



## RESTRICCIÓN A LA LIBERTAD INDIVIDUAL EN *UN MUNDO FELIZ*

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### Resumen

El objetivo de este trabajo es mostrar como la libertad individual ha sido restringida en la novela de Aldous Huxley, *Un mundo feliz*. Para hacer esto hemos seguido el enfoque crítico basado en la respuesta de lector. El texto ha sido seguido en forma secuencial, observando si se cumplen las expectativas, si se modifican o son satisfechas, y como se recapitula la evidencia. La inevitable influencia de causas varias de estabilidad social, basada en adelantos técnicos y científicos, hacen posible la anulación de la individualidad y la restricción a la libertad de la gente. En el nuevo mundo civilizado, se producen bebés fuera del útero materno, se usan métodos de condicionamiento de Pavlov para controlar el comportamiento humano y disuadir cualquier tipo de actitud que pudiera desestabilizar la sociedad, se usa además "*hypnopaedia*", manipulación genética y biológica y distribución libre de soma para controlar a la gente. No hay pensamiento, sentimientos, creatividad artística. Las expectativas y observaciones de la novela han surgido en parte del texto y en parte del repertorio de lector, de su experiencia lectora y de su conocimiento social y cultural.

Palabras clave: restricciones-libertad individual-condicionamiento-estabilidad

### Abstract

The aim of this paper is to show how individual freedom is restricted in Aldous Huxley's novel, *Brave New World*. In order to do this, we follow the reader-response criticism. The text is followed sequentially, observing the expectations being aroused, how they are satisfied or modified, and how the evidence is recapitulated. The unavoidable influence of various sources of social stability, based on scientific and technological improvements, make it likeable the nullification of individuality and restriction to freedom upon people. In the new civilized world babies are produced outside the mother's womb, Pavlov's conditioning is used to control human behaviour and to discourage attitudes that might destabilize society. Hypnopaedia, manipulation of genetics and human biology and free distribution of soma are used to control people. There is no thinking, feelings, artistic creativity. The expectations and observations on the novel have aroused partly from the text and partly from the reader's repertoire—that is, the reader's reading experience plus his or her social and cultural knowledge.



Key words: restrictions-individual freedom-conditioning-stability

The 20<sup>th</sup> century in Great Britain really began before the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century with Queen Victoria's Jubilee in 1887 that was felt to represent the end of an era. Moreover, in the face of rapid economic and social changes radical doubts about the stability of the existing order were expressed. By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the pre-industrial economy and way of life had almost disappeared. The sense of local community was being lost: a greater anonymity of the individual in the urban context was a result; society became more fragmented and individual identities more fluid. Liberal beliefs in the gradual transition to a better world began to be questioned, while the mass destruction of the World War I led many towards more extreme affiliations, and both fascism and Marxism held attractions for many intellectuals as well as workers.

A strong social ethic began increasingly to influence the political character of the country and its institutions. The aristocracy and upper classes exerted less influence and the state began to organise itself more in the interests of majority community needs and Institutions became more democratic.

Culturally too, the increasing access to literacy and formal education, led to profound changes in the reading public. The Education Act of 1870 made elementary education compulsory for everyone between 5 and 13. This caused a rapid expansion of a largely unsophisticated literary public, the rise of popular press, and the mass production of popular literature for a semi-literate "*low-brow*" readership.

The 20<sup>th</sup> century has gradually seen more of this broadening of artistic trends extending into the other cultural forms: radio, television, cinema and popular music. Some writers reacted to this situation by concentrating on a narrow, highly educated audience, thus, the avant-garde era in writing became popular. A tension in writing between the rational and the esoteric, the popular and the specialised, the commercial and the avant-garde, became major features of the new century.

Isolation and alienation, together with experimental forms of expression, came to characterize serious literature, while cinematic techniques came to dominate other forms



of cultural expression. To some writers the alienation they felt and depicted was an exploration of the individual sensibility in a world which it was felt was becoming ever more standardized and uniform, an age of the masses.

Modernism is one of the key elements during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Among its main influences were the works of Sigmund Freud. Modernism is essentially post-Darwinian: it is a search to explain mankind's place in the modern world, where religion, social stability and ethics are all called into question.

