

Brave new world: utopia or dystopia

[Literature](#), [British Literature](#)



The novel *Brave New World* has often been characterized as dystopia rather than utopia. Nevertheless, the superficial overview of the novel implies a utopian society, especially if judging by what the Controller said to John, the Savage: People are happy; they get what they want, and they never want what they can't get. They're well off; they're safe; they're never ill; they're not afraid of death; they're blissfully ignorant of passion and old age; they're plagued with no mothers or fathers; they've got no wives, or children, or lovers to feel strongly about; they're so conditioned that they practically can't help behaving as they ought to behave.

And if anything should go wrong, there's soma. (Huxley, 2002: 151) Enjoying themselves in feelies, electromagnetic golf and in soma they are never worried, sad, nor solitary. The most frequent sentence pronounced in the novel which describes the people's emotional state of mind is „ Everybody's happy nowadays.

“ People spend time at work, spending money on new things, having fun and sex which does not involve any deep feelings or love relationship.

The moment we take a deeper insight into this society, ideal perfection, or utopia, immediately disappears. The human kind is artificially generated, people are conditioned to suit their social roles in the Community, they are unconscious that their lives are carefully planned, manipulated and controlled by a few leaders. This picture does not imply a *Brave New World* to be a utopian society. Opposite to utopia stands dystopia, defined by dictionaries as „ an imaginary place where people lead dehumanized and often fearful lives“ (Hornby, 1995: 362). A little bit softer tone of this

definition can be applied to Huxley's society. People do not live in a fear, they do the job they are predestined to and therefore comfortable with, they lead the life they are made for, without making any arguments, and the most of all they are satisfied and happy with the way the things are. „ All the people who, for one reason or another, have got too self-consciously individual to fit into community-life.

All the people who aren't satisfied with orthodoxy, who've got independent ideas of their own." (Huxley, 1995: 155) are punished. But " Brave New World has its own gentler punishments: for non-conformists, it's exile to Iceland, where Man's Final End can be discussed among like-minded intellects, without pestering " normal" people – in a sort of university, as it were." (Atwood, 2007: par. 17). Contrary to this civilized society, there is another smaller society, a Savage Reservation. John, the Savage, raised in the Reservation, has been taken to the Other Place. He was eager to go there as his mother told him beautiful stories about that civilized world.

People living in the Reservation are considered not to have been „ civilized" and they lead their lives as people did before, in harmonization with nature. They believe in marriage, they are monogamous and religious. Family is important to them. All the aspects of their lives are considered as uncivilized by people from the Other Place who consider them primitive. They still undergo the process of aging and mourn when someone dies. Growing old is artificially stopped in the Other Place, and death is accepted as the usual end. In a Hospital for the Dying eighteen months – old – children get accustomed to death. „ All the best toys are kept there, and they get

chocolate cream on death days. They learn to take dying as a matter of course.” (Huxley, 1995: 109).

This society, the World State, has its motto „ Community, Identity, Stability“ which governs its citizens’ lives. The society is arranged so that apart from the division to social classes, everybody is part of one unit, one large community which is controlled by only a few people, called the Controllers. The Controllers created the environment which suits people’s lives in order to benefit the Community. Identity is related to the Bokanovsky process. This process creates identical people, twins of the same qualities. They can hatch out up to 96 twins from only one ovary and a gamete. These armies, or sets of identical people with same abilities serve the Community. Therefore „ Bokanovsky’s Process is one of the major instruments of social stability!“ (Huxley, 1995: 7). Community has to be stable in order to survive.

They strive for stability, “ the primal and ultimate need.” (Huxley, 1995: 31). For this reason, apart from bokanovskification, controllers do their best to satisfy people’s impulses and vices, so they arranged “ no strain on the mind or the muscles. Seven and a half hours of mild, unexhausting labour, and then the soma ration and games and unrestricted copulation and the feelies.” (Huxley, 1995: 153). Unrestricted copulation and the proverb “ everyone belongs to everyone else”, repeated for so many times during hypnopaedic lessons, complete one another together. They can copulate with anyone they like whenever and wherever they want. Moreover, it is quite impolite not to do so. Having been raised in this manner it was so strange for Lenina when the Savage rejected to be intimate with her. Unlike Lenina, he relies on monogamy and romance, which in the World State are

considered as „ a narrow channelling of impulse and energy.” (Huxley, 1995: 29).

Even though they are not burdened with problems, people in the Brave New World are deprived of most human qualities. They cannot think for themselves as they have literally built-in instincts, aspirations and abilities. They are unfamiliar with what the term family connotes. What used to be the base of a prosperous and a healthy society is now regarded as something unnecessary, impure and offensive to talk about. When the Controller talked to students about family and relations in family „ one of the boys, more sensitive than the rest, turned pale at the mere description and was on the point of being sick.” (Huxley, 1995: 27) since the negative attitude and feelings towards family and family life are embedded from their early childhood. The Controller once more reminds them: “ And home was as squalid psychically as physically. Psychically, it was a rabbit hole, a midden, hot with the frictions of tightly packed life, reeking with emotion.

What suffocating intimacies, what dangerous, insane, obscene relationships between the members of the family group!” (Huxley, 1995: 28). According to Atwood „ The word “ mother” – so thoroughly worshipped by the Victorians – has become a shocking obscenity.” (Atwood, 2007: par. 18). Wherever in the novel characters mention mother it drew impure connotation, like „ that smutty word again“ (Huxley, 1995: 27) „ full of mothers-therefore of every kind of perversion from sadism to chastity” (28) or “ the word made Lenina look uncomfortable” (79) and finally “ To say one was a mother-that was past a joke: it was an obscenity.” (103). One of the main characters Bernard, an Alpha plus, an intellectual, occasionally shows independent opinion.

