VINTAGE CLASSICS

ALDOUS HUXLEY

BRAVE NEW WORLD

'Provoking, stimulating, shocking and dazzling'
Observer

EX LIBRIS

VINTAGE CLASSICS

Copyrighted Material

Copyrighted Material

ALDOUS HUXLEY

Aldous Huxley was born on 26 July 1894 near Godalming, Surrey. He began writing poetry and short stories in his early twenties, but it was his first novel, *Crome Yellow* (1921), which established his literary reputation. This was swiftly followed by *Antic Hay* (1923), *Those Barren Leaves* (1925) and *Point Counter Point* (1928) – bright, brilliant satires of contemporary society. For most of the 1920s Huxley lived in Italy but in the 1930s he moved to Sanary, near Toulon.

In the years leading up to the Second World War, Huxley's work took on a more sombre tone in response to the confusion of a society which he felt to be spinning dangerously out of control. His great novels of ideas, including his most famous work *Brave New World* (published in 1932, this warned against the dehumanising aspects of scientific and material 'progress') and the pacifist novel *Eyeless in Gaza* (1936) were accompanied by a series of wise and brilliant essays, collected in volume form under titles such as *Music at Night* (1931) and *Ends and Means* (1937).

In 1937, at the height of his fame, Huxley left Europe to live in California, working for a time as a screenwriter in Hollywood. As the West braced itself for war, Huxley came increasingly to believe that the key to solving the world's problems lay in changing the individual through mystical enlightenment. The exploration of the inner life through mysticism and hallucinogenic drugs was to dominate his work for the rest of his life. His beliefs found expression in both fiction (*Time Must Have a Stop*, 1944 and *Island*, 1962) and non-fiction (*The Perennial Philosophy*, 1945, *Grey Eminence*, 1941 and the famous account of his first mescalin experience, *The Doors of Perception*, 1954).

Copyrighted Material

Huxley died in California on 22 November 1963.

ALSO BY ALDOUS HUXLEY

NOVELS

Crome Yellow
Antic Hay
Those Barren Leaves
Point Counter Point
Eyeless in Gaza
After Many a Summer
Time Must Have a Stop
Ape and Essence
The Genius and the Goddess
Island

SHORT STORIES

Limbo
Mortal Coils
Little Mexican
Two or Three Graces
Brief Candles
The Gioconda Smile
(Collected Short Stories)

BIOGRAPHY

Grey Eminence
The Devils of Loudun

TRAVEL

Along the Road
Jesting Pilate
Beyond the Mexique Bay

POETRY & DRAMA

The Burning Wheel
Jonah
The Defeat of Youth
Leda
Verses and a Comedy

ESSAYS & BELLES LETTRES

On the Margin
Proper Studies
Do What You Will
Music at Night
Texts and Pretexts
The Olive Tree
Ends and Means
The Art of Seeing
The Perennial Philosophy
Science, Liberty and Peace
Themes and Variations
The Doors of Perception
Adonis and the Alphabet
Heaven and Hell
Brave New World Revisited
Literature and Science
The Human Situation
Moksha

FOR CHILDREN

The Crows of Pearblossom

Copyrighted Material

ALDOUS HUXLEY

BRAVE NEW WORLD

WITH INTRODUCTIONS BY
Margaret Atwood and David Bradshaw

VINTAGE CLASSICS
Copyrighted Material

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

Vintage Classics is part of the Penguin Random House
group of companies whose addresses can be found
at global.penguinrandomhouse.com

Penguin
Random House
UK

This edition published in Vintage Classics in 2024
First published in Great Britain by Chatto & Windus in 1932

Copyright © Mrs Laura Huxley 1932

Margaret Atwood's introduction © 2007 O.W. Toad Ltd.
Published by arrangement with Random House Canada,
a division of Random House of Canada Limited.

David Bradshaw's introduction © David Bradshaw 1994
Biographical introduction © David Bradshaw 1994

Aldous Huxley has asserted his right to be identified as the author of this
Work in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988

penguin.co.uk/vintage-classics

Printed and bound in Great Britain by Clays Ltd, Elcograf S.p.A.

The authorised representative in the EEA is Penguin Random House Ireland,
Morrison Chambers, 32 Nassau Street, Dublin D02 YH68

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 9780099518471

Penguin Random House is committed to a sustainable future
for our business, our readers and our planet. This book is made
from Forest Stewardship Council® certified paper.

