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Full Length Research Paper

Enslavement and freedom in Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*

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This research paper focuses on the subject of enslavement and freedom in Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*. It compares between two contrasting worlds: the primitive world, where John the Savage lives and the utopian world, where Bernard Marx, Helmholtz Watson, and their fellow-citizens inhabit. The primitive world, in this connection, symbolizes freedom, whereas the utopian world represents enslavement. The story of the novel, Brave New World revolves round these three central figures: John the Savage, Bernard Marx and Helmholtz Watson. The novel examines how the characters of the World State are enslaved and very few of them attempt to rebel against the principles of the World State.

Key words: Enslavement, freedom, primitive world, the savage.

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this research paper is to investigate enslavement and freedom in Aldous Huxley's B*rave New World*. Although Huxley is a famous writer in the Western World, his works are sadly neglected in Egypt (the author's country) in particular and in the Arab World in general. The second reason for approaching this study is that most studies discussed Huxley as a science fiction writer and very few of them handled him as a writer seeking freedom.

Aldous Huxley (1894 to 1963) is considered as one of the best science fiction writers during the twentieth century. He made his fame as a novelist with *Brave New World* (1932). He was described by T. S. Eliot as "one of the four chief contemporary English novelists" and also has been acclaimed as "a brilliant and promising novelist" (Enroth, 1960: 123). He contributed immensely to the genre of science fiction. From his early childhood, he had great interest in the field of science and technology. This affected his life as a writer, most of his writings deal with scientific issues.

Huxley's writings fall into three periods: Period one includes *Crome Yellow, Antic Hay* and *Those Barren Leaves*; the second consists of *Point Counter Point and Brave New World*; and the third comprises *Eyeless in Gaza, After Many a Summer Dies the Swan, Time Must Have a Stop, Ape and Essence*, and *The Genius and the Goddess*. Through reading and evaluating Huxley's works, one can say that the second period, which includes *Brave New World*, is the best one. (Enroth, 1960: 123). *Brave New World* has marked Huxley's genius and good ability of producing such scientific novels. It "has an assured place as a popular classic" (Drabble, 1985: 487). It has been claimed that *Brave New World* is "one of the two most widely discussed English fantasies of this century.

The other is…Orwell's *1984*" (Schmerl, 1962: 328). *Brave*

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New World provides" artificial pleasures which dim the mind". It also draws "an extremely pessimistic picture of humanity's future" (Varricchio, 1999: 98). The novel "depicts a scientifically perfect society based on a caste system in which human beings are 'conditioned' to occupy a place on a social scale" (Carter and McRae, 1997: 433).

Title

The title of the novel, *Brave New World*, is taken from Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. The words of brave new world were repeated by Miranda in *The Tempest* as well as John the Savage in Huxley's *Brave New World*. (Grushow, 1962: 42)

Setting

From the very beginning, Huxley established his setting. He announced the time and the place of the story. *Brave New World* is mainly set in Central London in the year 632 AF (After Ford); London, the imaginary world, is one of the ten world zones. The events of the story alternate between London and the Reservation. London represents civilization, whereas the Reservation represents the primitive world.

Plot

The question of enslavement and freedom is a significant theme in *Brave New World*. Most characters of the World State are enslaved. Only two of them could rebel against the codes of the society, in which they lived. These rebellious characters are Bernard Marx and Helmholtz Watson. Bernard is the first individual to rebel against the World State و attempting to challenge the principles of his society. He also urges his friends to revolt against the society. Among his friends is his girlfriend, Lenina. Bernard's rebellion can be shown in his talk with Lenina:

How can I ? …. No, the real problem is: How is it that I can't, or rather – because, after all, I know quite well why I can't – what would it be like if I could if I were free – not enslaved by my conditioning …. Don't you wish you were free Lenina?

