

## BRAVE NEW WORLD

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**Abstract:** Huxley's *Brave New World* portrays a futuristic hyperbole of mankind's future as a result of technological advancements. From a New Historical perspective, this essay examines how BNW satirizes contemporary society by satire where the audience is both a part of the problem and solution. Through the use of satire Huxley's novel successfully portrays horrific examples of how human life in a not so distant future may find that the technology which revolutionized our lives actually enslaves us. Post-novel examples such as Hitler and his Nazi regime is a real life example of the type of totalitarian regime that is possible as a direct result of scientific progress in many fields. In this paper, however, posterity is excluded from the analysis. Instead this essay focuses on the contemporary society as depicted in early 20<sup>th</sup> century literature and how it reflects identifiable satirical elements in BNW. The analysis depicts how several discourses of contemporary industrialized Britain such as rationalism, socialism, industrialism, freedom, religion and political indifference are reflected in the novel. Ultimately, Huxley's dystopian reflection of human future taunts us, the audience, by directly and indirectly illuminating the dangers of blindly accepting scientific advancements in the name of progress. The one, perhaps most relevant question the novel raises is – are we truly free when we are free to have the most wonderful time?

**Keywords:** New Historicism, Satire, 20<sup>th</sup> Century Britain, Discourse

### Introduction

Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (BNW) displays a dystopian world view about how human life could have advanced by AD 2540. Like much science-fiction, however, the novel is really a comment on the present. Published in 1932, Huxley's novel satirizes other discourses of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Using new historical critical theory, this essay will investigate how BNW satirizes contemporary discourse on 20<sup>th</sup> century modern industrialized Britain, mainly as depicted in British newspapers from 1920-1930, through its hyperbolic examples of productivity-efficiency, and characters as hyperbolic examples of state-totalitarianism where personalities have been replaced by caste, ie., class specific traits. By analyzing characters depiction by the narrative and ethics behind their decisions one can understand certain aspects of the texts better: "Narrative – fiction as well as journalism, informal narratives of everyday life, or films – thrives on the affective appeal of characters. Whether we like them or not, we are compelled to read on because we respond to those paper people" (Bal 112). In the

character analysis, the characters John the Savage, Lenina Crowne and Bernard Marx serve a central role. The goal of the analysis, however, is not to understand who the characters are, but rather to understand what they are in order to better understand how they can help identify elements of satire in BNW (Bal 113). Similarly, the setting is also crucial in identifying satire in BNW, but the setting itself is not as important as the contemporary discourse the setting may depict. The setting is but a satirical surface, this paper is interested in the ‘reality’ masked behind it. Ultimately, this paper claims that BNW uses hyperboles of discourse in contemporary 20<sup>th</sup> century Britain to satirize a blind perception which if left unchecked will creep towards the horrific example in the novel.

New historicism as a critical theory states that in contrast to what factual historians say about fiction and its meaningfulness in understanding historical discourses, literary texts are valuable in understanding the complex web of discourses: “literary texts are cultural artifacts that can tell us something about the interplay of discourses, the web of social meanings, operating in the time and place in which the text was written” (Tyson 323). The web of social meaning operating at the time and place when BNW was written during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century will therefore be examined by analyzing contemporary discourse.

Political, societal and cultural discourses which can be identified in contemporary discourse and mirrored in BNW will be the backbone for the analysis of satire in BNW.

According to Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms, Satire is defined as:

A mode of writing that exposes the failings of individuals, institutions, or societies to ridicule and scorn. Satire is often an incidental element in literary works that may not be wholly satirical, especially in \*comedy. Its tone may vary from tolerant amusement, as in the verse satires of the Roman poet Horace, to bitter indignation, as in the verse of Juvenal and the prose of Jonathan Swift... satire usually found in plays and novels allows us to draw our own conclusions from the actions of the characters, as for example in the novels of Evelyn Waugh or Chinua Achebe. (Baldick 402-03)

This definition alone, however, cannot explain how satire works in BNW. To better understand the application of satire in Huxley’s novel, we need to add important insights from Charles A. Knight’s *The Literature of Satire* and John C. Ball’s *Satire & the Postcolonial Novel*.

Knight analyses the rhetorical problems created by satire’s complex relations to its community, and examines how it exploits the genres it borrows from. He argues that satire derives from an awareness of the differences between appearance, ideas and discourse (ii). Knight analyzes how satire has evolved from the Greek philosopher Democritus. Satire as introduced by Democritus lay on the concept that the physical reality as such, is not what we as humans perceive when we look at it or learn about it.



Rather, any notion, be it political or cultural, is not really reality as such, but a discourse we may perceive as reality (Knight 1-2). Therefore, the individuals, societies and institutions are actually satirized by ridiculing their perception of various subject. When a certain perception of a ‘reality’ or discourse is satirized, those who blindly believe what is satirized are also subject to the satire. To quote Knight:

The effect of the Democritian satirist is...to correct perception. But the correction of perception is not effected by admonition – by the translation of behavior into abstract moral language – but by a form of representation so skewed as to allow recognition to take place and to force a new judgment on it, so that viewers recognize that they are what is represented and what is foolish is them. We become both subject and object of satire” (Knight 2-3).