Copyrighted Material

INTRODUCTION BY MARGARET ATWOOD

> 'O brave new world, that has such people in't!'
>
> – Miranda, in Shakespeare's play *The Tempest*, on first sighting the shipwrecked courtiers

IN THE LATTER HALF of the twentieth century, two visionary books cast their shadows over our futures. One was George Orwell's 1949 novel, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, with its horrific vision of a brutal, mind-controlling totalitarian state – a book that gave us Big Brother, and thoughtcrime and Newspeak and the memory hole and the torture palace called the Ministry of Love, and the discouraging spectacle of a boot grinding into the human face forever.

The other was Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932), which proposed a different and softer form of totalitarianism – one of conformity achieved through engineered, bottle-grown babies and hypnotic persuasion rather than through brutality; of boundless consumption that keeps the wheels of production turning and of officially enforced promiscuity that does away with sexual frustration; of a pre-ordained caste system ranging from a highly intelligent managerial class to a subgroup of dim-witted serfs programmed to love their menial work; and of *soma*, a drug that confers instant bliss with no side effects.

Copyrighted Material

Which template would win, we wondered? During the Cold War, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* seemed to have the edge. But when the Berlin Wall fell in 1989, pundits proclaimed the end of history, shopping reigned triumphant, and there was already lots of quasi-*soma* percolating through society. True, promiscuity had taken a hit from AIDS, but on balance we seemed to be in for a trivial, giggly, drug-enhanced Spend-O-Rama: *Brave New World* was winning the race.

That picture changed, too, with the attack on New York City's Twin Towers in 2001. Thoughtcrime and the boot grinding into the human face could not be got rid of so easily, after all. The Ministry of Love is back with us, it appears, though it's no longer limited to the lands behind the former Iron Curtain: the West has its own versions now.

On the other hand, *Brave New World* hasn't gone away. Shopping malls stretch as far as the bulldozer can see. On the wilder fringes of the genetic engineering community, there are true believers prattling of the Gen-rich and the Gen-poor – Huxley's Alphas and Epsilons – and busily engaging in schemes for genetic enhancement and – to go *Brave New World* one better – for immortality.

Would it be possible for both of these futures – the hard and the soft – to exist at the same time, in the same place? And what would that be like?

Surely it's time to look again at *Brave New World* and to examine its arguments for and against the totally planned society it describes, in which 'everybody is happy now'. What sort of happiness is on offer, and what is the price we might pay to achieve it?

I first read *Brave New World* in the early 1950s, when I was fourteen. It made a deep impression on me, though I didn't fully understand some of what I was reading. It's a tribute to

Copyrighted Material

Huxley's writing skills that although I didn't know what knickers were, or camisoles – nor did I know that zippers, when they first appeared, had been denounced from pulpits as lures of the Devil because they made clothes so easy to take off – I nonetheless had a vivid picture of 'zippicamiknicks', that female undergarment with a single zipper down the front that could be shucked so very easily: 'Zip! The rounded pinkness fell apart like a neatly divided apple. A wriggle of the arms, a lifting first of the right foot, then the left: the zippicamiknicks were lying lifeless and as though deflated on the floor.'

I myself was living in the era of 'elasticized panty girdles' that could not be got out of, or indeed into, without an epic struggle, so this was heady stuff indeed.

The girl shedding the zippicamiknicks is Lenina Crowne, a blue-eyed beauty both strangely innocent and alluringly voluptuous – or 'pneumatic', as her many male admirers call her. Lenina doesn't see why she shouldn't have sex with anyone she likes whenever the occasion offers, as to do so is merely polite behaviour and not to do so is selfish. The man she's trying to seduce by shedding her undergarment is John 'the Savage', who's been raised far outside the 'civilized' pale on a diet of Shakespeare's chastity/whore speeches, and Zuni cults, and self-flagellation, and who believes in religion and romance, and in suffering to be worthy of one's beloved, and who idolizes Lenina until she doffs her zippicamiknicks in such a casual and shameless fashion.

Never were two sets of desiring genitalia so thoroughly at odds. And thereby hangs Huxley's tale.

Brave New World is either a perfect-world utopia or its nasty opposite, a dystopia, depending on your point of view: its inhabitants are beautiful, secure, and free from diseases and

Copyrighted Material

worries, though in a way we like to think we would find unacceptable. 'Utopia' is sometimes said to mean 'no place', from the Greek 'O Topia'; but others derive it from 'eu', as in 'eugenics', in which case it would mean 'healthy place' or 'good place'. Sir Thomas More, in his own sixteenth-century *Utopia*, may have been punning: utopia is the good place that doesn't exist.