When he and Lenina were in a visit to a Savage Reservation and saw two mothers breastfeeding, Bernard noted: “ What a wonderfully intimate relationship,” he said, deliberately outrageous. “ And what an intensity of feeling it must generate! I often think one may have missed something in not having had a mother. And perhaps you’ve missed something in not being a mother, Lenina. Imagine yourself sitting there with a little baby of your own. ...” (Huxley, 1995: 76) Such an observation was not something somebody would notice in that way, nor say out loud. Lenina is shocked. She looks for soma to calm her down. Her reaction is not unusual, most of the people coming from the World State would react this way for they reproduce artificially and do not take care of the children.

The controllers developed many ways to manipulate people’s lives. Reproduction, which used to be the primary goal for all species, including the humankind, is now artificially carried out in laboratories. There are the so called „ hatcheries“ where human babies are hatched out of bottles and conditioned to fit their anticipated social position. The positions are occupied according to the level of their intelligence. Huxley used the Greek alphabet to name positions, starting from Alpha, the most intelligent people, and ending with Epsilons, morons who are capable for manual work. Different components are given to them while they are in bottles, as well as the amount of the oxygen. This manipulation with lives and deciding upon the role in the society in the Brave New World is a dehumanizing act. Mustapha Mond, one of the controllers, proudly explains to the Savage, who is getting more and more disappointed with what he has seen, the great biotechnology of people manipulation „ his conditioning has laid down rails along which

he's got to run. He can't help himself; he's foredoomed." (Huxley, 1995: 152).

Another element of manipulation is soma. It is a kind of a drug, distributed by the State, which brings about pleasant feelings, makes people happy and easygoing, with no side effects. " Soma promotes a superficial hedonism and causes alienation from the kind of " real human life" that we know. Furthermore, soma is used to keep the social order as it is." (Schermer, 2007: 121). When his mother dies in the Park Lane Hospital for the Dying, the Savage encounters Deltas who are about to get their portions of soma.

Thinking of his mother, Linda, who died as a slave he decides to free the others. He cries out " poison to soul as well as body." (Huxley, 1995: 145) and asks them if they would rather be slaves and puppets, than to experience manhood and freedom. He creates chaos among Deltas when he starts to throw the soma pills out of the window. Deltas panic and attack him. In the end policemen spray the soma cloud into the air and play the Voice of Reason and the Voice of Good Feelings. " Two minutes later the Voice and the soma vapour had produced their effect. In tears, the Deltas were kissing and hugging one another-half a dozen twins at a time in a comprehensive embrace." (Huxley, 1995: 147). Peace and social stability were restored.

World State controllers apply the so called hypnopaedic lessons to manipulate people's psychology. Hypnopaedic proverbs, rhymes, prejudices and wisdoms are played to children while they sleep. The hypnopaedia turned out to be " the greatest moralizing and socializing force of all time." (Huxley, 1995: 21). Moreover, hypnopaedic lessons are not the same for all

social classes. For example, when Lenina, the Alpha, saw Deltas she noted “ what hideous colour khaki is.” (Huxley, 1995: 42) the hypnopædic prejudices of her caste. Among many of the themes hypnopaedia covers, some of them are about “ hygiene, sociability, class-consciousness and toddler’s love life” (Huxley, 1995: 99). They also use the hypnopaedic rhyme “ Ending is better than mending. The more stitches, the less riches.” (Huxley, 1995: 35) to encourage people to get rid of old things and constantly buy new ones. In this way they created a society accustomed to get rid of the old things and immediately replace them with the new ones.

„ The novel provides a prophecy of a world of test tube babies, genetic engineering, and social control.“ (Carter and McRae, 2001: 433). This prophecy turned out to be in practice nowadays. Test tube babies are for those who cannot have children in natural way and genetic engineering is used to improve organisms. Ordinary people know almost nothing if those are used for manipulation and creating lives or organisms to compromise humankind.

Huxley saw the beginnings of consumer society and therefore incorporated it into the novel. „ There was the conscription of consumption. Every man, woman and child compelled to consume so much a year. In the interests of industry.” (Huxley, 1995: 35). Nowadays there are numerous shopping malls in cities attracting consumers. Buildings and roads are full of billboards as well as mass media with advertisements which hypnotize masses and make them anxious to spend money.

„ Brave New World eliminated all problems, sense of loyalty or compassion, love for art and philosophy, as well as any other activities which can lead to

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individual thinking or even more dangerous to induce passion or feelings.” (Koljevi?, 2002: 133). In this way Huxley tried to warn the society of his time what can happen to humankind if people are deprived of activities which can induce individuality, like philosophy, art, religion, family, and above all freedom, to be free to make their own choice and think for themselves. Likewise the existence of one community in the novel, the contemporary world is under the process of globalization, erasing borders between countries, and turning into one global village, one state, offering the same products worldwide and promptly delivering information. The present world is a mixture of the futuristic elements which Huxley mentioned, but it retains all activities which enable people to show their skills, their individuality. In the end the Savage dies.

“ The Savage seeks the admittedly narrow freedom to be unhappy rather than to escape into an induced, tidy and controlled soma dream.” (Sanders, 1994: 556). Despite his eagerness to live in the World State with all amenities it offers, he realized that he would rather feel pain if it meant to be free, than to be happy and at the same time to be someone’s slave. Brave New World developed technology to manipulate people. Its dystopian environment eventually killed the Savage, a representative of true moral values which raised the question: Will the true moral values resist as technology and science move forward? Nobody cannot stop their development, but can make use of them for proper purposes. Hopefully the humankind will be smart enough to take out the best of its history, develop science and technology to benefit people, and prevent creating uniformity and sameness to preserve the diversity of human souls.

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