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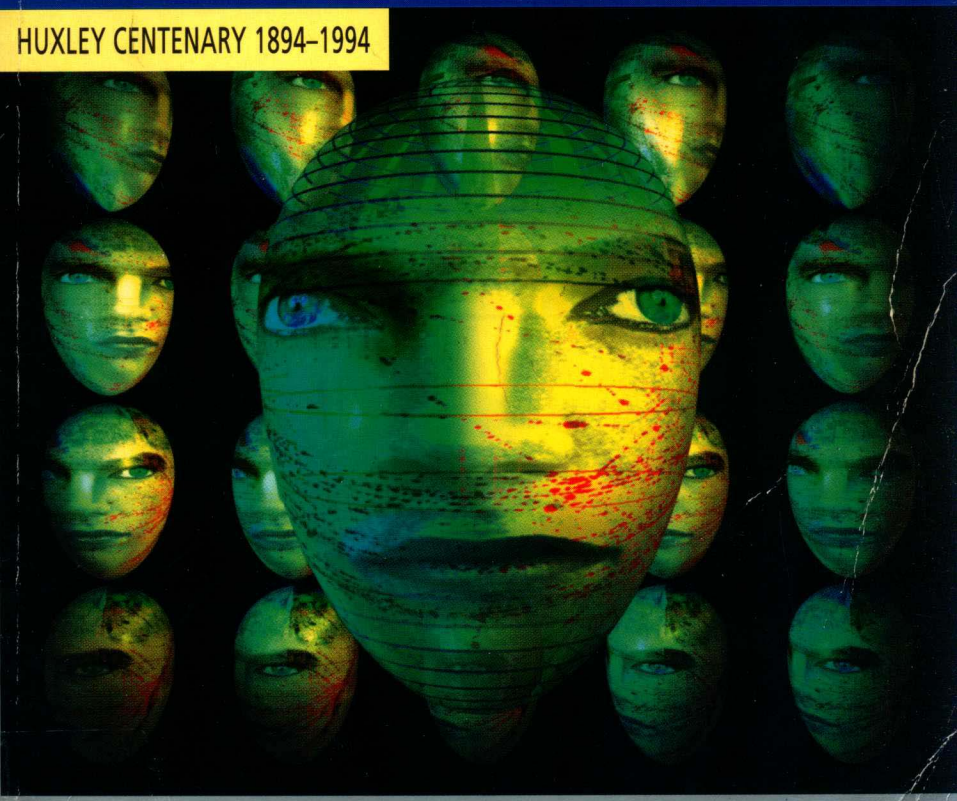
Aldous HUXLEY

HUXLEY CENTENARY 1894–1994



Brave New World

'Provoking, stimulating, shocking and dazzling.'
Observer

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ALDOUS HUXLEY

Brave New World

With an introduction by David Bradshaw

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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 in which Huxley wittily but ruthlessly passed judgement on the shortcomings of contemporary society. For most of the 1920s Huxley lived in Italy and an account of his experiences there can be found in *Along the Road* (1925).

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. The 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 such titles 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).

Huxley died in California on 22 November 1963.

By the same author

NOVELS

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

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The Human Situation
Moksha

FOR CHILDREN

The Crows of Pearblossom

INTRODUCTION

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 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 the World State are the inhabitants of the various Savage Reservations. Segregated by electrified fences from the Fordian hell which surounds 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 lionized 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 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 civilization. '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, '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' *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 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 crisis 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 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 civilization 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 Middlesborough 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 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. 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 Revisited* (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 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 have 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 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 un-programmed 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 become 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 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
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1993

ALDOUS HUXLEY (1894–1963)

On 26 July 1894, near Godalming in Surrey, Aldous Leonard Huxley was born into a family which had only recently become synonymous with the intellectual aristocracy. Huxley's grandfather, Thomas Henry Huxley, had earned notoriety as 'Darwin's bulldog' and fame as a populariser of science, just as his own probing and controversial works were destined to outrage and exhilarate readers and non-readers alike in the following century. Aldous Huxley's mother was a niece of the poet and essayist Matthew Arnold, and he was a nephew of the redoubtable Mrs Humphry Ward, doyenne of late-Victorian novelists. This inheritance, combining the scientific and the literary in a blend which was to become characteristic of his vision as a writer, was both a source of great pride and a burden to Huxley in his formative years. Much was expected of him.

Three traumatic events left their mark on the young Huxley. In 1908 his mother died of cancer, and this led to the effective break-up of the family home. Two years later, while a schoolboy at Eton, Huxley contracted an eye infection which made him almost completely blind for a time and severely impaired his vision for the rest of his life. The suicide of his brother Trevenen in August 1914 robbed Huxley of the person to whom he felt closest. Over twenty years later, in *Eyeless in Gaza* (1936), Huxley's treatment of the death of the main character's mother and his embodiment of 'Trev' in the novel as the vulnerable Brian Foxe give some indication of the indelible pain which these tragic occurrences left in their wake. To a considerable degree, they account for the darkness, pungency and cynicism which feature so prominently in Huxley's work throughout the inter-war period.

Within months of achieving a First in English Language and Literature at Balliol College, Oxford in 1916, Huxley

published *The Burning Wheel*. Huxley's first collection of verse, and the three which followed it, *Jonah* (1917), *The Defeat of Youth* (1918) and *Leda* (1920), reveal his indebtedness to French symbolism and *fin de siècle* aestheticism. Also discernible, however, beneath the poetry's triste and ironic patina, is a concern with the inward world of the spirit which anticipates Huxley's later absorption in mysticism. These volumes of poetry were the first of over fifty separate works of fiction, drama, verse, criticism, biography, travel and speculative writing which Huxley was to produce during the course of his life.

Unfit for military service, Huxley worked as a farm labourer at Lady Ottoline Morrell's Garsington Manor after he left Oxford. Here he met not only D.H. Lawrence, Bertrand Russell, Clive Bell, Mark Gertler and other Bloomsbury figures, but also a Belgian refugee, Maria Nys, whom he married in 1919. By then Huxley was working for the *Athenaeum* magazine under the adroit editorship of Middleton Murry. Soon after he became the first British editor of *House and Garden*, worked for *Vogue* and contributed musical criticism to the *Weekly Westminster Gazette* in the early 1920s.

Limbo (1920), a collection of short stories, preceded the appearance of *Crome Yellow* in 1921, the novel with which Huxley first made his name as a writer. Inspired by, among others, Thomas Love Peacock, Norman Douglas and Anatole France, Huxley's first novel incorporated many incidents from his sojourn at Garsington as well as mischevious portraits of its chatelaine and his fellow guests. More blatantly still, *Crome Yellow* is an iconoclastic tilt at the Victorian and Edwardian mores which had resulted in the First World War and its terrible aftermath. For all its comic bravura, which won acclaim from writers such as Scott Fitzgerald and Max Beerbohm, *Crome Yellow* may be read, along with Lytton Strachey's *Eminent Victorians* (1918) and Huxley's second novel *Antic Hay* (1923), as an expression of the pervasive mood of disenchantment in the early 1920s. Huxley told his father that *Antic Hay* was 'written by a member of what I may call the war-generation for others of his kind'. He went on to say that it was