As a literary construct, *Brave New World* thus has a long list of literary ancestors. Plato's *Republic* and the Bible's Book of Revelations and the myth of Atlantis are the great-great-grandparents of the form; nearer in time are Sir Thomas More's *Utopia*, and the land of the talking-horse, totally rational Houyhnhnms in Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, and H.G. Wells's *The Time Machine*, in which the brainless, pretty 'upper classes' play in the sunshine during the day, and the ugly 'lower classes' run the underground machinery and emerge at night to eat the social butterflies.

In the nineteenth century – when improvements in sewage systems, medicine, communication technologies, and transportation were opening new doors every year – many earnest utopias were thrown up by the prevailing mood of optimism, with William Morris's *News from Nowhere* and Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward* foremost among them.

Insofar as they are critical of society as it presently exists but nevertheless take a dim view of the prospects of the human race, utopias may verge on satire, as do Swift's and More's and Wells's; but insofar as they endorse the view that humanity is perfectible, or can at least be vastly improved, they will resemble idealizing romances, as do Bellamy's and Morris's. The First World War marked the end of the romantic-idealistic utopian dream in literature, just as several real-life utopian plans were about to be launched with disastrous effects. The Communist regime in Russia and the Nazi takeover of Germany both began as utopian visions.

Copyrighted Material

But as most literary utopias had already discovered, perfectibility breaks on the rock of dissent. What do you do with people who don't endorse your views or fit in with your plans? Nathaniel Hawthorne, himself a disillusioned graduate of the real-life Brook Farm utopian scheme, pointed out that the Puritan founders of New England – who intended to build the New Jerusalem – began their construction efforts with a prison and a gibbet. Forced re-education, exile, and execution are the usual choices on offer, in utopias, for any who oppose the powers that be. It's rats in the eyes for you – as in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* – if you won't love Big Brother. (*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.)

Utopias and dystopias from Plato's *Republic* on have had to cover the same basic ground that real societies do. All must answer the same questions: Where do people live, what do they eat, what do they wear, what do they do about sex and child-rearing? Who has the power, who does the work, how do citizens relate to nature, and how does the economy function? Romantic utopias such as Morris's *News from Nowhere* and W.H. Hudson's *A Crystal Age* present a Pre-Raphaelite picture, with the inhabitants going in for flowing robes, natural settings in abodes that sound like English country houses with extra stained glass, and lots of arts and crafts. Everything would be fine, we're told, if we could only do away with industrialism and get back in tune with Nature, and deal with overpopulation. (Hudson solves this last problem by simply eliminating sex, except for one unhappy couple per country house who are doomed to procreate.)

But when Huxley was writing *Brave New World* at the beginning of the 1930s, he was, in his own words, an 'amused, Pyrrhonic aesthete', a member of that group of bright young

Copyrighted Material

upstarts that swirled around the Bloomsbury Group and delighted in attacking anything Victorian or Edwardian. So *Brave New World* tosses out the flowing robes, the crafts, and the tree-hugging. Its architecture is futuristic – electrically lighted towers and softly glowing pink glass – and everything in its cityscape is relentlessly unnatural and just as relentlessly industrialized. Viscose and acetate and imitation leather are its fabrics of choice; apartment buildings, complete with artificial music and taps that flow with perfume, are its dwellings; transportation is by private helicopter. Babies are no longer born, they're grown in hatcheries, their bottles moving along assembly lines, in various types and batches according to the needs of 'the hive', and fed on 'external secretion' rather than 'milk'. The word 'mother' – so thoroughly worshipped by the Victorians – has become a shocking obscenity; and indiscriminate sex, which was a shocking obscenity for the Victorians, is now de rigueur.

'He patted me on the behind this afternoon,' said Lenina.

'There, you see!' Fanny was triumphant. 'That shows what he stands for. The strictest conventionality.'

Many of *Brave New World's* nervous jokes turn on these kinds of inversions – more startling to its first audience, perhaps, than to us, but still wry enough. Victorian thrift turns to the obligation to spend, Victorian till-death-do-us-part monogamy has been replaced with 'everyone belongs to everyone else', Victorian religiosity has been channelled into the worship of an invented deity – 'Our Ford', named after the American car-czar Henry Ford, god of the assembly line – via communal orgies. Even the 'Our Ford' chant of 'orgy-porgy' is an inversion of the familiar nursery rhyme, in which kissing the girls makes them cry. Now, it's if you refuse to kiss them – as 'the Savage' does – that the tears will flow.

