

ALDOUS HUXLEY • BRAVE NEW WORLD

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

ALDOUS HUXLEY (1894-1963)

English novelist and critic, best known for his dystopian novel *Brave New World*, he also published travel books, histories, poems, plays, and essays on philosophy, arts, sociology, religion and morals.

Aldous Huxley was born in Godalming, Surrey on July 26, 1894, into an important upper-middle-class family of scientists and men of letters. He studied at Eton College, Berkshire (1908-13). When Huxley was fourteen, his mother died. At the age of 16, Huxley suffered

an attack of *keratitis punctata* and became totally blind for a period of about 18 months. By using special glasses he was able to read and he also learned Braille. Despite a condition of near-blindness, Huxley continued his studies at Balliol College, Oxford (1913-15), receiving his B.A. in English in 1916. Unable to pursue his chosen career as a scientist – or fight in World War on the front – Huxley turned to writing.

Huxley's first novel, *Crome Yellow* (1921), a witty criticism of society, appeared in 1921. Huxley's style, a combination of brilliant dialogue, cynicism, and social criticism, made him one of the most fashionable literary figures of the decade. In eight years he published a dozen books, among them *Point Counter Point* (1928), a novel of ideas. It was a turning point after which Huxley became a different writer, less concerned with the problems of the aesthetics of fiction and more involved in ethical, political, social problems. *Brave New World* (1932) was the first result of this change of attitude. *Eyeless in Gaza* (1936), *After Many a Summer* (1939), *Ape and Essence* (1948) offer a desperate comment on the years of fear and violence between the Thirties and the Second World War.

After the war Huxley seemed to have found an answer to his own and his era's anxiety and misery in the concern for mystical philosophy and paranormal phenomena (*The Doors of Perception*, 1956 – where Huxley tells about his experience with hallucinogenic drugs used as a means for widening the area of consciousness and the key to a deeper understanding of reality). He later became a guru among Californian hippies. He also started to use LSD and showed interest in Hindu philosophy. Huxley died in Los Angeles on November 22, 1963.



A. Huxley

ABOUT THE NOVEL

Brave New World

The novel – published in 1932 – is a picture of how life might be in London in another six centuries – in 600 A.F., that is Anno Fordii, after the name of the American car producer Henry Ford. All values have changed, family life has disappeared and a “brave” new race is produced in test tubes. Life is planned and conditioned by the World State from birth to death in the interest of industry and consumerism. People are not allowed to have ideas of their own. In exchange the World State ensures them eternal happiness. Even boredom is cured through “soma”, a euphoric drug.

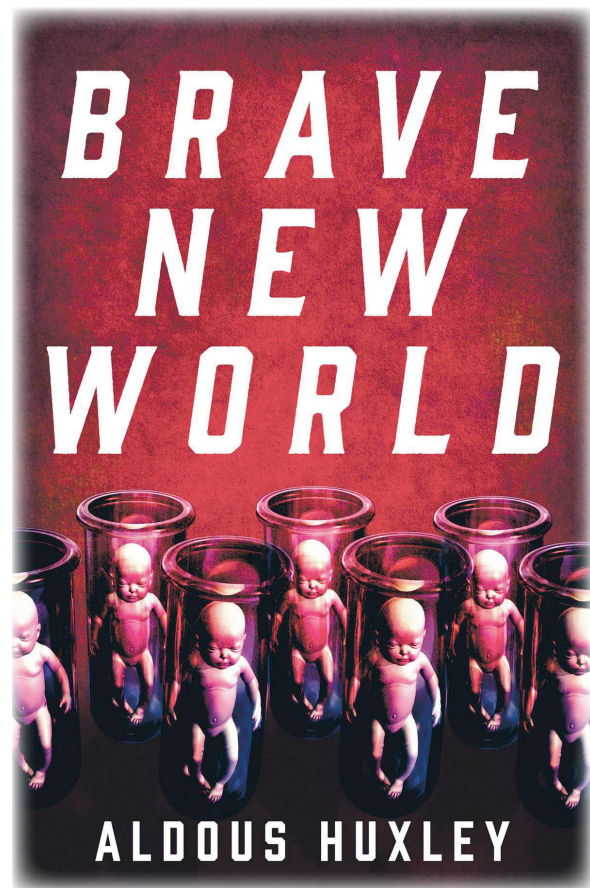
The plot centres around the lives of these human robots, in particular Bernard Max, who tends to be too individualistic because of a defect in his scientific upbringing. One day he goes on vacation with the beautiful Lenina, a perfect example of a superwoman. After visiting a Savage Reserve, an old village kept to study habits before Ford's age, they decide to bring back one of the savages.

But the young man is shocked by the hedonistic “civilised” society of the Brave New World and commits suicide.

