

# KEY FACTS ON BRAVE NEW WORLD

**Full Title** • Brave New World

**Author** • Aldous Huxley

**Type Of Work** • Novel

**Genre** • utopian novel, dystopian novel, science fiction

**Language** • English

**Time And Place Written** • 1931, England

**Date Of First Publication** • 1932

**Publisher** • Chatto and Windus, London

**Narrator** • Third-person omniscient; the narrator frequently makes passages of “objective” description sound like the speech or thought patterns of a particular character, using a technique usually called “free indirect quotation.”

**Climax** • John incites a riot in the hospital in Chapter 15.

**Protagonists** • Bernard Marx, Helmholtz Watson, and John

**Antagonist** • Mustapha Mond

**Settings (Time)** • 2540 a.d.; referred to in the novel as 632 years "After Ford," meaning 632 years after the production of the first Model T car.

**Settings (Place)** • England, Savage Reservation in New Mexico

**Point Of View** • Narrated in the third person, primarily from the point of view of Bernard or John but also from the point of view of Lenina, Helmholtz Watson, and Mustapha Mond.

**Falling Action** • Chapter 18, in which John isolates himself in a lighthouse and punishes himself; it ends with an orgy and his suicide.

**Tense** • Past

**Foreshadowing** • The director's memories of his trip to the Reservation foreshadow his relationship to John and Linda; Bernard's insecurities and dissatisfactions foreshadow his exile; John's longing to sacrifice himself foreshadow his suicide.

**Tone** • initially sardonic and detached; later, despairing and sympathetic.

**Themes** • The use of technology to control society, the incompatibility of happiness and truth, the dangers of an all-powerful state

**Motifs** • Alienation, sex, Shakespeare

**Symbols** • The drug soma is a symbol of the use of instant gratification to control the World State's populace. It is also a symbol of the powerful influence of science and technology on society.

## STYLE OF BRAVE NEW WORLD

Brave New World is written in a detailed, unemotional style, making the technologies seem plausible and the characters pitiful. Though the majority of the plot centers on a handful of characters, the book opens with an extended explanation of the hatching and fertilizing processes of the World State, with little description of the characters themselves. The director, who describes the world we are about to enter, remains a vague figure himself: "Old? Young?...It was hard to say...it didn't occur to you to ask it." Huxley rarely includes physical descriptions of characters, reinforcing their interchangeability and lack of personal identity. When he does detail what a character looks like, their appearance is usually unappealing: Bernard is short, slight, and unattractive; Lenina has purple eyes and gums, and Linda is "monstrous." This

detached, slightly repulsed style of description makes the characters seem pathetic, and undermines the sense of World State as a pleasant place to live.

Huxley jumps between scenes and repeats phrases to highlight the contrast between what characters might think if they had free will, and what they are conditioned to think by the World State. In the early chapters he juxtaposes scenes of Lenina and Fanny discussing their sex lives with short phrases describing the history of New World and its scientific advancements. This reminds the reader that World State, despite appearing a monolith of progress, is made of up of individuals who still bear some relationship to real people. Huxley also includes many of the programmatic phrases the citizens of New World heard in their sleep, a process called hypnopædia. Sayings like “a gramme is better than a damn,” “ending is better than mending,” and the song lyrics “hug me till you drug me, honey” are repeated throughout the book, mimicking the way these slogans work their way into characters’ brains. The phrases have a sing-song quality to them reminiscent of the childhood rhymes that readers already know. The softening of otherwise sinister concepts like brainwashing and genetic engineering is perhaps best seen in the phrase “orgy-porgy,” which Huxley invents to describe a literal orgy that combines religious worship with sexual promiscuity.

The novel also contains many references to Shakespeare, including quotes from several plays, likening the

futuristic concerns of the book's characters and the timeless human struggles depicted by Shakespeare centuries ago. The novel takes its title from the line in *The Tempest* where Miranda, who has been sheltered from other humans, says, "O brave new world, that has such people in it!" Huxley modeled *Brave New World* on *The Tempest*, and quotes the play throughout the book, as well as *Macbeth*, *Hamlet*, and *Othello*. At one point John reads Shakespeare's poem "The Phoenix and the Turtle" to Helmholtz, who despairs of writing poetry with actual meaning and emotion. The many references to Shakespeare serve to underscore the meaninglessness of language to convey actual emotion in *World State*. The words and phrases of *World State* are propaganda, in that they contain no actual truth, and are tools of repression rather than enlightenment. Shakespeare, on other hand, represents the highest potential of communicating the human experience. Bernard cannot tell the difference between Shakespeare and New World jargon – "It's just a solidarity service hymn," he says, after John recites the poem – marking him as less sensitive to his own humanity than either John or Helmholtz.

## DOES ART CAUSE AN UNSTABLE SOCIETY?

The Fordist society in *Brave New World* deprives citizens

of art in an effort to maintain happiness, suggesting that art leads to social instability. Mustapha explains that "beauty's attractive, and we don't want people to be attracted by old things. We want them to like the new ones." A societal structure that creates art and literature is now considered dangerous. According to Mustapha, "you can't make tragedies without social instability. The world's stable now. People are happy; they get what they want, and they never want what they can't get." They would be unlikely to appreciate art, anyway: Brainwashing has successfully alienated them from the human experiences art seeks to illuminate, such as death, love, and pain. At the same time, art has the potential to enlighten people about their own oppression, and cause them to feel dissatisfaction. Dissatisfaction is bad for production, and leads to revolution. "Universal happiness keeps the wheels steadily turning; truth and beauty can't," Mustafa explains. If the citizens of World State were exposed to experiences beyond their own, sensitized to their innate humanity, and inspired to question the meaning of their existence, the society would cease to function.

John's experience on the Reservation suggests that rather than inciting social instability, art provides solace for the inevitable sorrows and difficulties of human experience. The social instability of the Reservation has nothing to do with art, but rather with the inequities innate to all civilizations whose citizens are not engineered and drugged into passivity. John feels pain, alienation, and ostracism before he learns how to read. Shakespeare,

rather than making him more dissatisfied with his condition, alleviates his suffering by showing him the universality of his experience. The beauty and truth to be found in a play like Othello, he believes, is worth the suffering necessary to comprehend Othello's experience. Words, as Helmholtz believes, can be transformative: "you read them and you're pierced." For John, this transformation of pain into meaning is the point of art, and the point of life. When Mustapha argues that the experience of reading Othello can be simulated through a "Violent Passionate Surrogate" without any of the "inconveniences" of actually reading the play, John insists that he likes the inconveniences. A society whose citizens are alive to their own humanity may be unstable, but it also contains the possibility of beauty and meaning.

While John and Mustapha initially seem opposed in their attitudes toward art's role in society, they ultimately agree that people need the emotional release known as catharsis in order to be happy. The two characters disagree about how to provide that release, with John arguing for the value of art, and Mustapha arguing for the safety and efficiency of drugs. Despite asserting that the absence of art is necessary for happiness, the state ensures that its citizens still experience pain, just through a different method. Pain, rather than being eradicated completely, has just been controlled, so as to be safe and useful. "We prefer to do things comfortably," Mustapha says. His statement contains an inherent contradiction – something can't be simultaneously painful

and comfortable, or dangerous and safe. Art, because it is an experience that can't be controlled, is dangerous. So while art can incite social instability, it also provides the necessary catharsis that enables people to exist and find meaning in an unstable world

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