Sex is often centre stage in utopias and dystopias – who can do what, with which set of genital organs, and with whom,

Copyrighted Material

being one of humanity's main preoccupations. Because sex and procreation have been separated and women no longer give birth – the very idea is yuck-making to them – sex has become a recreation. Little naked children carry on 'erotic play' in the shrubberies, so as to get a hand in early. Some women are sterile –'freemartins' – and perfectly nice girls, though a little whiskery. The others practise 'Malthusian drill' – a form of birth control – and take 'pregnancy surrogate' hormone treatments if they feel broody, and sport sweet little faux-leather fashionista cartridge belts crammed with contraceptives. If they slip up on their Malthusian drill, there's always the lovely pink-glass Abortion Centre. Huxley wrote before the Pill, but its advent brought his imagined sexual free-for-all a few steps closer. (What about gays? Does 'everyone belongs to everyone else' really mean everyone? We aren't told.)

Of course, Huxley himself still had one foot in the nineteenth century: he could not have dreamed his upside-down morality unless he himself also found it threatening. At the time he was writing *Brave New World*, he was still in shock from a visit to the United States, where he was particularly frightened by mass consumerism and its group mentality and its vulgarities.

I use the word 'dreamed' advisedly, because *Brave New World* – gulped down whole – achieves an effect not unlike a controlled hallucination. All is surface; there is no depth. As you might expect from an author with impaired eyesight, the visual sense predominates: colours are intense, light and darkness vividly described. Sound is next in importance, especially during group ceremonies and orgies, and the viewing of 'Feelies' – movies in which you feel the sensations of those onscreen, 'The Gorillas' Wedding' and 'Sperm Whale's Love-Life' being sample titles. Scents are third – perfume wafts everywhere, and is dabbed here and there; one

Copyrighted Material

of the most poignant encounters between John the Savage and the lovely Lenina is the one in which he buries his worshipping face in her divinely scented undergarments while she herself is innocently sleeping, zonked out on a strong dose of *soma*, partly because she can't stand the awful real-life smells of the 'reservation' where the new world has not been implemented.

Many utopias and dystopias emphasize food (delicious or awful; or, in the case of Swift's Houyhnhnms, oats), but in *Brave New World* the menus are not presented. Lenina and her lay-of-the-month, Henry, eat 'an excellent meal', but we aren't told what it is. (Beef would be my guess, in view of the huge barns full of cows that provide the external secretions.) Despite the dollops of sex-on-demand, the bodies in *Brave New World* are oddly disembodied, which serves to underscore one of Huxley's points: in a world in which everything is available, nothing has any meaning.

Meaning has in fact been eliminated, as far as possible. All books except works of technology have been banned – *pace* Ray Bradbury's 1953 novel *Fahrenheit 451*; museum-goers have been slaughtered, *pace* Henry Ford's 'History is bunk.' As for God, he is present 'as an absence; as though he weren't there at all' – except, of course, for the deeply religious John the Savage, who has been raised on a Zuni 'reservation' off-limits to normal Brave New Worlders. There, archaic life carries on, replete with 'meaning' of the most intense kinds. John is the only character in the book who has a real body, but he knows it through pain, not through pleasure. 'Nothing costs enough here,' he says of the perfumed new world where he's been brought as an 'experiment'.

The 'comfort' offered by Mustapha Mond – one of the ten 'Controllers' of this world and a direct descendant of Plato's Guardians – is not enough for John. He wants the old world back – dirt, diseases, free will, fear, anguish, blood, sweat,

Copyrighted Material

tears, and all. He believes he has a soul, and like many an early twentieth-century literary possessor of such a thing – such as the missionary in Somerset Maugham's 1921 story, 'Miss Thompson', who hangs himself after sinning with a prostitute – John is made to pay the price for this belief.

In the foreword to *Brave New World* written in 1946, after the horrors of the Second World War and Hitler's Final Solution, Huxley criticizes himself for having provided only two choices in his 1932 utopia/dystopia – an 'insane life in Utopia' or 'the life of a primitive in an Indian village, more human in some respects, but in others hardly less queer and abnormal'. (He does, in fact, provide a third sort of life – that of the intellectual community of misfits on Iceland – but poor John the Savage isn't allowed to go there, and he wouldn't have liked it anyway, as there are no public flagellations available.) The Huxley of 1946 comes up with another sort of utopia, one in which 'sanity' is possible. By this, Huxley means a kind of 'High Utilitarianism' dedicated to a 'conscious and rational' pursuit of man's 'Final End', which is a kind of union with the immanent 'Tao or Logos, the transcendent Godhead or Brahmin'. No wonder Huxley subsequently got heavily into the mescalin and wrote *The Doors of Perception*, thus inspiring a generation of 1960s hopheads and pop musicians to seek God in altered brain chemistry. His interest in *soma*, it appears, didn't spring out of nowhere.

