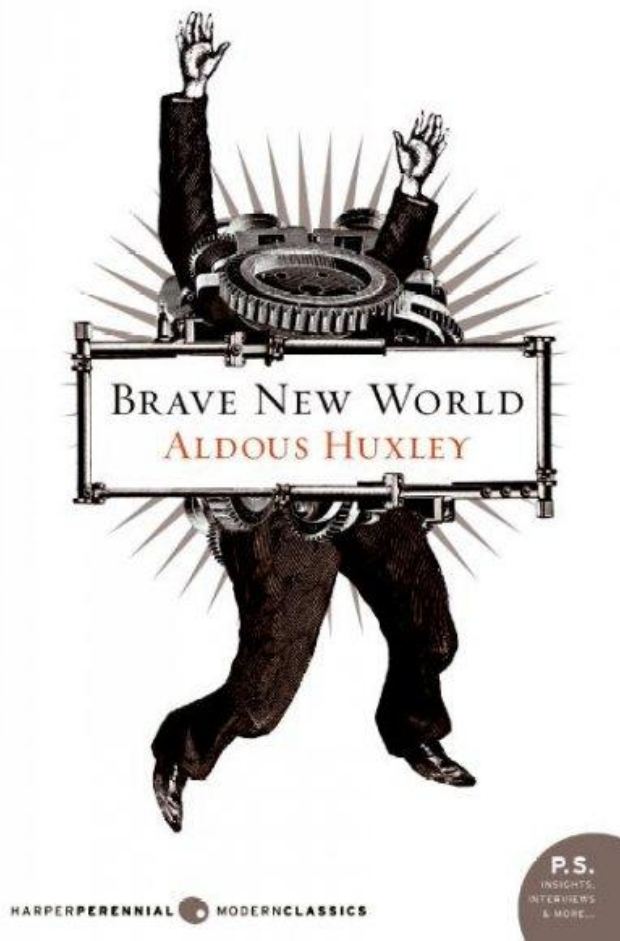


About the book...



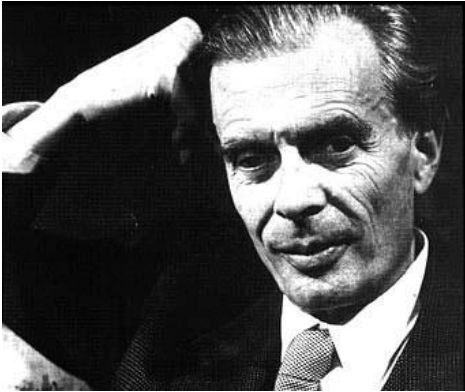
Brave New World is both a fantasy about the future and a satire on present trends. And in both roles it carries conviction because of the expert and convincing handling of detail to create a plausible world. It is England 600 years ahead, and Huxley has been wise enough not to change it beyond recognition. It is the country we know and a different world, and this paradox sustains our attention.

The society of the future is a parody of Plato's republic, with a small group of World Controllers ruling five castes of subjects, divided not merely socially but biologically, since they have been conditioned to their future tasks in the bottles where they were bred. To preserve happiness, the World Controllers discard everything that might provoke either thought or passion. The world's stable now [says Mustapha Mond, Controller for England]. 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.

There is no need for violent or overt repression. Men are so conditioned from the time the spermatozoon enters the egg in the Hatchery that there is little chance of their breaking into rebellion; if they do become discontented there are always drugs to waft them into the heavens of restorative illusion. Thus the Controllers are able to govern with a softly firm hand; the police use whiffs of anaesthetic instead of truncheons, and those over-brilliant individuals who do not fit the established pattern are allowed to indulge their heretical notions in the intellectual quarantine of exile.

Woodcock, George. "Brave New World: Overview." Reference Guide to English Literature. Ed. D. L. Kirkpatrick. 2nd ed. Chicago: St. James Press, 1991. Literature Resource Center. Gale. ANN ARBOR DISTRICT LIBRARY. 30 Apr. 2009 <<http://go.galegroup.com/ps/start.do?p=LitRC&u=aadl>>.

About the author...



