

## BRAVE NEW WORLD

*Three misfits illustrate the flaws of a future world-state in which technology permits complete control of people and the government claims to provide happiness to everyone*

**Author:** Aldous Huxley (1894–1963)

**Genre:** Science fiction—dystopia

**Type of work:** Novel

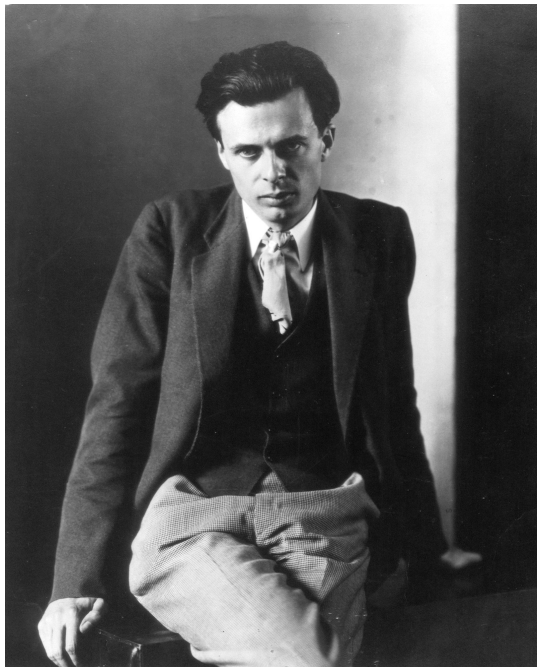
**Time of work:** Half a millennium in the future

**Location:** What are now the United Kingdom and the United States

**First published:** 1932

### THE STORY

In the totalitarian state of *Brave New World*, people are socially conditioned from conception; they are hatched from test tubes rather than born. Something, however, is wrong with Bernard Marx. Although he ought to be, in keeping with everyone else in this engineered society, an absolute conformist, he evinces certain quirks that his fellows find disturbing. They theorize that something must have gone wrong chemically during his incubation. Bernard dates Lenina Crowne, but he



Aldous Huxley. (Library of Congress)

wants her all to himself. This is against the mores of their society, which prescribes communal sexual relations and proscribes monogamous pairing. Lenina is outraged by his request for monogamy. Any contravention of the societal motto of “Community, Identity, Stability” is regarded as a heinous offense.

Happiness is not an individual quest; it is a daily, community guarantee. Through early conditioning, people are educated to be happy for what they are allotted, with allotments made according to class, which is determined at conception. A drug called soma provides a haven from any temporary unhappiness.

Lenina and Bernard, on vacation, visit an Indian reservation in New Mexico that is a mixture of living museum and circus. There they find John, who was reared on the reservation by his mother, Linda, a woman from Western Europe. John later is revealed to be the illegitimate son of the director of the Bloomsbury Hatchery. As someone outside mainstream society, he is able to find flaws in it. He has escaped the universal conditioning and has steeped himself in the works of a forbidden author, William Shakespeare. A collection of Shakespeare’s works is the only book he has ever read. He is imbued with the spirit of drama and finds the utter placidity of the present world an affront to the human spirit: riskless, monotonous, and amoral. When Lenina, who fancies him, disrobes in preparation for a guiltless sexual episode, he rejects her for her whorishness even though he is in love with her.

After his mother’s death from an overdose of soma, John attempts to subvert some workers who are about to receive their allocation of the drug. This causes a riot, which results in the banishment to Iceland of Bernard and Helmholtz Watson, another “flawed” person. Mustapha Mond, controller of Western Europe, refuses to extend this sentence to John, wanting to keep him nearby so that he can study him.

John retreats from the world into a lighthouse, where he flagellates himself for his sins. He is recorded doing so by a reporter with a sound camera, and this footage is made into a “feelie,” a film with sensations added, that receives widespread

attention. Tourists arrive in helicopters to gawk at this curious creature who cultivates his own pain. Among them is Lenina. John lashes her and, as she writhes on the ground, himself. This drives the onlookers into an orgiastic frenzy, which catches John up in its license. The next day, when he realizes to what degrading ends his self-mortification has been put, he hangs himself.

#### ANALYSIS

*Brave New World* sold more than fifteen thousand copies in its first year and has been in print ever since. It has joined the ranks of utopian/dystopian satires such as Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726) and George Orwell's *Animal Farm* (1945). The author himself has said that he wanted to warn against the conditioning of human beings by a manager class with the latest technology at its fingertips. Humanity could lose its soul through such a process, Aldous Huxley feared, trading in its unique qualities in exchange for security and for drugged and directed "happiness."

There cannot have been a year since its publication in which this novel has not been compared to the present condition of humanity and found to be a perspicacious guess at the shape of things to come. Huxley, for example, did not exactly predict television, but he foresaw other means of mass hypnosis.

An ingenious and persuasive writer, Huxley renders his analogue quite credibly, although

requirements of his genre necessitated more conflict than would be plausible in a state as well managed as the one the novel presents. The characters for the most part think too much like Huxley and too little like people who have been brainwashed into conformity.

Huxley's vision of sexuality in this futuristic society anticipates the repressive desublimation of a world in which the social obligation to be sexual defuses passion. This vision runs into trouble because the only choices permitted to his protagonist are a sulky celibacy and a foreordained and regulated promiscuity. The liberating powers of a passionate sexuality are left out of Huxley's equation even though, when he includes a few nonconformists, he allows that there can be exceptions in this totalitarian society. It becomes a question, then, of why some exceptions exist and not others; there is no reason for the lack of a female equivalent to Bernard or Helmholtz.

Huxley in essence equates happiness with barbarism and unhappiness with culture. The happiness, however, is shown to be false. Characters all evince signs of deep disturbance. True happiness must be what they are missing. One can ask why Huxley did not portray a more efficient society, one that was able to erase this distinction between the true and the false. It may be precisely this flaw in the novel that explains its continuing popularity.

—David Bromige

## THE BREAST

*David Alan Kepesh, a thirty-eight-year-old professor of literature, copes with his transformation into a human breast*

**Author:** Philip Roth (1933– )

**Genre:** Fantasy—magical realism

**Type of work:** Novella

**Time of work:** 1971–1972

**Locale:** New York City

**First published:** 1972

#### THE STORY

The narrator, David Kepesh, recounts the changes that occurred in his life in the preceding two years,

beginning with the peculiar sensations he felt in his penis. These sensations of increased sensitivity, accompanied by increased sexual desire, led to the change that took place between midnight and 4 a.m. on February 18, 1971. Kepesh became a six-foot, 155-pound human female breast. The novella chronicles Kepesh's responses to his condition, which vary from acceptance to a conviction that he has become mad.

The novella is divided into five sections. In the first, Kepesh describes his "symptoms" before the change from man to mammary. He details his sexual feelings for Claire, the twenty-five-year-old woman he has been seeing for three years. The

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