Aldous Huxley managed to transpose his main concern about the future in the central issue of his novel: the way in which those in power might allow science and technology to be applied to our daily lives. Consequently, the aim of this work is to analyse and highlight the nullification of individuality and restriction to freedom upon civilized people in *Brave New World* caused by the influence of various sources of social stability based on scientific and technological improvements.

Huxley's *Brave New World* provides a prophecy of a perfect and completely organised society based upon a scientific caste system, the abolition of free will by methodical conditioning, the servitude made acceptable by regular doses of chemically induced happiness, the orthodoxies drummed in by nightly courses of sleep-teaching – all elements that, according to Huxley were coming all right, but not in his time.

In this novel, Huxley manages to exploit the anxieties of his bourgeois audience about both Soviet Communism and Fordist American capitalism. He taps into, and then feeds, our revulsion at Pavlovian-style behavioural conditioning and eugenics. Worse, it is suggested that the price of universal happiness will be the sacrifice of the most sacred values and institutions of our culture: motherhood, home, family, freedom and love. The exchange yields a false happiness that is unworthy of its name. Its unpleasant evocation arouses our unease and distaste. Happiness is achieved in the consumption of mass-produced goods and sports such as Obstacle Golf and Centrifugal Bumble-puppy, promiscuous sex, the "feelies", and most famously of all, a perfect pleasure-drug known as soma.

The leaders of the World State have created a form of utopian society: they have attempted to engineer a perfect world where everyone is happy and there is no financial or social insecurity. The novel is set six hundred years in the future: A.F.632. Year zero in the



history of the Brave New World is 1908, the year in which Henry Ford launched the Model-T mass produced car. So important is mass production that the name Ford has replaced God in the Brave New World vocabulary, and the same system of manufacture is applied not just to consumer goods but to “the product of human beings”. (Southwick, 1991: vii-viii) Humans used to be viviparous in the old times but in the new civilized world babies are produced outside the mother’s womb by making use of several processes and techniques (Ectogenesis). Eugenics and dysgenics were practised systematically. The novel begins at the Central London Hatchery and Conditioning Centre for Western Europe, a production factory for human beings. A group of students is being given a tour of the facilities by the Director who introduces them to the various machines and techniques used to promote the production and conditioning of embryos. In one set of bottles biologically superior ova, fertilized by biologically superior sperm were given the best pre-natal treatment and were finally decanted as Betas, Alphas and even Alphas Pluses. In another, much numerous set of bottles, biologically inferior sperm, were subjected to the Bokanovsky Process (ninety-six identical twins out of a single egg) and treated pre-natally with alcohol and other protein poisons. Predestinations then decide the future function of each embryo within the society, essentially assigning a future job to each human.

Society contains a five-tired caste system which ranks Alphas and Betas on the top. Only the Alphas and Betas come from single eggs which are not budded and hence have no twins. All the non-Alpha and Beta embryos are conditioned for their future status in society by dividing them into Gammas, Deltas and finally into Epsilons who are described as having little to no intelligence.

The students continue their tour of the Central London Hatchery and Conditioning Centre and they observe what is called Neo-Pavlovian Conditioning being employed to train a group of Delta infants. Their behaviour is modified through the use of electric shocks and sirens whenever the babies touch roses or books. This is done in order to discourage behaviour that might destabilize society, such as allowing Deltas to read books or acquire knowledge. Pavlovian conditioning is based on research by Pavlov who showed that animals can be trained to do an action through the use of punishment and reward. This concept is expanded to humans by Huxley in order to condition lower caste babies. The surprising comment by the director, “what man has joined, nature is powerless to put



asunder" (Southwick, 1991: 16), reveals the extent of the influence of conditioning upon behaviour.

The students also view a group of sleeping children who are exposed to hypnopaedia (learning while sleeping) used to teach moral values. Phrases are read to the babies while they sleep then they are repeated several thousand times. In this case, infant Betas listen to a tape played a hundred of times which indoctrinates them to believe they are superior to Gammas, Deltas and Epsilons but not as clever as Alphas. The use of hypnopaedia strengthens the conditioning and indicates the subversive nature of the State whose goal is to ensure social stability. Therefore, Huxley is showing the readers that propaganda starts at birth and can be used even when we are unaware of it, as in the case of sleeping. The earliest attempts at sleep-teaching, the Director tells his audience, have been misguided and therefore unsuccessful. Educators have tried to give intellectual training to their slumbering pupils. But intellectual activity is incompatible with sleep. Hypnopaedia became successful only when it was used for moral training-in other words, for the conditioning of behaviour through verbal suggestion at a time of lowered psychological resistance.