I don't know what you mean. I am free. Free to have the most wonderful time. Everybody is happy nowadays.
But wouldn't you like to be free to be happy in some other way, Lenina? In your own way, for example; not in everybody else's way. (Huxley, 1932: 78-79)

Bernard wants Lenina to be happy in her own way, not in the way of her society. For realizing this, he tries to persuade her to have a child. He explains for her that having a child is amazing:

"What a wonderfully intimate relationship …. And what an intensity of feeling it must generate! I often think one may have missed something in not having had a mother. And perhaps you've missed something in not being a mother, Lenina. Imagine yourself sitting there with a little baby of your own … "(Huxley, 1932: 96). It is oddly enough that getting married and having a child are not allowed in this dystopian world; they are against the stability of the World State; they are also signs of freedom which is forbidden in this new world.

Helmholtz Watson is another character who revolted against the rules of the World State. Helmholts is highly admired by Aldous Huxley. This sense of admiration springs from Helmholtz's intelligence. Helmholtz, as previously mentioned, is one of the very few characters who rebelled against the arbitrary state. He expresses his rebellion through poetry which is against the Brave New World. He recites:

Yesterday's committee,

Sticks, but a broken drum,

Midnight in the city,

Flutes in a vacuum,

Shut lips, sleeping faces,

Every stopped machine,

The dumb and littered places

Where crowds have been –

All silence rejoice,

Weep (loudly or low),

Speak – but with the voice

Of whom, I do not know.

Absence, say, of Susan's,

Absence of Egeria's

Arms and respective bosoms,

Lips and, ah, posteriors,
Slowly from a presence;

Whose? And I ask, of what

So absurd an essence,

That something, which is not,

Nevertheless should populate

Empty night more solidly

Than that with which we copulate,

Why should it seem so squalidly? (Huxley, 157-158)

Accordingly, Helmholtz now feels free:

"I feel … as though I were just beginning to have something to write about. As though I were beginning to be able to use that power I feel I've got inside me – that extra, latent power. Something seems to be coming to me" (Huxley, 158-159).

In this strange world, there is no space for freedom; all the people's actions are guided and controlled. Brave New World is a community without freedom. Freedom, in fact, has been sacrificed for happiness and stability. In contrast to this new world, comes John the Savage who is considered as the protagonist of the novel. John represents the primitive world. It can be safely said that John "is the most admirable character in the book, the one with whom we can most closely identify …. The great challenge comes when he enters civilization" (Grushow, 1962: 45). John's message is to free humanity, namely the citizens of the World State:

"I come to bring you freedom" (Huxley, 186).

In fact, John is not satisfied with the so-called utopian citizens. He even despises their self-satisfaction:

"Don't you want to be free and men? Don't you even understand what manhood and freedom are" (Huxley, 187).

He acknowledges that his mother, who was once a utopian citizen, died as a slave. At this point, he says:

"Linda [john's mother] had been a slave, Linda had died; others should live in freedom, and the world made beautiful" (Huxley, 185). John rejects Mostapha Mond's talk, one of the World State's controllers centered in London, when he says:

The world's stable now. People are happy; they get what they want, and they never want what they can't get. They're well off; they're safe; they're never ill; they're never afraid of death; they're blissfully ignorant of passion and old age; they're plagued with no mothers or fathers; they've got no wives, or children, or lovers to feel strongly about; they're so conditioned that they practically can't help behaving as they ought to behave. And if anything should go wrong, there's soma. (Huxley, 193 - 194)

John silently and scornfully replies:

"You seem to have paid a fairly high price for your happiness" (Huxley, 203). According to John, man seeks his happiness and stability at the expense of his freedom. Like H. G. Wells in his famous novel The Time Machine, Huxley attacks human self-satisfaction. The citizens of the World State have become very satisfied with their own life; they are not ready to free themselves from slavery imposed upon them by Mostapha Mond.

In fact, freedom is not found in this totalitarian state. People's happiness is controlled by their masters. Strangely, they have no right to be unhappy. This can be proved in the words of the Savage: "Not to mention the right to grow old and ugly and impotent; the right to have syphilis and cancer; the right to have too little to eat; the right to be lousy; the right to live in constant apprehension of what may happen tomorrow; the right to catch typhoid; the right to be tortured by unspeakable pains of every kind" (Huxley, 212).

