Brave New World

Blind Perception of the Early 20th Century

Du Sköna Nya Värld
Blind Uppfattning under det Tidiga 1900-talet

Sebastian Kylin
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Abstract

Huxley’s *Brave New World* portrays a futuristic hyperbole of mankind’s future as a result of technological advancements. From a New Historical perspective, this essay examines how *BNW* satirizes contemporary society by satire where the audience is both a part of the problem and solution. Through the use of satire Huxley’s novel successfully portrays horrific examples of how human life in a not so distant future may find that the technology which revolutionized our lives actually enslaves us. Post-novel examples such as Hitler and his Nazi regime is a real life example of the type of totalitarian regime that is possible as a direct result of scientific progress in many fields. In this paper, however, posterity is excluded from the analysis. Instead this essay focuses on the contemporary society as depicted in early 20th century literature and how it reflects identifiable satirical elements in *BNW*. The analysis depicts how several discourses of contemporary industrialized Britain such as rationalism, socialism, industrialism, freedom, religion and political indifference are reflected in the novel. Ultimately, Huxley’s dystopian reflection of human future taunts us, the audience, by directly and indirectly illuminating the dangers of blindly accepting scientific advancements in the name of progress. The one, perhaps most relevant question the novel raises is – are we truly free when we are free to have the most wonderful time?

Keywords: New Historicism, Satire, 20th Century Britain, Discourse
Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World* (BNW) displays a dystopian world view about how human life could have advanced by AD 2540. Like much science-fiction, however, the novel is really a comment on the present. Published in 1932, Huxley’s novel satirizes other discourses of the early 20th century. Using new historical critical theory, this essay will investigate how BNW satirizes contemporary discourse on 20th century modern industrialized Britain, mainly as depicted in British newspapers from 1920-1930, through its hyperbolic examples of productivity-efficiency, and characters as hyperbolic examples of state-totalitarianism where personalities have been replaced by caste, ie., class specific traits. By analyzing characters depiction by the narrative and ethics behind their decisions one can understand certain aspects of the texts better: “Narrative – fiction as well as journalism, informal narratives of everyday life, or films – thrives on the affective appeal of characters. Whether we like them or not, we are compelled to read on because we respond to those paper people” (Bal 112). In the character analysis, the characters John the Savage, Lenina Crowne and Bernard Marx serve a central role. The goal of the analysis, however, is not to understand who the characters are, but rather to understand what they are in order to better understand how they can help identify elements of satire in BNW (Bal 113). Similarly, the setting is also crucial in identifying satire in BNW, but the setting itself is not as important as the contemporary discourse the setting may depict. The setting is but a satirical surface, this paper is interested in the ‘reality’ masked behind it. Ultimately, this paper claims that BNW uses hyperboles of discourse in contemporary 20th century Britain to satirize a blind perception which if left unchecked will creep towards the horrific example in the novel.

New historicism as a critical theory states that in contrast to what factual historians say about fiction and its meaningfulness in understanding historical discourses, literary texts are valuable in understanding the complex web of discourses: “literary texts are cultural artifacts that can tell us something about the interplay of discourses, the web of social meanings, operating in the time and place in which the text was written” (Tyson 323). The web of social meaning operating at the time and place when BNW was written during the early 20th century will therefore be examined by analyzing contemporary discourse. Political, societal and cultural discourses which can be identified in contemporary discourse and mirrored in BNW will be the backbone for the analysis of satire in BNW.

According to *Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, Satire is defined as:

A mode of writing that exposes the failings of individuals, institutions, or societies to ridicule and scorn. Satire is often an incidental element in literary works that may not be wholly satirical, especially in *comedy*. Its tone may vary from tolerant amusement, as in the verse satires of the Roman poet Horace, to bitter indignation, as in the verse of Juvenal and the prose of Jonathan Swift… satire usually found in plays and novels allows us to draw our own
conclusions from the actions of the characters, as for example in the novels of Evelyn Waugh or Chinua Achebe. (Baldick 402-03)

This definition alone, however, cannot explain how satire works in BNW. To better understand the application of satire in Huxley’s novel, we need to add important insights from Charles A. Knight’s *The Literature of Satire* and John C. Ball’s *Satire & the Postcolonial Novel*.