Meanwhile, those of us still pottering along on the earthly plane – and thus still able to read books – are left with *Brave New World*. How does it stand up, seventy-five years later? And how close have we come, in real life, to the society of vapid consumers, idle pleasure-seekers, inner-space trippers, and programmed conformists that it presents?

The answer to the first question, for me, is that it stands up very well. It's still as vibrant, fresh, and somehow shocking as it was when I, for one, first read it.

Copyrighted Material

The answer to the second question, Dear Reader, rests with you. Look in the mirror: do you see Lenina Crowne looking back at you, or do you see John the Savage? If you're a human being, you'll be seeing something of both, because we've always wanted things both ways. We wish to be as the careless gods, lying around on Olympus, eternally beautiful, having sex and being entertained by the anguish of others. And at the same time we want to be those anguished others, because we believe, with John, that life has meaning beyond the play of the senses, and that immediate gratification will never be enough.

It was Huxley's genius to present us to ourselves in all our ambiguity. Alone among the animals, we suffer from the future perfect tense. Rover the Dog cannot imagine a future world of dogs in which all fleas will have been eliminated and doghood will finally have achieved its full glorious potential. But thanks to their uniquely structured languages, human beings can imagine such enhanced states for themselves, though they can also question their own grandiose constructions. It's these double-sided imaginative abilities that produce masterpieces of speculation such as *Brave New World*.

To quote *The Tempest*, source of Huxley's title: 'We are such stuff / As dreams are made on.' He might well have added: and nightmares.

Margaret Atwood, 2007

Copyrighted Material

Introduction by David Bradshaw

First published in 1932, *Brave New World* is set in 'this year of stability, A.F. 632' – that is, 632 years after the advent of the American car magnate Henry Ford (1863–1947), whose highly successful Model T (1908–1927) was the first automobile to be manufactured by purely mass-production methods, such as conveyor-belt assembly and specialised labour. Ford is the presiding deity of the World State, a global caste system set up after the double catastrophe of the Nine Years' War and the great Economic Collapse, and his industrial philosophy dominates every aspect of life within it.

The stability of the World State is maintained through a combination of biological engineering and exhaustive conditioning. Its 2,000 million standardised citizens, sharing only 10,000 surnames, have not been born, but 'hatched' to fill their predestined social roles. They are no more than cells in the body politic. In infancy the virtues of passive obedience, material consumption and mindless promiscuity are inculcated upon them by means of hypnopaedia or sleep-teaching. In later life the citizens of the World State are given free handouts of *soma*, the government-approved dope, and flock to Community Sings and Solidarity Services (which routinely culminate in an orgy) designed to instil more deeply the values

Copyrighted Material

of 'COMMUNITY, IDENTITY, STABILITY', the World State's motto. Every aspect of life has been reduced to the level of social utility and even corpses are exploited as a handy source of phosphorus.

Each of the World State's ten zones is run by a Resident World Controller. 'His fordship' Mustapha Mond, the Controller of the Western European zone centred on London, heads a hierarchical, factory-like concern, with a mass of Epsilon-Minus Semi-Morons bred for menial labour at the base and with castes of increasing ability ranked above them. Immediately below Mond are a caste of Alpha-Plus intellectuals. Bernard Marx and Helmholtz Watson are members of this elite, but both have developed subversive tendencies, taking delight in such deviant pleasures as being alone and abstaining from sex. They know only too well that it is 'their duty to be infantile', and that 'when the individual feels, the community reels' and both are fated to be exiled on one of the islands which serve as asylums for Alpha-Plus misfits.

The only other human beings permitted to exist beyond the pale of World State are the inhabitants of the various Savage Reservations. Segregated by electrified fences from the Fordian hell which surrounds them, the savages still get married, make love, give birth and die as of old. It is while visiting the Reservation in New Mexico that Bernard Marx meets a savage named John, whom he brings back to London. John is at first enraptured by the new world which surrounds him and is lionised by fashionable London, but he soon becomes disillusioned by the World State, and it is from John's perspective that the full, totalitarian horror of A.F. 632 is affirmed.

Brave New World has long been installed, along with Zamyatin's *We* (1920–21), Koestler's *Darkness at Noon* (1940) and Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949), as one of the principal dystopian or anti-utopian novels of the twentieth

Copyrighted Material

century. Its title is now a pervasive media catch phrase, automatically invoked in connection with any development viewed as ultra-modern, ineffably zany or involving a potential threat to human liberty. When Huxley wrote the novel, however, he had other things on his mind besides the 'nightmarish' future, and a knowledge of the precise circumstances of its conception and composition can help us to explain the ambivalence which so many readers have sensed in *Brave New World*.