As a matter of fact, "Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* is impressive in its bold insights into a frighteningly mechanized, regimented world". According to Ward:

"Man was no longer free, but manipulated according to society's master plan" (Ward, 1960: 178). In *Brave New World*, Huxley compares two contrasting worlds: materialistic world, in which there is no freedom; and the other is the primitive world, in which people enjoy their individual freedom:

In *Brave New World*, Huxley shows that any society that has set happiness and material well-being as its goals must, for the sake of stability, deliberately cultivate mediocrity and perpetual adolescence in all but a tiny portion of its numbers. If, on the other hand, it wants to make its members fully human, individual, and independent, it must abandon the economic, political, and social structures that impose conformity – in a word, it must revert to primitivism, with all of the attendant disease, intolerance, and ignorance. (Enroth, 1960: 130)

The world of *Brave New World* is extremely totalitarian. The world government totally controls the whole world. The World State is under the supervision of only ten controllers who dominate everything in the state, such as work, life, love, happiness, and the right to have children. In this strange world, children are not born and raised by natural parents. They are conditioned and decanted in bottles and forced to do the roles imposed upon them by the World State. In this strange society, there is no space for love or marriage:

Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*… is a satirical attack on the utopia of social reformers in which misery and instability have been abolished by a supreme, benevolent state, at the expense of individual freedom of action and thought" (Coleman, 1967: 6). Huxley claims that the World

State “aim[s] at the destruction of man as a human being, and seeks to replace him with a monster hatched and conditioned by a machine, indoctrinated in the cradle, and without any inclination to be anything other than a cog in the machine of the state” (Coleman, 1967: 7).

In Huxley’s World State, “there are no social, political, or religious questions, because they have all been solved by the government” (Coleman, 1967: 8). In fact, the people of Brave NewWorld have no souls; they have lost feeling. This can be described in Lawrence’s poem:

When men are made in bottles
and emerge as squeaky globules with no bodies to speak of,

and therefore nothing to have feelings with,

they will still squeak intensely about their feelings

and be prepared to kill you if you say you’ve got none. (Qtd. In Firchow, 1976: 271)

The novel criticizes the society of the World State:

The society of A. F. 632 is “perfectly” terrifying to the creative individual who wishes to test the gates of heaven and hell, and who seeks to find doors of perceptions not conveniently opened for perverse purposes by the state. When pleasure and escape become unavoidable goals. Huxley reasons, the individual lives in a nightmarish ideal society that cannot allow him the right to be unhappy. (Matter, 1975: 148)

Accordingly, “*Brave New World* shows that the greatest heights are achieved only by those willing to suffer at times”. Thus, “these inhabitants have no options, no free will, no chance to make a difference; only the opportunity to be another happy cog in a vast machine designed and run by the government” (Barr, 2010: 856).

Huxley proceeds to attack the World State; he “enforces in us disgust toward the future society largely through constant reference to our own society. We find the World State intolerable largely because we see in it perversions of our most cherished ideas and institutions” (Grushow, 1962: 42).

Now, we can safely say that lack of freedom results in the death of individuality. People of this ugly new world lose individuality. In fact, the idea of individuality is highly discussed in *Brave New World*. In much of his works, “Huxley pays so many respectful compliments to the dignity of the individual and to the truly free society that one is disarmed for what is to come”

(Ward, 1960: 178). Huxley believes that there are some factors which help destroy man. These factors are: “Society’s inherent weaknesses, over-organization, mass propagandization, [and] mass mind-maneuvering”. These factors are described as “the enslavers of man”. Huxley asserts that these destroy his individuality, his unique mentality, and his freedom” (Ward, 1960: 179)

As a result, people of *Brave New World* have feelings of loss. In this new world, there is no time for mourning or sadness. People seek only their physical pleasures. When one feels angry or tired in this new world, he resorts to soma as a means of relief and escape. For example, Bernard takes four tablets of soma.