Knight analyses the rhetorical problems created by satire’s complex relations to its community, and examines how it exploits the genres it borrows from. He argues that satire derives from an awareness of the differences between appearance, ideas and discourse (ii). Knight analyzes how satire has evolved from the Greek philosopher Democritus. Satire as introduced by Democritus lay on the concept that the physical reality as such, is not what we as humans perceive when we look at it or learn about it. Rather, any notion, be it political or cultural, is not really reality as such, but a discourse we may perceive as reality (Knight 1-2). Therefore, the individuals, societies and institutions are actually satirized by ridiculing their perception of various subject. When a certain perception of a ‘reality’ or discourse is satirized, those who blindly believe what is satirized are also subject to the satire. To quote Knight:

The effect of the Democritian satirist is…to correct perception. But the correction of perception is not effected by admonition – by the translation of behavior into abstract moral language – but by a form of representation so skewed as to allow recognition to take place and to force a new judgment on it, so that viewers recognize that they are what is represented and what is foolish is them. We become both subject and object of satire” (Knight 2-3).

In other words, the audience of a play or the readers of a novel ultimately become both subjects and objects of satire as it is their blind perception that is satirized. The complex form of satire can engage viewers on multiple levels and may even be paradoxical, with the audience acting as both part of a problem and its solution. To this extent, satire as originating from Democritus is a tool in which a sort of blind perception can be corrected. Ultimately, analyzing satire is problematic in the sense that identifying contemporary criticism in literature can misrepresent the satiric spirit of the text. Therefore, the critic has to be cautious not to become overzealous in interpreting satire as contemporary criticism, nor should the critic be too soft in accepting satire as purely fictional comedy (Ball 23-28).

Analyzing BNW through new historicism, with a focus on satire as introduced by Democritus helps us better understand contemporary discourses scorned by the novel. BNW’s caste system for
one satirize how socioeconomic factors incentivize leaders to only condition a small portion of the populations as beings capable of making a free choice:

“I was wondering,” said the Savage, “why you had them at all - seeing that you can get whatever you want out of those bottles. Why don’t you make everybody an Alpha Double Plus while you’re about it?” Mustapha Mond laughed. “Because we have no wish to have our throats cut,” he answered. “We believe in happiness and stability. A society of Alphas couldn’t fail to be unstable and miserable. Imagine a factory staffed by Alphas - that is to say by separate and unrelated individuals of good heredity and conditioned so as to be capable (within limits) of making a free choice and assuming responsibilities. Imagine it!” he repeated (Huxley 195).

Alpha, being the top caste citizens in BNW’s society can be seen as a reflection of the power elite class discourse in 20th century industrialized Britain. Keeping factories well-staffed was important but problematic, as apparent by the following passage from a Nottingham Journal article, “Coming Big Boom In Trade – One Hindrance” 1st January 1920: “Many firms have booked sufficient orders to keep them employed until the Christmas of 1922. The only causes for anxiety in the minds of the producers are the fear of labor unrest and the insufficiency of machinery of production” (No. 29: 364). In BNW the World Controllers solved this problem by biologically and psychologically engineering Epsilon workers to be content with factory work. Biologically reduced intelligence, sleep-induced brain-washing, low-level education and shock therapy was just some of the things society imposed on Epsilons in order to make them content with Epsilonhood. The factories in BNW evidently share a similar problem to the ones depicted in a post WW1 British newspaper, the fear of labor unrest. The World Controllers in BNW tried to staff factories with Alphas as an experiment and found the whole example self-explanatory. Why on earth would an Alpha, who is capable of free choice (within limits), be content with working in a factory?