Writing to his brother Julian in August 1918, Aldous Huxley predicted that one of the most deplorable consequences of the First World War would be 'the inevitable acceleration of American world domination'. Many other intellectuals felt the same, and the 1920s witnessed a revival of the vogue for condemning America epitomised in the previous century by Fanny Trollope's *Domestic Manners of the Americans*, Dickens's contemptuous *American Notes* and Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*. This resurgent concern with the grotesquerie of America helps us to understand why Huxley was almost thrilled to find the United States every bit as vulgar and as freakish as he had anticipated when he first visited the country in 1926. The final section of *Jesting Pilate*, published later that year, contains a gleeful execration of the gimcrack movies, blank-faced 'pneumatic' flappers, 'barbarous' jazz and unrelenting pep which Huxley had encountered in Los Angeles ('the City of Dreadful Joy') and which made him so gloomy about the prospects for European civilisation. 'I wish you had seen California,' he wrote at the time to another recent visitor to America. 'Materially, the nearest approach to Utopia yet seen on our planet.' Huxley reiterated his doleful prophecy that 'the future of America is the future of the world' on a number of occasions in the 1920s, and it is clear that the World State, with its huge skyscrapers, dollar economy, cult of youth,

Copyrighted Material

'feelies' (tactile descendants of Hollywood's talkies), sex-hormone chewing-gum, ubiquitous zippers (identified by Huxley as America's national 'crest') and wailing sexophones, was first conceived as a satire on the global diffusion of the American way of life. Huxley had discovered Henry Ford's *My Life and Work* in the ship's library during his voyage to the United States, and everything he came across after he had disembarked at San Francisco seemed perfectly in tune with Fordian principles.

In June 1931 Huxley informed a correspondent that he was organising a second trip to America, 'just to know the worst, as one must do from time to time, I think'. In May he had told another that he was writing 'a novel about the future – on the horror of the Wellsian Utopia and a revolt against it'. On a number of occasions Huxley had scoffed at H.G. Wells's *Men Like Gods* (1923), with its rosy portrayal of a utopia peopled exclusively by 'active, sanguine, inventive, receptive and good-tempered' citizens, and his use of the term 'Wellsian' here encompasses all those aspects of the progressive outlook which he found most rebarbative or preposterous. But Huxley was certainly not the 'greatest anti-Wellsian of them all', as Anthony Burgess once tagged him. On the contrary, with the exception of *Men Like Gods*, Huxley had a great deal in common with Wells in the 1920s and early 1930s, in particular, a robust contempt for parliamentary democracy and a conviction that mass society must be reorganised as a hierarchy of mental quality controlled by an elite caste of experts. Huxley's original purpose in writing *Brave New World* may well have been to satirise *Men Like Gods* and the fantastic, 'Californian' world it depicted, but even as he began to write the novel, Huxley's urge to parody a fictional future became embroiled with his horrified engrossment in the urgent non-fictional problems of the present.

The Wall Street Crash of October 1929 triggered a global
Copyrighted Material

depression which had severe repercussions for those areas of Britain which depended exclusively on the staple industries. Unemployment rose rapidly in these regions during the next two years, and by the early months of 1931, with the country's economic problems growing daily more acute and Parliament increasingly exposed as an ineffectual bystander, Britain appeared to be on the brink of chaos. Many commentators predicted that the whole of Europe was heading for complete economic collapse and bloody unrest. Civilisation itself seemed doomed.

Huxley visited the Durham coalfield and witnessed the misery of mass unemployment for himself. He was also present during a key Commons debate on the economic and political situation and was profoundly unimpressed by the posturing he observed and the 'twaddling' he heard. As the crises deepened during the summer of 1931, so too did Huxley's pessimism. The run on sterling in August, the formation of Britain's first National Government to deal with the emergency, and the abandonment of the gold standard in September, marking 'the watershed of English history between the 'wars' (in A.J.P. Taylor's words), prompted Huxley to postpone his second visit to the United States indefinitely. Shortly afterwards he reached the nadir of his despair with conventional politics and argued, like many of his contemporaries, that the time had come to renounce parliamentary democracy and to submit to rule 'by men who will compel us to do and suffer what a rational foresight demands'. He envisaged propaganda being used as a legitimate tool of state control and repeatedly called for the implementation of a national plan, similar to that which had recently been set in motion in the Soviet Union. In 1928, when the first Five Year Plan was inaugurated in Russia, Huxley had written, 'To the Bolshevist idealist, Utopia is indistinguishable from a Ford factory', but the events of 1931 persuaded him to adopt a