Later the student's tour is led outside where they watch some children playing a game of Centrifugal Bumble-puppy which is elaborate and requires complex machinery. Students are told that the heavy reliance on machinery is done in order to increase consumption of material goods and thus boost the economy. Meanwhile, young children are encouraged to play sexual and erotic games: this is evident when a boy is taken to see a psychologist because he refused to play with a girl.

These instances reveal two other important philosophical issues within the novel: the role of consumption and the interplay between sexuality and emotions in the perfect and stable society.

Consumption is viewed as highly beneficial to society since the more consumption means the more goods will have to be made, which in turn will increase the number of jobs. Examples of how consumption is increased include: hypnopaedia phrases telling people to throw away old clothes and buy new, indoctrinating Deltas to enjoy country sports so they will use the state transportation system to exit the city, and complex machinery required for any sort of sport or game.



On the other hand, the interplay between sexuality and emotions is rather complex. The Utopian society is based on promiscuity fostered by hypnopaedic phrases such as “everyone belongs to everyone else...” (Southwick, 1991: 100) and on baby factories whose aim is eradicating emotions and replacing them with pure sexual desire. Emotions are therefore directed by the State for the sake of social control.

In the Utopian world there is an effective control against diseases and the consequent prolongation of youth. It is through the successful manipulation of genetics and human biology that science and technology have provided with methods and techniques to control diseases and to preserve the body from becoming old or sick. As it has already been pointed to, embryos, for instance, are pre-natally treated with alcohol and with other substances needed to avoid particular maladies. Moreover, they have healthy lives: people neither smoke, nor drink, nor sniff, nor give themselves injections. Eventually, death is not feared but accepted and even found to be needed. In addition to this, the new civilized world is pleasant and perfectly clean which makes it sharply contrast with the Savage Reservation; “cleanliness is next to fornicity” (Southwick, 1991: 90) is one of the phrases that clearly illustrates this fact. As a result, not only excellent health is guaranteed in the civilized world but also continuous beauty.

Due to this, the dirty and smelly village in Mexico is extremely disgusting for Lenina and Bernard who are accustomed to the cleanliness and beauty of their place. Furthermore, they are disgusted by the unpleasant appearance of Linda, John’s mother, who is a rather fat middle-aged woman with shattered and ugly teeth. In other words, she no longer looks like a “pneumatic” or beautiful civilized woman as in her old times. This is particularly evident when Linda and her son are introduced to the Director of the Central London Hatchery and Conditioning Centre in front of a group of students who disgusted by Linda’s appearance, cruelly laugh at her.

At the same time, a similar reaction is exhibited at the hospital by a group of boys when they see Linda. John Savage goes to Park Lane Hospital for the Dying to see his mother who is dying of soma’s overdose. He encounters the head nurse who is astonished that anyone could be interested in the dying or dead; since society has abandoned individuality, dying is considered to be highly beneficial. John finds his mother in an unconscious state and tries to wake her up. Meanwhile, the head nurse leads an entire



Bokanovsky group into the room for their death conditioning. The boys act as if they are in a game room, and the nurse encourages them to have fun; the idea of this exercise is that if death and fun are always intermingled then people will lose their natural fear of dying. When the boys notice Linda they make fun of her ugliness and fatness. Consequently, John angrily picks one of the boys and tosses him away from her because his conception of death is different: he holds that each individual represents a whole unto itself and as such they should be mourned when they pass away. Conversely, children are learning to view death in the opposite way: in a societal context where the individual has no meaning. Thus death is merely something that happens and since it does not harm society, it should not be feared.

