**Brave New World** by Aldous Huxley

**Huxley and England in 1932**

**Context**

When Huxley wrote *Brave New World* in 1932, America was in the process of becoming a dominant cultural and economic force. Henry Ford harnessed advances in technological and science to the mass production of cars on an unprecedented scale and America was the home of the mass media phenomenon, which included the jazz age. The novel is set in 2540 or 632 A.F. a future ‘after Ford’ where a totalitarian super power ‘The World State’ has replaced national identities. Americans, after the sufferings of WW1, were encouraged to live for the moment and purchased possessions like cars and white goods as status symbols. Huxley, visiting America, feared England would adopt crass consumerism to the detriment of humanist values perpetuated in canonical literature and the arts. Science and information threatened to subsume the function of literature as enduring sources of wisdom.

As an antidote to this loss of culture Huxley uses Shakespeare and canonical literature to underpin his ideological thesis. Even Controller Mond admits to owning and reading ‘pornographic’ literature; the bible and canonical texts including Shakespeare’s plays. The Savage quotes *Othello, The Tempest* and *Romeo and Juliet* extensively to convert his auditors to belief in passionate emotions instead of sensual gratification.

Where Ford’s pervasive influence shapes the destruction of individuality, the misapplication of Freud’s views on liberating the libido and combating sexual repression inform the rampant promiscuity of the World State. Huxley’s own patriarchal society is threatened by female sexuality freed from pre-war social taboos.

Huxley’s early ambivalent views of benevolent dictatorships, whereby a small number of cultural elite decide the lives and fate of the majority, changed after he wrote the novel and this partially explains his ambiguous characterisation of World Controller Mustafa Mond. However, *Brave New World* anticipates the rise of Fascism and the horrors of World War 2, including atrocities such as the Holocaust that resulted from Hitler’s pursuit of pure Aryan super-race, which in turn caused Huxley to add a new preface expressing reservations.

*Brave New World*, like Herbert’s *Dune*, reflects the respective composer’s concerns about dogma and religion. Herbert identifies the pursuit of a Messiah as an extension of our pursuit of a single resolution to human destiny and Huxley recognises humanity’s need to believe in an omniscient and omnipotent force: The Savage says ‘I want God, it is natural to believe in God’ and Mond hides a bible which he quotes without acknowledging the source. Ford assumes the function of God, Mond is the Messiah, the tops are broken off crosses replacing the Christian symbol and time is measured as A.F. not A.D. Religious experience is provided by ‘Community Sings’ and ‘Solidarity Services’. Huxley’s fears for his context are clear even as he rejects orthodox religions. Mond says ‘God is not compatible with machinery and scientific medicine and
universal happiness. You must make you choice. Our civilization has chosen machinery and medicine and happiness.’ (p.234)

Literary Context - *Brave New World* and Science Fiction

Is *Brave New World* Science Fiction? Early science fiction belonged to a small group of fans who devised, critiqued and developed their own criteria for successful science fiction. Contemporary critics dismissed Huxley’s work as highbrow and anti-science, some even objected to the focus on sexuality. One criticism was that Huxley, like Swift and Orwell, used the alien world principally to convey political satire. The extent to which their texts are Science fiction is the extent to which they are not literature.

*Brave New World*

Unlike Asimov and Heinlein, Huxley rejected science as a panacea for human ills just as he rejected religion and nineteenth century idealism. The first chapter in the novel describes the Hatcheries and scientists, like John Foster, as ambitious and pompous. Adjectives such as ‘corpse like’ and ‘frozen’ identify eugenics as anti-life; social stratification is as rigid as that in *Dune* and Mond’s defence of suppressing pure science and labour saving devices to maintain the balance of power is flawed. Huxley, like Herbert, Gibson and Clarke feared the abuse of science and technology. Human greed, ambition and lusts are considered the dangers.