

FROM SCIENCE TO LITERATURE: THE LIMITS OF ALDOUS HUXLEY'S INTERDISCURSIVE UTOPIA

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Abstract: The idea of the interdiscursive construction of literature leads back to Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann's *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (1966). Famously, this study proposes to treat "social reality" as the sum total of the "common-sense world" of intersubjective everyday life and multiple provinces of subjective experience and objectivized knowledge (Berger – Luckmann 1991, 28–29, 34). In an attempt to conjoin the otherwise disparate "social distribution of knowledge" with intersubjectivity, Berger and Luckmann develop the concept of "symbolic universes" (60, 110). They designate the latter as specialist fields of knowledge, language, and meaning that at once transcend and affect everyday life, as well as defining intersubjective relations. In the light of this theory, literature acquires the significant role of a mediator between the intersubjective experience of everyday life, on the one hand, and the symbolic universes of science, religion, politics, philosophy, and economy, on the other. As an interdiscursive construction, literature becomes capable of integrating social reality. Aldous Huxley's writing career exemplifies the interdiscursive construction of literature. This enterprise amounts to an articulation of utopia, an ever-receding horizon where literature integrates social reality by creating a common ground between scientific and literary discourses. As early as the "Subject-matter of poetry", an essay collected in *On the Margin* (1923), Huxley premises his utopia on the allegedly profound receptivity of literature in general, and poetry in particular, to the most recent scientific agenda. He observes:

There would be real novelty in the new poetry if it had [...] taken to itself any of the new ideas and astonishing facts with which the new science has endowed the modern world. There would be real novelty in it if it had worked out a satisfactory artistic method for dealing with abstractions. It has not (1928, 33).

Key words: social reality, symbolic universe, literature and science, two cultures debate, fiction, dystopian literature

Introduction

As late as his last book *Literature and Science* (1963), Huxley reinstates the same desideratum in the context of the two Cultures debate (50). This debate, initiated in the 19th century by his grandfather, the biologist Thomas Henry Huxley, and his great-uncle, the cultural critic Matthew Arnold, took on the scale of a vitriolic and

largely overexerted confrontation in the late 1950s and early 1960s. notoriously, C.p. Snow accused literature of scientific ignorance, while F.r. leavis ruled against the dehumanizing trappings of science (james 2016). Huxley, in turn, outlines a mutually advantageous rapprochement:

All that is necessary, so far as the man of letters is concerned, is a general knowledge of science, a bird's eye knowledge of what has been achieved in the various fields of scientific enquiry, together with an understanding of the philosophy of science and an appreciation of the ways in which scientific information and scientific modes of thought are relevant to individual experience and the problems of social relationships, to religion and politics, to ethics and a tenable philosophy of life. and, it goes without saying, between the two Cultures the traffic of learning and understanding must flow in both directions – from science to literature, as well as from literature to science (1963, 62).

Thus, Huxley's interdiscursive utopia equips literature with scientific competences, which bear on the representation of both intersubjective relations and characters' private lives. literature becomes at once a means and an end: as it displays a wider awareness of the modern world, it gains parity with and informs science. This arrangement promotes literature to the status of a holistic purveyor of what Berger and luckmann understand as social reality.

Methods.

Huxley's own fictional writing facilitates literature's interdiscursivity. most of his novels, from *Crome Yellow* (1921) to *Island* (1962), feature discussions of scientific ideas ranging between the establishment of a rational state and the spiritual treatment of social ills. The figure of the scientist takes center stage in an overwhelming number of Huxley's fictions, and one only needs to be reminded of the following characters: the physiologist Shearwater from *Antic Hay* (1923), the biologist lord edward tantamount and his assistant illidge from *Point Counter Point* (1928), the physicist and world controller mustapha mond from *Brave New World* (1932), the sociologist anthony Beavis from *Eyeless in Gaza* (1936), the medical researcher Dr. obispo from *After Many a Summer* (1939), the botanist Dr. poole from *Ape and Essence* (1948), the physics student john rivers and the nobel prize-winning physicist Dr. Henry maartens from *The Genius and the Goddess* (1955), and the medical doctor robert macphail from *Island*. individually, these characters embody Huxley's mutable attitude to science, be it distrust, fascination, or a mixture of both. Yet taken together, they enable interdiscursive exchanges between science and literature, which constitute a recurrent concern in his work.