In other words, the audience of a play or the readers of a novel ultimately become both subjects and objects of satire as it is their blind perception that is satirized. The complex form of satire can engage viewers on multiple levels and may even be paradoxical, with the audience acting as both part of a problem and its solution. To this extent, satire as originating from Democritus is a tool in which a sort of blind perception can be corrected. Ultimately, analyzing satire is problematic in the sense that identifying contemporary criticism in literature can misrepresent the satiric spirit of the text. Therefore, the critic has to be cautious not to become overzealous in interpreting satire as contemporary criticism, nor should the critic be too soft in accepting satire as purely fictional comedy (Ball 23-28).

Analyzing BNW through new historicism, with a focus on satire as introduced by Democritus helps us better understand contemporary discourses scorned by the novel. BNW’s caste system for one satirize how socioeconomic factors incentivize leaders to only condition a small portion of the populations as beings capable of making a free choice:

“I was wondering,” said the Savage, “why you had them at all – seeing that you can get whatever you want out of those bottles. Why don’t you make everybody an Alpha Double Plus while you’re about it?” Mustapha Mond laughed. “Because we have no wish to have our throats cut,” he answered. “We believe in happiness and stability. A society of Alphas couldn’t fail to be unstable and miserable.

Imagine a factory staffed by Alphas – that is to say by separate and unrelated individuals of good heredity and conditioned so as to be capable (within limits) of making a free choice and assuming responsibilities. Imagine it!” he repeated (Huxley 195).

Alpha, being the top caste citizens in BNW’s society can be seen as a reflection of the power elite class discourse in 20<sup>th</sup> century industrialized Britain. Keeping factories well-staffed was important but problematic, as apparent by the following passage from a Nottingham Journal article, “Coming Big Boom In Trade – One

Hindrance” 1<sup>st</sup> January 1920: “Many firms have booked sufficient orders to keep them employed until the Christmas of 1922. The only causes for anxiety in the minds of the producers are the fear of labor unrest and the insufficiency of machinery of production” (No. 29: 364). In BNW the World Controllers solved this problem by biologically and psychologically engineering Epsilon workers to be content with factory work. Biologically reduced intelligence, sleep-induced brain-washing, low-level education and shock therapy was just some of the things society imposed on Epsilons in order to make them content with Epsilonhood. The factories in BNW evidently share a similar problem to the ones depicted in a post WWI British newspaper, the fear of labor unrest. The World Controllers in BNW tried to staff factories with Alphas as an experiment and found the whole example self-explanatory. Why on earth would an Alpha, who is capable of free choice (within limits), be content with working in a factory?

Combining new historical perspectives of BNW and the contemporary article from the Nottingham Journal, this information can be seen as criticism of contemporary industrialized Britain, elitism, and the conditions which factory workers had to endure. Twentieth century discourse of industrialism is identifiable on multiple occasions in BNW, as depicted by the hyperbolic example above where the World Controllers solved the problem of labor unrest by vile methods like shock therapy for infants. The need for the wheels of industry to keep turning then it seems, ridicule how the elite will do anything to staff their factories. As such, in terms of blind perception in satire, BNW satirizes the whole concept of industrialism on several levels such as caste-bound labor and inhumane working conditions. To the World Controllers in BNW it is perfectly clear that a smarter, better educated and free Alpha would go mad doing Epsilon work:

The Savage tried to imagine it, not very successfully. “It’s an absurdity. An Alpha-decanted, Alpha-conditioned man would go mad if he had to do Epsilon Semi-Moron work-go mad, or start smashing things up. Alphas can be completely socialized-but only on condition that you make them do Alpha work. Only an Epsilon can be expected to make Epsilon sacrifices, for the good reason that for him they aren’t sacrifices; they’re the line of least resistance. His conditioning has laid down rails along which he’s got to run. He can’t help himself; he’s foredoomed. Even after decanting, he’s still inside a bottle-an invisible bottle of infantile and embryonic fixations. Each one of us, of course,” the Controller meditatively continued, “goes through life inside a bottle. But if we happen to be Alphas, our bottles are, relatively speaking, enormous. (Huxley 196)

### Conclusion

To conclude, from the perspective of new historicism, Aldous Huxley’s novel BNW, published in 1932, displays multiple satirical elements seen in its setting and characters that display how future manifestation of contemporary discourses afflict



human nature. The novel's satirical personifications of hyperboles reflect contemporary discourses of early 20<sup>th</sup> century Britain. A clash between industrialism and religion is depicted, yet the battle of God against Industrialism is not what is satirized. Ultimately the novel satirizes industrialism as a religion in contemporary Britain. Consumerism, be it alcohol, cars, clothes or jewelry, and its accompanying rituals act the part of religion. Over the course of the novel, John the Savage's character highlights how love, compassion, hate, and anger are needed as parts of human nature. John's incapability to adapt to civilized society portrays a satire of the dangers of contemporary society endangered by the massproduction of goods and state-induced values of character as tools for successively marginalizing freedom. The new state, as the novel puts it, is a business of sitting, not hitting. In Lenina Crowne BNW depicts how the state 'conditions' its citizens. She is completely subjugated by her conditioning, incapable of seeing anything but what she is 'supposed to'. Lenina is satirized as a mindless automaton of the plebs working nine to five, rinse and repeat. Bernard Marx, finally, embodies an educated and intelligent man who sees the world for what it is, but who is ultimately unprepared to rise against the totalitarian regime, political indifference having festered for so long that freedom has been obliterated. The satire of BNW thus uses hyperbole to warn against a blind perception rooted in contemporary 20<sup>th</sup> century Britain which, if left unchecked, will creep towards the subject of the hyperbole. In short, towards a brave new world.

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