Copyrighted Material

different perspective. Like Mustapha Mond, Huxley asserted at the time he was writing *Brave New World* that stability was the 'primal and the ultimate need' if civilisation was to survive the present crisis. Mond is named after Sir Alfred Mond (1868–1930), first Chairman of Imperial Chemical Industries Ltd, whose vast plant at Billingham near Middlesbrough Huxley visited just before he started writing *Brave New World*. Huxley hailed Billingham as a 'triumphant embodiment' of the principles of planning, an 'ordered universe . . . in the midst of the larger world of planless incoherence'. It is tempting to speculate that, in his magisterial domination of the Savage, Mustapha Mond personifies that 'strong and intelligent central authority' whom Huxley had summoned in July 1931 to impose reason, order and stability on Britain. Mond's 'deep, resonant voice' is noted by Huxley on three occasions. Moreover, he observes that it vibrates 'thrillingly', and that Mond's face betrays nothing more threatening than 'good-humoured intelligence' during his interviews with the Savage, Bernard Marx and Helmholtz Watson in Chapters XVI and XVII. For all its hideousness, the hierarchical, aseptic, colour-coded world of A.F. 632 is not aeons away from the scientific utopia Huxley was promoting elsewhere before, during and after he wrote *Brave New World* in 1931.

Two weeks prior to the publication of *Brave New World*, in a talk broadcast on B.B.C. Radio in January 1932, Huxley discussed the possible use of eugenics as an instrument of political control and expressed his readiness to sanction eugenicist measures to arrest the 'rapid deterioration . . . of the whole West European stock'. Huxley's interest in eugenics, or the state manipulation of the biological make-up of society, had first surfaced in *Proper Studies* (1927) and eugenicist nostrums were advocated by intellectuals of all political hues in the inter-war period. Bokanovsky's Process, Podsnap's Technique, Neo-Pavlovian Conditioning and

Copyrighted Material

Hypnopaedia are the whimsical equivalents of the techniques which, over the airwaves, Huxley suggested might soon be applied to Britain's political problems. As he put it, 'It may be that circumstances will compel the humanist to resort to scientific propaganda, just as they may compel the liberal to resort to dictatorship. Any form of order is better than chaos.'

In the same way that H.G. Wells's *The Time Machine* (1895) was inspired less by a prospect of the distant future than a Victorian fear of the abyss and its pullulating swarms, so Huxley's morbid fascination with the economic muddle, political inertia and social unrest which shaped national life in 1931, and the panaceas put forward to solve the crisis, lies just beneath the surface of *Brave New World*. For instance, when the Director of Hatcheries and Conditioning informs his students that the lower castes are conditioned to want to go into the country 'at every available opportunity', and engage in sports which, by law, 'entail the use of elaborate apparatus. So that they consume manufactured articles as well as transport', and when we learn that it is axiomatic in the World State that 'Ending is better than mending', Huxley is satirising the theory that the problems which confronted Britain were caused by under-consumption, a view he ascribed to the economist J.M. Keynes and with which he strongly disagreed. Keynes also believed that unemployment could be reduced and the economy revived through a systematic programme of public works. The Obstacle Golf course at Stoke Poges, the forests of Centrifugal Bumble-puppy towers massed in the western suburbs of London, and the double row of Escalator Fives Courts which 'lined the main road from Notting Hill to Willesden' are bizarre manifestations of the Keynesian initiatives which were exciting so much debate at the time the novel was written.

An awareness of the precise background to *Brave New World* in no way invalidates the novel's dystopian credentials.

Copyrighted Material

It can be read just as tellingly as a projection of the totalitarian dangers inherent in the corporate state, as it can be taken as a satire on the American bogey. As we have seen, *Brave New World* can even be interpreted as Huxley's oblique and despairing endorsement of scientific planning. All texts are autonomous; *Brave New World* itself, the various non-fictional writings which Huxley produced at the same time as his novel, and his retrospective accounts of why he wrote it and what it means, can either be attended to in unison or left to speak for themselves. But whatever interpretation the reader favours, it seems more than likely that the composition of *Brave New World* proved so problematic for Huxley between April and August 1931 because he was unsure in his own mind whether he was writing a satire, a prophecy or a blueprint. When a journalist asked him in 1935 whether his ultimate sympathies were with 'the savage's aspirations or with the ideal of conditioned stability', Huxley is reported to have replied, 'With neither, but I believe some mean between the two is both desirable and possible and must be our objective.' Significantly, a letter which Huxley wrote to his father in late August 1931 announcing the completion of a 'comic, or at least satirical, novel about the Future' concluded with him declaring that he felt 'more and more certain that unless the rest of the world adopts something on the lines of the Five Year Plan, it will break down'. In his 1946 Foreword to *Brave New World* Huxley makes no reference to the appeal which planning and eugenics held for him at the time he wrote the novel. Hitler and the 'Final Solution' had made all such ideas unthinkable and by then Huxley had long since forsaken them. Instead, the Foreword and *Brave New World Revisted* (1958) emphasise the novel's prophetic awareness of the 'nightmarish' future which the hegemony of Soviet Communism seemed to portend.