The characters are stereotypes representing two sets of contrasting values: those of mass society and those of the free individual. The same dichotomy is present in the style. On one side there is the technical language of the scientific and political debates, on the other there are the passionate quotations from Shakespeare spoken by the Savage which are meant to stress the value of a past cultural tradition.

The title of the novel is from Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*. The words are spoken by Miranda, Prospero’s daughter, who has spent most of her life on a desert island. When she sees a handsome young man for the first time and falls in love she exclaims: “How beautiful mankind is! O Brave new World”. When the Savage meets the beautiful Lenina coming from the world outside his village, his feelings are the same as Miranda’s and he uses her words to express his joy.

Although this is a novel of ideas, it can be read as science fiction because of its extraordinary anticipations of technological inventions.



THE TEXT

Bokanovsky’s Process

This extract is the beginning of the book. The action takes place in the London Hatching and Conditioning Centre, the scientific laboratory for the mass production of babies. The Director is lecturing visiting students on the Bokanovsky Process or “the principle of mass production applied to biology”. According to this principle, babies are made in labs to answer the needs of a technological, totalitarian society. The process will determine the future behaviour and social condition of the babies.

‘Bokanovsky’s Process’, repeated the Director, and the students underlined the words in their little note-books.

One egg, one embryo, one adult – normality. But a bokanovskified egg will bud, will proliferate, will divide. From eight to ninety-six buds, and every bud will grow into a perfectly formed embryo, and every embryo into a full-size adult. Making ninety-six human beings grow where only one grew before. Progress.

‘Essentially’, the D.H.C. concluded, ‘bokanovskification consists of a series of arrests of development. We check the normal growth and, and, paradoxically enough, the egg responds by budding.’ Responds by budding. The pencils were busy.

He pointed. On a very slowly moving band a rackful of test-tubes was entering a large metal box, another rackful was emerging. Machinery faintly purred. It took eight minutes for the tubes to go through, he told them. Eight minutes of hard X-rays being about as much as an egg can stand. A few died; of the rest, the least susceptible divided into two; most put out four buds; some eight; all were returned to the incubators, where the buds began to develop; then after two days, were suddenly chilled, chilled and checked. (...)

But one of the students was fool enough to ask where the advantage lay.

‘My good boy!’ The Director wheeled sharply round on him. ‘Can’t you see? Can’t you see?’ He raised a hand; his expression was solemn. ‘Bokanovsky’s Process is one of the major instruments of social stability!’

Major instruments of social stability.

Standard men and women; in uniform **batches**. The whole of a small factory staffed with the products of a single bakanovskified egg.

'Ninety-six identical twins working ninety-six identical machines!' The voice was almost tremulous with enthusiasm. 'You really know where you are. For the first time in history'. He quoted the planetary motto. 'Community, Identity, Stability.' Grand words. 'If we could bakanovskify indefinitely the whole problem would be solved.'

Solved by standard Gammas, unvarying Deltas, uniform Epsilons. Millions of identical twins. The principle of mass production at last applied to biology.

'But, alas', the Director shook his head, 'we can't bakanovskify indefinitely'.

'We also predestine and condition. We **decant** our babies as socialized human beings, as Alphas or Epsilons, as future sewage workers or future ...' He was going to say 'future World Controllers', but correcting himself said 'future Directors of Hatcheries' instead.

band: *nastro*
batch: *gruppo*
brave: *coraggioso*
to bud: *germogliare*
to chill: *raffreddare*
to decant: *travasare*
to lecture: *tenere una lezione accademica*
to purr: *ronzare*
to pursue: *dedicarsi*
rackful of test-tubes: *rastrelliera portaprovette*
upbringing: *istruzione*
to wheel: *ruotare*
witty: *arguto*

COMPREHENSION

1 Read the text and answer the questions.

1. Who is Bokanovsky?
2. How does the Director feel about the process he is describing?
3. What basic principles does the process emphasise?
4. What are the three essential points in the society of the new world?
5. Where is "progress" evident in the process?
6. What is the purpose of artificial treatments used on embryos while they are incubated?
7. What could be the advantages in a technological society of "standard men and women"?

ANALYSIS

2 Read the text again and answer the questions.

1. What is the function of such an opening in the novel?
2. The underlined sentences show two characteristics of Huxley's style. What are they?
3. Identify all the words or phrases which are scientific or pseudoscientific.
4. The Director's lecture is an example of scientific description. What are the stylistic features?
5. How do we know that the students have no real mind of their own? Give two pieces of evidence from the text.
6. Irony is evident in the description of the Director's emphatic behaviour. Can you find the words conveying this?
7. What do the first five letters of the Greek alphabet refer to?

DISCUSSION

- 3 Do you think these scientific experiments existed at the time Huxley was writing?
- 4 Can you think of any recent developments in modern science which resemble this description?
- 5 Do you think there is any danger that having test-tube babies nowadays could develop into experimentation with human life, as in *Brave New World*?