Combining new historical perspectives of BNW and the contemporary article from the Nottingham Journal, this information can be seen as criticism of contemporary industrialized Britain, elitism, and the conditions which factory workers had to endure. Twentieth century discourse of industrialism is identifiable on multiple occasions in BNW, as depicted by the hyperbolic example above where the World Controllers solved the problem of labor unrest by vile methods like shock therapy for infants. The need for the wheels of industry to keep turning then it seems, ridicule how the elite will do anything to staff their factories. As such, in terms of blind perception in satire, BNW satirizes the whole concept of industrialism on several levels such as caste-bound labor and inhumane working conditions. To the World Controllers in BNW it is perfectly clear that a smarter, better educated and free Alpha would go mad doing Epsilon work:
The Savage tried to imagine it, not very successfully. “It’s an absurdity. An Alpha-decanted, Alpha-conditioned man would go mad if he had to do Epsilon Semi-Moron work—go mad, or start smashing things up. Alphas can be completely socialized—but only on condition that you make them do Alpha work. Only an Epsilon can be expected to make Epsilon sacrifices, for the good reason that for him they aren’t sacrifices; they’re the line of least resistance. His conditioning has laid down rails along which he’s got to run. He can’t help himself; he’s foredoomed. Even after decanting, he’s still inside a bottle—an invisible bottle of infantile and embryonic fixations. Each one of us, of course,” the Controller meditatively continued, “goes through life inside a bottle. But if we happen to be Alphas, our bottles are, relatively speaking, enormous. (Huxley 196)

The character from the previous quote Mustafa Mond, one of ten World Controllers in BNW, is one of the most important, intelligent and most well-educated citizens in the fictional Civilization of the novel. His perception of the requirements for a factory worker can be seen as a direct reflection of class society in the industrial age. The political climate in Europe during the early part of the twentieth century was horrid. The rise of totalitarian government, especially in Germany, was built on a doctrine of superiority of one race over the other (Ramesh 32). In this sense, the passage satirizes the blind perception that some people are worth more than others, a condition which we are born into. Technological advancement, it seems, are by no means any equalizer of social groups inequality. Rather, technology seems to amplify the chasms between different social groups leading to hyper-specialized sub-groups who have little to no freedom of choice. Additionally, the same passage can be perceived as a satire of the horrible conditions which factory workers must endure “Alpha-conditioned man would go mad if he had to do Epsilon Semi-Moron work” (Huxley 196).

BNW features a detailed and descriptive glimpse into humanity’s fictional future of A. F. (After Ford) 632, which translates into 2540 AD in Gregorian calendars. The translation is possible because the BNW calendar begins when the ford T-model began production in America (Huxley 2). This temporal information immediately tells us two important things about the setting. For one, it is a future projection based on human history, albeit fictional. Secondly, the discourse of industrialism is so intertwined with the setting that the very calendar is based upon an industrial milestone, the mass-production of automobiles. In contrast to BNW’s calendar which was forged around the birth of the T-model, the Gregorian calendar was designed around the birth of Christ. The replacement of religion with industrialism as a calendar center-point immediately displays how deeply manifested the discourse of industrialism is in the setting of BNW. Satirically, this reflects
how industrialism manifested itself to such extent that the populous worshipped it like a religion. Industrialism is not only a part of Civilization, in the wake of technological advancement it has reshaped Civilization into something new (Tyson 315). Industrialism and rational modern states, it seems, may be less compatible with Christianity than pre-revolutionary era states. Calendar definitions alone are but tip of the iceberg that is technological importance in Huxley’s novel. While no single discourse can satisfactorily explain the ideological setting in BNW, industrial solutions based on rationalism have pushed technological advancements in every field of Civilization (Tyson 316).

Studying early twentieth century British newspapers, one can see why the discourse of rationalism as an opposition against spirituality is reflected in BNW. In The Daily Herald of July 1928 for example, an anonymous article exclaims a grievance over the loss of love and compassion in contemporary Britain: “…I don’t care where the fire for peace comes from, and I don’t care who lights it, and I don’t care what it consumes, provided it is under Divine guidance” (1). On the one hand, a religious population bemoaned that peace, love and serenity was lost in modern society. In contrast to this conservative stance, proud followers of rationalism advocated that religion is worthless as any intelligent educated man cannot believe such things. Similar discussions were frequently published in contemporary British newspapers which seems to suggest that modern industrial civilization of the early 20th century was to some extent incompatible with the teachings of Christianity. Industrialists, trade unions and scholars advocated on multiple occasions that religion had to some extent become obsolete by scientific progress. Rashdall wrote in The Yorkshire Post of 1922 a summary of a political forum between religious Christian parties and various economically invested groups such as trade unions and industrialists. The religious argued that morality, love and compassion were lost in the recent surge of mass-production and scientific progress which hurt and maimed a large portion of the population. On the contrary, the opposition argued that religious beliefs should not have anything to do with economic growth because those values would ruin capitalism. “Conditions of labor could never be satisfactory to Christians until they permitted every man and woman to find an inspired joy in their work” (Rashdall 1 ff.).