One of the great strengths of *Brave New World* is that it is hard to dissect, it resists categorical interpretation. For

Copyrighted Material

instance in an article published in May 1931, D.H. Lawrence described how New Mexico changed him 'for ever' by liberating him from the 'great era of material and mechanical development'. Huxley's Savage Reservation appears to owe much to this essay, *The Plumed Serpent* (1926), and *Mornings in Mexico* (1927). In these works Lawrence continually draws a distinction between the aboriginal Americans, who had held on to the 'animistic' soul of man, and the democratic citizens of the Ford-infested United States. *Brave New World* seems to employ the same distinction, and Huxley even uses one of Lawrence's favourite words, 'obsidian', to describe the wrinkled face of a Pueblo Indian. Lawrence died in 1930, and Huxley brought out an edition of the letters of his friend and fellow novelist in 1932. In preparing it, Huxley would have come across further vivid evidence of what New Mexico meant for Lawrence. In part, *Brave New World* certainly can be construed as another tribute to Lawrence, but, as with so many aspects of the novel, the situation is not quite as uncomplicated as it seems. Huxley was not, in fact, sympathetic to Lawrence's 'regressive' celebration of primitive cultures, and when the Savage flings himself against 'a clump of hoary juniper bushes' in the last chapter of the novel, the incident seems more a send-up of Birkin's naked gambol in the prickly undergrowth in *Women in Love* than a moment of allusive homage to Lawrence. Similarly, as a 'very stout blonde', Linda bears more than a passing resemblance to Frieda Lawrence, who spent the rest of her life in New Mexico after her husband's death, and with whom Huxley had grown distinctly irritated while assembling Lawrence's letters.

Those who would read the Savage Reservation as the human, warts-and-all antithesis of the inhuman World State, must also recognise that John and Linda's ostracism amidst the racial prejudice of Malpais ('They disliked me for my complexion,' John tells Bernard and Lenina when they first meet at the ritual

Copyrighted Material

flagellation in Chapter VII. 'It's always been like that.') is far more intolerable than the predicament of Bernard Marx and Helmholtz Watson in the World State. Unorthodox behaviour is punished more brutally in New Mexico than in London, and are the totemism and *mescal* of Malpais any more than the crude counterparts of the World State's Fordism and *soma*? Conversely, the sanitised elysium of A.F. 632 is not a place where aberrant behaviour, human error, emotional instability and social disorder have been completely extirpated. Riot police are kept in reserve to deal with outbreaks of unprogrammed disharmony, like the Park Lane punch-up, and it speaks volumes for the irrepressibility of human passion that a high flier like the Director of Hatcheries and Conditioning should have come so disastrously and romantically involved with the young Linda, and she so devoted to her 'Tomakin'. Similarly, the 'popular' and 'pneumatic' Lenina Crowne follows up her exclusive attachment to Henry Foster with an unaccountable fondness for the stunted Bernard Marx, and, as reported in Chapter XIII, it is Lenina's *human* gaffe which will lead to the premature death of an Alpha-Minus administrator at Mwanza-Mwanza. Likewise, it is rumoured that Bernard's lack of stature and his disenchantment may be due to someone else's cack-handed fallibility in the past.

In the 1946 Foreword Huxley explains that if he were to rewrite the novel he would offer the Savage a third alternative, the option of living in a community where the economics would be decentralist, the politics anarchist and where science and technology would be harnessed to serve rather than to coerce mankind. 'Religion would be the conscious and intelligent pursuit of man's Final End, the unitive knowledge of the immanent Tao or Logos, the transcendent Godhead or Brahman.' As readers, we must be thankful that Huxley never revised the novel along these lines, because, had he done so, *Brave New World* would undoubtedly have

Copyrighted Material

lost its enduring appeal. Paradoxically, it is the anxieties and uncertainties which beset Britain and Huxley in 1931, and which resulted in the rich ambivalence of his novel, which have guaranteed *Brave New World*'s status as a twentieth-century classic.

David Bradshaw
Worcester College, Oxford
1993

Copyrighted Material

Copyrighted Material