In fact, the citizens of the World State are amoral; they do not care about each other. Their minds and souls are controlled by machines. According to Huxley, the use of technology leads to the enslavement of man. The novel, in this connection, criticizes modernism embodied in technology. It “articulates deep anxiety about the drift of modern civilization”. In this novel, “man’s weakness and infirmities are exposed” (Rajimwale, 2006: 452).

In Brave New World, “Huxley foresaw the development and dangerous abuses of technology by government in its perpetual search for ways in which to control its subjects. He “also understood the power of technology to not only enable government to control the populace, but also as a way to control the human mind” (Barr, 2010: 849). In this new world, “human beings are limited in both mental and physical abilities to meet the needs of the government and society at large, not their own” (Barr, 850). Citizens of Brave New World live in luxury. They “put in a few hours of non-taxing work and then immerse themselves in the high-tech entertainment of movies and TV, sports, and drugs” (Seabury, 1995: 184).

However, in this so-called utopian world, we have a character like Bernard rebels against this world; he wants to have sex with Lenina instead of soma: “Exceptions certainly present themselves even in Huxley’s utopian dystopia, as when a major character, Bernard Marx, indicates a preference for a thoughtful relationship with a female rather than soma-laden sex” (Barr, 2010: 850). In this novel, Huxley predicts “the development of advertising and propaganda as weapons to suppress freedom, as well as social destiny control by genetic means” (Firchow, 1975: 308). In fact, Huxley “reject[s] the blind technological domination of human society, and find[s] a solution to it through a primitive way of life” (Hadomi, 117).

Since the world of *Brave New World* enhances the role of technology and neglects the value of individuality, it surely ignores the value of art in man’s life. Thus, the world of *Brave New World* pays no interest in art, literature, or history because these things open man’s mind to the question of freedom which is, according to the World State, against the stability of society:

The dystopian world of *BNW* condemns history and

cultural heritage, memory, art, and any kind of emotional expression of inner life, whether individual or collective. This fact is satirically depicted in BNW by the function of the Shakespearian references used explicitly or implicitly in the text. Whether they subtly or grossly reveal the raw archaic life of the Reservation or the automated reality of the New World, the effect of this disjunction and distortion is strongly satirical. (Hadomi, 1991: 116-117)

As a matter of fact, "in BNW, there is no need for spiritual activity, scientific curiosity, artistic creativity, or exploration of cultural heritage. These are replaced by the consumption of Soma Pills, sex-hormone chewing gum, and escapist, sensuous "Feelies"" (Hadomi, 1991: 113)

The idea of inequality can be noticed in this novel. "… inequality has not only been recognized as biological and psychological fact, it has been made into one of the World State's cardinal principles. Intelligent people do not labor in the factories and morons have nothing to say about the government". Finally, the novel tragically "closes … with an image of universal death" (Schmerl, 1962: 331), in which john commits suicide. John's suicide is, indeed, a symbol of freedom and a reaction against this enslaving new world.

CONCLUSION

Brave New World showed that Aldous Huxley is a writer with a message, and the message is to warn us against self-satisfaction. In *Brave New World*, Huxley confirmed that "if man became completely happy and society completely efficient, he would cease to be human and it would become intolerable" (Burgess, 1974: 220). Through the characters of John the Savage, Bernard Marx and Helmholtz Watson, *Brave New World* focused on the question of enslavement and freedom. The novel depicted that happiness and sensual pleasures of the World State are the sole aims for utopian citizens. Brave New World proved that the inhabitants of the World State are selfish and immoral; they only seek their worldly pleasures. The novel also discussed the notion of individuality. In addition, it exposed modern civilization. Furthermore, Death of spiritual activity was cleverly portrayed in the novel.

In this novel, very few utopian characters, namely Bernard Marx and Helmholtz could rebel against the codes of the World State, seeking their own freedom. *Brave New World* predicted the trivial mentality of our future people. In spite of the tragic image drawn by Aldous Huxley in this novel, we saw glimpses of hope.

This was manifested through the characters of Bernard Marx and Helmholtz; both of them longed for freedom.

Conflict of interests

The author has not declared any conflict of interests.

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