My previous interventions have emphasized *Brave New World's* interdiscursive profile by drawing on how the novel engages with strands of national discourse, including the construction of the english landscape (Shadurski 2016a) and

sociocultural stereotypes (Shadurski 2018). This article explores how scientific discourses enhance Huxley's interdiscursive utopia, and how that utopia manifests itself in his fiction. Such a dual perspective takes into account several crucial variables attending Huxley's ideas. It requires reading *Brave New World* alongside relevant historical, intellectual, and critical contexts, in order to identify both the explications and limits of the novel's interdiscursivity. In what follows, I examine Huxley's most prominent and highly ambiguous novel, which harbors its author's ambivalences about science and, in doing so, prefigures what Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno dubbed the "dialectic of enlightenment" in their eponymous 1947 study. Primarily, though, *Brave New World* bears the imprint of the 1930s, when scientific ideas purported to inflect social reality in radical and therefore controversial ways, and Huxley's novel probes the applications of these ideas in the form of a eugenically controlled caste society. My discussion opens by contextualizing *Brave New World* in 1920s and 1930s debates about the changing roles of science and the scientist, followed by an overview of relevant criticism; it then proceeds to analyze the novel's treatment of science as a matter of literature's interdiscursivity. This analysis reveals how the co-optation of science to the service of social prejudice marks the limits of Huxley's interdiscursive utopia.

Historical, Intellectual, and critical contexts of Interdiscursivity In Brave new World

Written during the interwar period, *Brave New World* played witness to the changing social and cultural importance of science and the scientist. This tendency evidenced itself in literature's enhanced interdiscursivity. In *Imagined Futures: Writing, Science, and Modernity in the To-Day and To-Morrow Book Series, 1923-31* (2019), Max Saunders accounts for the emergence and development of a distinctive genre of "speculative non-fiction" which preoccupied itself with the popularization of science in ways accessible to the general public (vii). Comprised of 110 volumes, the *To-Day and To-Morrow* book series became a landmark during the interwar years, communicating the sense of "radical commencement" in the face of post-Darwinian degeneration and post-World War I despondency (Saunders 2019, 51). As an interdiscursive phenomenon, the series carved out what Saunders terms "a third culture" between science and literature (9). In his estimation, *Brave New World* derives much of its interdiscursivity from *To-Day and To-Morrow*, as, in all likelihood, Huxley "was following the series" quite closely (307). Thus, the novel owes its ideas of eugenics and Malthusian belts to J.B.S. Haldane's *Daedalus; or, Science and the Future* (1923); speculations about the misuses of science come from Bertrand Russell's *Icarus; or, The Future of Science* (1924); hypnopaedia and the feelies hark back to J.D. Bernal's *The World, the Flesh and the Devil; An Enquiry into the Future of the Three Enemies of the Rational Soul* (1929); and the rendition of Britain as anthropological

material resonates with archibald lyall's *It Isn't Done; or, The Future of Taboo Among the British Islanders* (1930). undoubtedly, Huxley's reading lists surpassed the remit of the book series, and other interdiscursive sources ought to be mentioned, particularly those dealing with eugenics and the exercise of power in a rational society: alexander m. Carr-Saunders' *s Eugenics* (1926), H.G. Wells, julian Huxley, and G.p. Wells's *The Science of Life* (1930), and Bertrand russell's *The Scientific Outlook* (1931).

Chronologically, the completion of *Brave New World* overlapped with the curtailment of *To-Day and To-Morrow* in 1931. The unrivalled prominence of science went into decline after the Great Depression, which, in Saunders's words, delivered "a blow to confidence in the future more generally" (2019, 341). Symptomatically, *Brave New World* translates the 1930s economic slump into the "year of stability, a.F. 632" (1968, 16). However, Huxley's compensatory gesture gives science and the scientist much less definite reaffirmation. my ensuing discussion shows that they both emerge simultaneously as perpetrators and saviors of social well-being, which does not always reflect the clear-cut distinction between pure and applied science. This peculiarity bespeaks a wider intellectual and sociocultural flux surrounding science before World War ii.