The discourse of religion is similarly depict in BNW as the World Controllers of the industrial hyperbole explain that religion as they knew it, of course, had to be removed from society. In this sense satire scorns both parties for their inability to adapt to change. In reality, solving a problem by ‘removing’ a problem is seldom an option. “ART, SCIENCE—you seem to have paid a fairly high price for your happiness,” said the Savage, when they were alone. ‘Anything else?’ ‘Well, religion, of course,’ replied the Controller” (Huxley 203). The very start of the novel introduces an awfully sterile ‘solution’ to some of nature’s shortcomings at the London Hatchery and
Conditioning center. The problems caused by orthodox views of a family, as the World Controller’s sees it, are multiple: unstable birth and mortality rates, monogamy-derived unhappiness and much more. As a result of technological, scientific and psychological advancements, traditional families are rendered obsolete. Religion, love, hate, passion, monogamy, family, privacy… all these things and more have been successively abolished in BNW on a campaign for stability and progress. Rationalism, the discourse of thinking logically without emotional or spiritual concern is deeply manifested in all of the World Controllers motives behind forging a hyperbolic rationalist setting. In the eyes of the World Controllers, no sacrifice is unthinkable in the name of progress, “…well, because progress is lovely, isn’t it?” (Huxley 86).

Born and raised without all the ideological dogmas and technological progress of Civilization, John “the Savage” finds London 2540 AD frightening and repulsive: “So you don’t much like Civilization, Mr. Savage…” (Huxley 192). His different “conditioning,” or rather lack of conditioning and biological mastering, is what makes him especially interesting for understanding BNW’s modern Civilization. One of the major differences John experiences is the lack of religion in Civilization, or at least the lack of acknowledgment of God. From the novel’s sixteenth to eighteenth chapters the readers get a direct glimpse into John’s and London’s regional World Controller Mustafa Mond’s perception of Civilization. Mond and John discuss the sacrifices which are required for modern Civilization 2540 AD. While John does admit that there are some very nice things such as the music in the air, he nevertheless rejects the whole experience as repulsive. The absence of love, passion and God is simply unbearable for him, as is the automaton-like behavior in the different castes.

“Call it the fault of Civilization. God isn’t compatible with machinery and scientific medicine and universal happiness. You must make your choice. Our Civilization has chosen machinery and medicine and happiness. That’s why I have to keep these books locked up in the safe. They’re smut. People would be shocked if…” The Savage interrupted him. “But isn’t it natural to feel there’s a God?” (Huxley 207)

From a new historical critic perspective, the conversation between the two reflects a similar discussion as depicted in contemporary London – what place does God have in 20th century enlightened industrial Civilization? Perhaps the thing which pains John the Savage the most in Civilization is the absence of God. BNW’s society is built upon rationalism as a dominant ideology, as shown on multiple occasions, including their views on God. Mustafa Mond believes that believing in God is simply something we have been conditioned to do, therefore, he also conceives that it is as natural to condition the opposite:
The Savage nodded, frowning. “You got rid of them. Yes, that’s just like you. Getting rid of
everything unpleasant instead of learning to put up with it. Whether ’tis better in the mind to
suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, or to take arms against a sea of troubles
and by opposing end them. But you don’t do either. Neither suffer nor oppose. You just
abolish the slings and arrows. It’s too easy.” (Huxley 210)