When Aldous Huxley was sixteen he was stricken with a disease of the eyes, which left him temporarily blind and permanently disrupted his plan to enter the medical profession. Yet his scientific training remained a major force in all his future endeavors. He became a renowned and prolific man of letters, writing essays, fiction, and poetry, as well as criticism of painting, music, and literature, all of it touched by his scientific and analytic processes of thought and sense of detail.

Huxley's oeuvre is often seen as falling into two periods: his early work, much of it social satire, is arch and occasionally condescending; his later work, essentially mystical, is prophetic but in places self-righteous. The first period includes novels like *Crome Yellow* and *Antic Hay*, witty and sardonic dissections of British society, particularly its artists and aristocrats. It also includes the well-known *Brave New World*, which Andre Maurois once called "an exercise in pessimistic prognostication, a terrifying Utopia." The later period is marked by the publication in 1936 of the novel, *Eyeless in Gaza*, which concerns the transformation of Anthony Beavis from cynic to mystic. A similar theme is explored in the novel, *Time Must Have a Stop*, as well as Huxley's later essays (especially *The Perennial Philosophy*) and his last novel, *Island*.

- Gale Biography Resource Center

Reviews

"Mr. Huxley is eloquent in his declaration of an artist's faith in man, and it is his eloquence, bitter in attack, noble in defense, that, when one has closed the book, one remembers."

--*Saturday Review of Literature*

"Such ingenious wit, derisive logic and swiftness of expression, Huxley's resources of sardonic invention have never been more brilliantly displayed."

—*The Times*

Discussion Questions

1. Few of Huxley's predictions have proven to be perfectly accurate, yet many aspects of the Utopia of *Brave New World* feel uncomfortably like our world. Talk about the book as a prophetic vision of the future. Which aspects of the book did you find most disturbing? Which hit closest to home? Which seem the most far-fetched?

2. When *Brave New World* was first published in 1932, the world was plunged in depression, fascism was on the rise in Western Europe, and Marxism appealed to increasing numbers of intellectuals in Europe and America. Place the book in the context of its historical moment. Which parts transcend its time and place?

- 3.** The two greatest obscenities in the society of Brave New World are birth and mother. Why?
- 4.** Toward the end of the book, the Controller Mustapha Mond sums up the benefits of living in the "brave new world" Utopia: "The world's stable now. People are happy; they get what they want, and they never want what they can't get." It sounds like perfection, and yet the world Mond describes is deeply, intentionally horrifying. Why? What exactly is so bad about this society of the future? Is there anything good about it, anything we could learn from and try to adapt to our own uses?
- 5.** As dehumanizing and oppressive as the brave new world Utopia is, the alternative in the "savage reserve" is in many ways worse - dirty, violent, unhealthy, cruel, uncomfortable. What point is Huxley making about human nature and the nature of human communities? Is his vision totally negative - or does the book hold out some shred of hope, some alternative mode that fosters both freedom and community?
- 6.** One of the most striking - and comic - aspects of Huxley's Utopia is the way our sexual mores and assumptions have been turned on their head: monogamy is bad, passion is deviation, casual, meaningless sex is the socially approved norm. What is Huxley getting at here? Is there any expression of human sexuality that he finds acceptable? Is sex at the heart of the "problem" in his view of human nature?
- 7.** Talk about the morality of the book. Is it a Christian morality? Socialist? Anarchist?
- 8.** In many ways, the main characters of the book are cartoon figures - Helmholtz Watson the alienated superman, Bernard Marx the cowardly, hypocritical intellectual, Mustapha Mond the cynical all-knowing leader, John the doomed idealistic. Discuss the book as an allegory and elaborate on what each character stands for.
- 9.** When John first starts reading Shakespeare, he discovers that the words make his emotions "more real" - they even make other people more real. Talk about the power of language in the book, the power of the word to influence thought and behavior. Why did Huxley choose Shakespeare as the medium of John's intellectual awakening?
- 10.** Huxley wrote many other books, yet this is his most popular and most enduring. What is it about this book that has captured our imaginations for so long? Are there aspects of it that seem dated?
- 11.** If you read the book earlier in life - say in high school or college - compare the experience of reading it again later on. Does it hold up to a second reading?
- 12.** Talk about Huxley's use of narrator. Does the fact that Huxley's vision was impaired for part of his life have any bearing on the way he narrates the story and sets the scenes?
- 13.** Could anything like Brave New World really happen? Has it happened in some form that we don't fully recognize?
- readinggroupguides.com