Brave New World's interdiscursivity has been the subject of several key enquiries, most of which testify to the post-World War ii discrediting of science. in "aldous Huxley and utopia" ("aldous Huxley und die utopie", 1955), Theodor W. adorno has offered one of the earliest critical evaluations of how Huxley's novel presents science as a means to totalitarianism. For adorno, *Brave New World* instrumentalizes science in ways that render both politics and economy subservient to a "totally planned state capitalism", where the "system of class relationships is made eternal and biological" (1997, 98–99). under the banner of civilization, science "lays hands on everything and tolerates nothing which is not made in its own image" (101). in adorno's estimation, this "linear concept of progress" heralds the contrary of "total enlightenment" and degenerates into irrationality (113, 115). along these lines, *Brave New World* anticipates Horkheimer and adorno's earlier work *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments* (*Dialektik der Aufklärung: Philosophische Fragmente*, 1947), and adorno does not deny Huxley the "accuracy of imagination" (1997, 115). indeed, Huxley envisions what Horkheimer and adorno call "the disenchantment of the world" (2002, 1), caused by the victory of science as instrumental reason: "reason serves as a universal tool for the fabrication of all other tools, rigidly purpose-directed and as calamitous as the precisely calculated operations of material production, the results of which for human beings escape all calculation" (23). as in *Brave New World*, the "dialectic of enlightenment" turns reason into its opposite, or, in Horkheimer and adorno's words, the "curse of irresistible progress is irresistible regression" (28). Despite acknowledging Huxley's shrewdness about

science, Adorno levels a dismissive critique at *Brave New World*'s ostensible failure to break free from its "repulsive complicity" with the present (1997, 116). By this token, the novel grotesquely totalizes science's co-optation by extant capitalist trends and, as a result, grants no sense of a future which would have ushered in a socialist alterity. Robert S. Baker has taken a more conciliatory line on both *Brave New World* and its author's preoccupations with science. In "Science and modernity in Aldous Huxley's inter-War essays and novels" (2001), he affords a nuanced analysis of a raft of scientist characters, which permits him to register the complexity of Huxley's evolving stances on science and historicize them alongside the perceived triumphs of scientific progress in the interwar years. Accordingly, Huxley assessed science "as dangerous; it must be controlled. It is complicit with industry and capitalism. It is the handmaid of social planning and social planning is, at best, both necessary and dangerous" (36). Baker records how such reservations find their reflection in Huxley's novels, particularly in the characters whose applications of science bring out sadistic tendencies, with *Brave New World*'s Mustapha Mond epitomizing "the more self-assured and domineering technocratic sadist" (36). Crucially, Baker distinguishes between Huxley's wariness about applied science and his growing fascination with the ontological mysticism of pure science (58). This distinction remains problematical in *Brave New World* and plays a pivotal role in Huxley's later writings, especially *Island* (Shadurski 2016b, 96–104). Unlike Baker, Joanne Woiak avoids vindicating Huxley's views of applied science and their representation in *Brave New World*. In "Designing a Brave New World: Eugenics, Politics, and Fiction" (2017), she reads the novel as "a satire on contemporary culture, a prediction of biological advances, a commentary on the social roles of science and scientists, and a plan for reforming society" (249). Woiak's reading discloses Huxley's paralyzing fear of the democracy of the lower classes, whom he identified with dysgenic types. For Woiak, Huxley devised his World State as a eugenically stratified society in order to circumvent the disappearance of what he deemed to be "our best stock" (250). Accordingly, Huxley's social prejudice mirrored "the predominant factor in British eugenics" during the interwar years (255). Unlike Adorno, Woiak evaluates *Brave New World* on its own terms. Instead of vexing negative about the novel's blatant flaws, she notices what it has achieved: "it offers a sophisticated critique of how scientific knowledge emerges from and in turn serves the social, political, and economic agendas of those in power" (256). This approach reaffirms *Brave New World*'s interdiscursive parameters; it also invites considerations of how Huxley's utopia comes to terms with the dystopia of a class-ridden, hedonistic, and technocratic society in the context of its own social and intellectual history. The next two sections examine the novel's two interdiscursive aspects: its provisional mediation of progress and regression, and its full endorsement of eugenic controls.

Conclusion

Being a spinoff of Berger and Luckmann's theory, interdiscursivity directly correlates with intersubjectivity. It ensures that the experience of everyday life becomes enriched with the competences from specialist symbolic universes. Social reality emerges at the intersections of interdiscursivity and intersubjectivity. Literature may lay a valid claim to a holistic representation of that reality, if it amalgamates multiple discourses and folds them into intersubjective relations. By this logic, Huxley's interdiscursive utopia achieves significant formal results, especially because it imaginatively renegotiates scientific knowledge and literary allusion. However, this form of interdiscursivity stays within the hermetic confines of an insulated symbolic universe. Its maintenance depends on the selective adaptations of both pure and applied science, which serve the interests and flourishing of a privileged caste. Huxley's interdiscursive construction of literature finds its limits in the dystopia of segregated intersubjective relations. Like every utopia, the intersubjectivity of *Brave New World* remains an ever-receding horizon, which Huxley's later fiction seeks to embrace.

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