As previously mentioned, during the early 20th century a similar discussion originating from
the discourse of rationalism was present in The Daily Herald, the largest newspaper in contemporary
London. Gerald Gould published several articles in 1928 where he openly discussed religion’s place
in the modern state. The consensus of the discussion was overwhelmingly leaning towards the
opinion that religion cannot, nor should not, be aligned with the state. From a new historical
perspective, there is an obvious resemblance in attitude between BNW’s world controller and the
discussion in The Daily Herald. Just like in BNW, the articles argue that religion is incompatible with
any modern 20th century state because “any intelligent people cannot believe in religion”. Just as
Mustafa Mond argues that religion is incompatible with machinery, the exact same issue is discussed
in several letters sent to Gerald Gould in 1928 from his readers, who argue that Christ’s teachings
are incompatible with workers in modern industrialized society (7-8). In contrast to rationalism,
religious values such as passion and love are crucial for John the Savage, which from a new
historical perspective can be seen as a personification of the movement that opposed overzealous
rationalist discourse in contemporary Britain. Ultimately, the message of the satire is clearly
depicted in the novel: “Getting rid of everything unpleasant instead of learning to put up with it.
… It’s too easy” (Huxley 210). The novel’s satirical reflection of society taunts rationalism and its
approach towards religion as too easy. However, religion in BNW stands for values of love,
compassion and diversity rather than a direct reflection of Christianity as such.

It was hard to deny collateral hazards such as environmental impact, harsh working
conditions and dangerous machinery as a bi-product of industrialism. At the same time, however,
the plentiful fruits of mass production such as cheap generic clothes and equipment were enjoyed.
Civilization in contemporary Britain would have been impossible to maintain without an industry
of mass production. In BNW, John the Savage hates Civilization so much that he becomes suicidal
by living in it. Ultimately, however, even John acknowledges that the supply of goods is indeed
quite nice: “Of course, the Savage went on to admit, there are some very nice things. All that music
in the air, for instance” (Huxley 192). In the end, however, no amount of mass produced goods
are sufficient for John who chooses to end his own life instead of living in the industrial
powerhouse that is BNW. John’s end as a tragic hero is not necessarily an exaggeration, but
reflected similar fates in contemporary industrialized Britain. In fact, on a single front-page from the *Nottingham Journal* on the 1st of July in 1929 several deaths and accidents are linked to industrialism. The majority of the articles differ from John’s in *BNW* as they were accidents, but one of the front-page articles describe how a mother ended her own and her four children’s lives deliberately by jumping off a bridge. Both John and the mother ended their lives prematurely because they could not bear living as a part of the industrial powerhouse that surrounded them.

Survival is one of the most basic instincts in nature, if society snuffs that instinct, it may depict a serious and integral flaw at the very core.

The World Controllers in *BNW* condition the population into very specific tasks, then they makes sure that they are happy and content enough to stay put. This topic opens up for a discussion on how to properly organize the population in an industrialized society. “The optimum population, said Mustapha Mond, is modelled on the iceberg-eight-ninths below the water line, one-ninth above” (Huxley 197). The factory workers, the lower castes, are supposed to be below the water line, in other words they need not know nor see the grand scheme of things. Translating this metaphor, what the World Controller is really saying is that the vast majority of the population need not worry about much else than working nine to five. In *BNW* the World Controllers maintain the majority of the population ‘below the water line’ by a series of distractions such as SOMA, The Feelies and Orgies. The satiric elements in this can be translated to contemporary use of alcohol, cinemas and bars/clubs as distractions for the masses so that they enjoy ‘being under the water’. At the very least, there is a satirical reflection on consumerism as a direct result of industrialism.

The population is compelled to consume: “Ending is better than mending, ending is better than mending, ending is better…. Every man, woman and child compelled to consume so much a year. In the interests of industry” (Huxley 42). Consumerism as an enforced part of artificially fabricated personalities therefore conveniently serves two purposes for the World Controllers. On top of ensuring a steady demand for goods it also simultaneously distracts the masses from seeking a higher purpose.

