

Book Report:

Aldous Huxley's: A Brave New World

Huxley's point of view in Brave New World is third person, omniscient (all-knowing). The narrator is not one of the characters and therefore has the ability to tell us what is going on within any of the characters' minds. This ability is particularly useful in showing us a cross section of this strange society of the future. We can be with the Director of Hatcheries and Conditioning in the Central London Conditioning and Hatchery Centre, with Lenina Crowne at the Westminster Abbey Cabaret, with Bernard Marx at the Fordson Community Singery. An extreme example of the technique would be in Chapter Three, when we hear a babble of unidentified voices--Lenina's, Fanny Crowne's, Mustapha Mond's--that at first sound chaotic but soon give us a vivid understanding of this brave new world.

The first three chapters present most of the important ideas or themes of the novel. The Director of Hatcheries and Conditioning explains that this Utopia breeds people to order, artificially fertilizing a mother's eggs to create babies that grow in bottles. They are not born, but decanted. Everyone belongs to one of five classes, from the Alphas, the most intelligent, to the Epsilons, morons bred to do the dirty jobs that nobody else wants to do. The lower classes are multiplied by a budding process that can create up to 96 identical clones and produce over 15,000 brothers and sisters from a single ovary.

All the babies are conditioned, physically and chemically in the bottle, and psychologically after birth, to make them happy citizens of the society with both a liking and an aptitude for the work they will do. One psychological conditioning technique is hypnopaedia, or teaching people while they sleep--not teaching facts or analysis, but planting suggestions that will make people behave in certain ways. The Director also makes plain that sex is a source of happiness, a game people play with anyone who pleases them.

The Controller, one of the ten men who run the world, explains some of the more profound principles on which the Utopia is based. One is that "history is bunk"; the society limits people's knowledge of the past so they will not be able to compare the present with anything that might make them want to change the present. Another principle is that people should have no emotions, particularly no painful emotions; blind happiness is necessary for stability. One of the things that guarantees happiness is a drug called soma, which calms you down and gets you high but never gives you a hangover. Another is the "feelies," movies that reach your sense of touch as well as your sight and hearing.

After Huxley presents these themes in the first three chapters, the story begins. Bernard Marx, an Alpha of the top class, is on the verge of falling in love with Lenina Crowne, a woman who works in the Embryo Room of the Hatchery. Lenina has been dating Henry Foster, a Hatchery scientist; her friend Fanny nags her because she hasn't seen any other man for four months. Lenina likes Bernard but doesn't fall in love with him. Falling in love is a sin in this world in which one has sex with everyone else, and she is a happy, conforming citizen of the Utopia.

Bernard is neither happy nor conforming. He's a bit odd; for one thing, he's small for an Alpha, in a world where every member of the same caste is alike. He likes to treasure his differences from his fellows, but he lacks the courage to fight for his right to be an individual. In contrast is his friend Helmholtz Watson, successful in sports, sex, and community activities, but openly dissatisfied because instead of writing something beautiful and powerful, his job is to turn out propaganda.

Bernard attends a solidarity service of the Fordian religion. It culminates in a sexual orgy, but he doesn't feel the true rapture experienced by the other 11 members of his group.

Bernard then takes Lenina to visit a Savage Reservation in North America. While signing his permit to go, the Director tells Bernard how he visited the same Reservation as a young man, taking a young woman from London who disappeared and was presumed dead. He then threatens Bernard with exile to Iceland because Bernard

is a nonconformist: he doesn't gobble up pleasure in his leisure time like an infant.

At the Reservation, Bernard and Lenina meet John, a handsome young Savage who, Bernard soon realizes, is the son of the Director. Clearly, the woman the Director had taken to the Reservation long ago had become pregnant as the result of an accident that the citizens of Utopia would consider obscene. John has a fantasy picture of the Utopia from his mother's tales and a knowledge of Shakespeare that he mistakes for a guide to reality.

Bernard gets permission from the Controller to bring John and Linda, his mother, back to London. The Director had called a public meeting to announce Bernard's exile, but by greeting the Director as lover and father, Linda and John turn him into an obscene joke. Bernard stays and becomes the center of attention of all London because he is, in effect, John's guardian, and everybody wants to meet the Savage. Linda goes into a permanent soma trance after her years of exile on the Reservation. John is taken to see all the attractions of new world society and doesn't like them. But he enjoys arguing with Helmholtz about them, and about Shakespeare.

Lenina has become popular because she is thought to be sleeping with the Savage. Everyone envies her and wants to know what it's like. But, in fact, while she wants to sleep with John, he refuses because he, too, has fallen in love with her--and he has taken from Shakespeare the old-fashioned idea that lovers should be pure. Not understanding this, she finally comes to his apartment and takes her clothes off. He throws her out, calling her a prostitute because he thinks she's immoral, even though he wants her desperately.

John then learns that his mother is dying. The hospital illustrates the Utopia's approach to death, which includes trying to completely eliminate grief and pain. When John goes to visit Linda he is devastated; his display of grief frightens children being taught that death is a pleasant and natural process. John grows so angry that he tries to bring the Utopia back to what he considers sanity and morality by disrupting the daily distribution of soma to lower-caste Delta workers. That leads to a riot; John, Bernard, and Helmholtz are arrested.

The three then confront the Controller, who explains more of the Utopia's principles. Their conversation reveals that the Utopia achieves its happiness by giving up science, art, religion, and other things that we prize in the real world. The Controller sends Bernard to Iceland, after all, and Helmholtz to the Falkland Islands. He keeps John in England, but John finds a place where he can lead a hermit's life, complete with suffering. His solitude is invaded by Utopians who want to see him suffer, as though it were a sideshow spectacle; when Lenina joins the mob, he kills himself.

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