Read-alikes

1984 – George Orwell

This novel projects life under perfected state controls. It presages with no uncertainty the horrors and sterility, the policing of every thought, action and word, the extinction of truth and history, the condensation of speech and writing, the utter subjection of every member of the Party. The story concerns itself with Winston, a worker in the Records Department, who is tormented by tenuous memories, who is unable to identify himself wholly with Big Brother and The Party. It follows his love for Julia, who also outwardly conforms, inwardly rebels, his hopefulness in joining the Brotherhood, a secret organization reported to be sabotaging The Party, his faith in O'Brien, as a fellow disbeliever, his trust in the proles (the cockney element not under the organization) as the basis for an overall uprising. But The Party is omniscient, and it is O'Brien who puts him through the torture to cleanse him of all traitorous opinions, a terrible, terrifying torture whose climax, keyed to Winston's most secret nightmare, forces him to betray even Julia. – Kirkus Reviews

The Road – Cormac McCarthy

In a novel set in an indefinite, futuristic, post-apocalyptic world, a father and his young son make their way through the ruins of a devastated American landscape, struggling to survive and preserve the last remnants of their own humanity. -- NoveList

Fahrenheit 451 – Ray Bradbury

Guy Montag, a fireman whose job it is to burn books, begins to doubt his society's high-speed, hedonistic way of life when he meets Clarisse McClellan, a young girl whose family lives a slower, more graceful existence. Clarisse shares her values with him until the McClellans mysteriously disappear. -- NoveList

Anthem – Ayn Rand

Rand's dark portrait of the future was first released in England in 1938 and reedited for publication in the United States in 1946. In this novella, Equality 7-2521 dares to defy the ideals of collectivism in a futuristic state. -- NoveList

We – Yevgeny Zamyatin

In one of the earliest novels to portray a dystopian society, the narrator describes a state in which the individuals have given up their freedom for materialistic rewards, in this utopian satire. -- NoveList

Watch-Alikes

28 Days Later – dir. Danny Boyle, 2002

Jim (Cillian Murphy), a bicycle messenger who was in an accident just days before the outbreak, is one of very few survivors who awakes 28 days later to a city that has been evacuated and is now utterly lifeless. He wanders the vacant streets of London feeling as if he's trapped in a never-ending hallucination. However, upon entering a church that is littered with dead bodies, he discovers that he is not alone--"the infected" are still living. They are violently sick, fast-moving, bloodthirsty zombies who travel at night in ravenous packs. Jim manages to escape "the infected" and locate a band of survivors-- Selena (Naomie Harris), Hannah (Megan Burns), and Frank (Brendan Gleeson)--and they

join forces searching for solutions, clinging to hope that somewhere healthy humanity thrives. – jinni.com

Children of Men – dir. Alfonso Cuaron, 2006

Set uncomfortably close to the present, it paints a frighteningly realistic picture of the future. In 2027, every woman on earth is infertile. With the loss of the ability to have children, the world has also lost hope. Clive Owen plays Theo, an Englishman attempting to make a life in a hellish world. His estranged wife (Julianne Moore) convinces him to help transport a young woman to safety. When Theo learns that the woman is pregnant, their journey takes on a significance--and a danger--he never imagined. – jinni.com

The Trial – dir. Orson Welles, 1962

The Trial is Orson Welles's claustrophobic adaptation of Franz Kafka's surreal tale of fear and paranoia in a nameless society. Anthony Perkins stars as Josef K., a seemingly innocent young man who is arrested one morning for an unexplained crime by men who refuse to identify themselves. K., asserting his innocence, sets off on a bizarre series of confrontations with shady government agents, overwhelming faceless courtrooms, and pompous advocates who talk in riddles. His nightmare continues through narrow, dark passageways and colorless rooms where he witnesses various forms of torture and interrogation. – jinni.com