Some drugs dull stupefy and sedate while others sharpen, animate and intensify. In *Brave New World* whenever anyone felt depressed he would swallow a tablet or two of a chemical compound called Soma which acts not only as a narcotic to control the masses, but also as a means to for individuals to avoid emotional conflict. Soma has no ill-side effects. In small doses it brings a sense of bliss, in larger doses, it makes people see visions or sink into a refreshing sleep, and all at no physiological or mental cost. For instance, Bernard is in love of Lenina so he is experiencing emotions, while she suppresses them all before they come to the surface. She uses soma to avoid situations which would normally incur anger or boredom. This conflict is interesting because Bernard constantly gets mad about at Lenina in spite of her love for her. This man is desperate to have his love returned and in a society devoid of commitment and monogamy, the only way for him to get Lenina to fall in love with him is to force her to experience her emotions, thus to overcome her conditioning and to become emotional. Each character's use of soma revolves around inhibiting their emotions. Therefore, Bernard only takes soma when he is forced into having sex with Lenina on their first date; it is his emotional revulsion against having sex so soon. She uses soma much more frequently than Bernard but for the same reason: she wishes to suppress her emotions.

The effect of taking soma can also be observed in some instances of Bernard and Lenina's visit to the Savage Reservation. Bernard Marx, for example, takes four tablets of soma to pass away a long plane journey to the Reservation in New Mexico. When they arrive at the Reservation, Lenina swallows half a gramme of soma when she begins to get





tired of the Warden's lecture, "...with the result that she could now sit, serenely not listening, thinking of nothing at all..."(Southwick, 1991: 83). To make things worse, both of them are forced to see the unpleasant dirty village consciously rather than through the effects of the narcotic for they forgot their soma. This response suggests that the user's sensibilities are numbed rather than heightened. In *Brave New World*, people resort to soma when they feel depressed, angry or have negative or spoiling thoughts. They take it because their lives, like society itself, are empty of spirituality or higher meaning. Soma keeps the population comfortable with their fate. At the same time, it also shows physiological tolerance. But taken in excess, soma acts as a respiratory depressant, for example in Linda who eventually dies of an overdose.

The Soma habit was not a private vice, it was a political institution, and it was the very essence of the life, liberty and pursuit of happiness guaranteed by the State. Yet this drug only brought instant gratification. The systematic drugging of individuals for the benefit of the State was a main plank in the policy of the World Controllers. The daily Soma ration was an insurance against personal maladjustments, social unrest and the spread of subversive ideas.

It is evident that the only way to create a permanently stable society is for a totalitarian regime, to have absolute power. The regime must then ensure that people are happy all the time, be able to control the behaviour of each individual, and ensure that independent thinkers are forbidden from disturbing the social fabric. Huxley creates a society in which individual creativity is frowned upon and in which only those who conform are welcome. The social motto "Community, Identity, Stability" frames this social structure. Thus Huxley generates "community" by dividing the population into segments, where the Alphas serve as intellectual superiors and Epsilons function as pure menial labour. Huxley shows how "identity" is established in the Conditioning Centre through the production and subsequent selection of embryos into each of five groups. "Stability" is ensured through the limitations placed on the intelligence of each group by manipulating human biology and genetics.

I strongly believe that the main sources of social stability based on scientific and technological improvements in *Brave New World* are clearly revealed. Therefore, people are not only created, but also conditioned, indoctrinated and even brainwashed in their sleep to guarantee they will be happy members of society, through the efficient use of





science and technology. There is, however, no depth of feeling, no ferment of ideas, and no artistic creativity. Individuality is suppressed while intellectual excitement and discovery have been abolished. Its inhabitants are healthy laboratory-grown clones, bottled and standardised from the hatchery. Consequently, the utopians are never educated to prize thinking for themselves.

The twin goals of happiness and stability - both social and personal - are not just prized but effectively *equated*. Therefore, I perceive *Brave New World* as a pessimistic warning of the dangers of runaway science and technology. Scientific progress, however, was apparently frozen with the advent of a world state. Thus ironically it is not perverse to interpret *Brave New World* as a warning of what could happen if scientific inquiry is suppressed.

*Brave New World* comes across as a stagnant civilisation that has got immovably stuck in a severely sub-optimal state. Its inhabitants are too contented living in their rut to extricate themselves and progress to higher things such as exploiting their individual freedom. Nevertheless, "...without freedom human beings cannot become fully human and that freedom is therefore supremely valuable.(...) It is our duty to do whatever we can to resist them." (Huxley, 1983: 189)

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