The nuclear family and monogamy are non-existent, and sexual promiscuity is the norm. A drug called soma addicts the populus and keeps their minds numb and happy.

Two "Alphas", Bernard Marx and Lenina Crowne, visit a "Savage Reservation," where people groups that are not part of society live. They are astonished at the practice of religion and actions of the people on the reservation. There they meet Linda, a woman that an Alpha higher-up called the Director lost while visiting a reservation years before. She has a son, John, and Marx decides to bring them back to show the Director. John is revealed to be the Director's son, which results in his resignation. Linda dies from an addiction to soma, and John is a societal outcast treated like a zoo animal. He becomes a violent spectacle of self-torture and ultimately commits suicide in disgust at his own participation in the system that he quickly comes to abhor.

The title is an allusion to "The Tempest" by William Shakespeare, as is repeatedly discussed by the character of John. The plot and themes are allusions as well; Shakespeare's character Caliban is referred to as a savage and found in an unfamiliar place that does not conform to the norms of outsiders.

The story is often interpreted as a satire of industrial society (Firchow, 451). Huxley imagines what he sees as an inevitable result of the progress of the technology of his time. The early 20th century saw a multitude of technological innovations that influenced Huxley. The primary influence, illustrated by the extended allusion to Ford, was Henry Ford's Model T car and assembly line. His ingenuity drastically changed how industry and labor functioned. While creating greater supply and lowering consumer costs, it also reduced specialization, resulting in the quick rise of factory labor.

Huxley saw this as having a negative effect on the human individual, prioritizing cheap pleasure and cheap labor for all over uniqueness and experience.

Brave New World is a satire because it showcases what Huxley sees as the end utopian goal of technology, where pleasure and conformity is strictly enforced by an authoritarian World State. Rather than a beautiful utopia, the happiness destroys all semblance of individualism, and “when measured up against the standard of a true humanity, is found solely wanting ...” (Firchow, 460).

An important note is that Huxley later wished, as explained in his forward to later editions, that he had included a third option for the Savage where true humanity could show its face. Neither the reservation nor the utopia offer what the author describes as “sanity,” only a choice between “insanity on the one hand and lunacy on the other.” He believed that this third option of “sanity” was possible but rare and difficult. Huxley also didn’t see technology or its development as an inherent evil, but rather its effects, through use by society and government, on the individual. He argues that,

Indeed, unless we choose to decentralize and to use applied science, not as the end to which human beings are to be made the means, but as the means to producing a race of free individuals, we only have two alternatives to choose from: either a number of national, militarized totalitarianisms ... or else one supra-national totalitarianism, called into existence by the social chaos resulting from rapid technological progress ... and developing, under the need for efficiency and stability, into the welfare-tyranny of Utopia. (Huxley, xix)

Brave New World is the epitome of the political dystopian novel. Huxley imagines a future utopia as a satire of the technological progress of his time. In his mind, without the prioritization of human freedom and individualism, there will inevitably be tyranny with its justification resting upon either the threat of destructive war or globalist efficiency and welfare. Applying such a lens and lessons to the modern world is not difficult.

LANGUAGE: English

This title was not censored before publishing