Psychologically engineered ads and slogans with propaganda to consume more is just the beginning of the arsenal used to brainwash the population to suit the industrial hyperbole in *BNW*. One can link many satirical aspects of the novel to contemporary Britain by studying contemporary newspapers, especially in widespread advertisements which reinforces consumerism. Ads were everywhere in newspapers attracting the reader’s attention with some cleverly engineered wording, much like “ending is better than mending” does in *BNW*. “Landsport Drapery Bazaar – Remember, these are DEPENDABLE BARGAINS, and, although prices are down, we still guarantee satisfaction…THESE ARE THE CARPET PRICES THAT DRAW BIG CROWDS…”
BE EARLY ON THURSDAY, The First Day” (Portsmouth Evening News July 1st 1929). This excerpt from Portsmouth Evening News further reinforce the reflected criticism of contemporary consumerism as a part of industrialism in BNW. Firstly, the very fact that the entire front page of a newspaper is covered in advertisement tells us how important it is for the real world reflection of “World Controllers” to distract the population. Secondly, the way the ad is written is very aggressive in its attempts to persuade the population into consumerism. The entire front page in Portsmouth Evening News is filled with various activities for the consumer to engage in, whether it be shopping, a day trip, or trying out a new type of alcohol at a local Bar. The World Controllers reflect contemporary reality it seems, sharing the desire to distract the eighth-ninths or so of the population below the water level: “But industrial Civilization is only possible when there’s no self-denial. Self-indulgence up to the very limits imposed by hygiene and economics. Otherwise the wheels stop turning” (Huxley 209). Indeed, in order for a state to thrive as an industrial powerhouse, it needs to prevent any criticism that may hinder the wheels from turning.

The novel’s reflection of industrialism echoes the question of whether God has a place in Civilization, an echo originating from the removal of religion in favor of industrialism in BNW. Satire, as pointed out previously, is paradoxical in the sense that ‘we’, i.e., the readers, are in a sense what is being scorned. The satirical aspect of industrialism in the novel does not actually suggest that there is no place for God in contemporary industrial society, rather it implies that industrialism acts as a religion (Ramesh 33-34). Religion, it seems, is indistinguishable from mankind through history; people seek some sense of purpose by various means of worship. People believed in a higher power before Christianity, which makes it plausible to believe that the form of religion may change again. Fordism therefore can be viewed as a satirical reflection of replacing spirituality with consumerism. The World Controllers in BNW did not remove religion as such, rather they systematically replaced obsolete cultural (and spiritual) rituals with new ones based on technologically engineered solutions in the name of progress:

“My good boy!” The Director wheeled sharply round on him. “Can’t you see? Can’t you see?” He raised a hand; his expression was solemn. “Bokanovsky’s Process is one of the major instruments of social stability!” Major instruments of social stability. Standard men and women; in uniform batches. The whole of a small factory staffed with the products of a single bokanovskified egg. “Ninety-six identical twins working ninety-six identical machines!” The voice was almost tremulous with enthusiasm. “You really know where you are. For the first time in history.” He quoted the planetary motto. “Community, Identity, Stability.” Grand words. “If we could bokanovskify indefinitely the whole problem would be solved.” Solved
by standard Gammas, unvarying Deltas, uniform Epsilons. Millions of identical twins. The principle of mass production at last applied to biology. (Huxley 4-5)

Giving birth has traditionally been seen as a miracle, something beautiful and holy. In *BNW*, however, the population is disgusted by the notion of traditional (natural) methods of breeding. Instead, they find it perfectly normal to engineer babies in factories just like a car would be produced on the assembly line. In fact, they rejoice in knowing that they have perfected nature. “Progress is lovely, isn’t it?” (Huxley 86). In contemporary Britain, the discourse of Eugenics had mounted an idea not far from the systematically engineered babies in *BNW*. Followers of social Darwinism advocated that character traits such as high intelligence was bound in the genetics. Breeding and death control became tools, in the field of Eugenics, where one could alter (1) the quality people, (2) the ration among good/low quality people (Martínez 1 ff.). In *BNW* the World Controllers similarly focus on the balance of society, the individual loss is never as important as the societal gain:

Five bus-loads of boys and girls, singing or in a silent embracement, rolled past them over the vitrified highway. “Just returned,” explained Dr. Gaffney, while Bernard, whispering, made an appointment with the Head Mistress for that very evening, “from the Slough Crematorium. Death conditioning begins at eighteen months. Every tot spends two mornings a week in a Hospital for the Dying. All the best toys are kept there, and they get chocolate cream on death days. They learn to take dying as a matter of course.” “Like any other physiological process,” put in the Head Mistress professionally. (Huxley 142)

Just as many other things, not only birth but death too has been adopted into the religion of industrialism. In fact, people rarely die from natural causes in *BNW*; instead the state systematically harvest chemicals like phosphorous from old people by ending their lives early. This gruesome act of rationalism is completely acceptable in the satirical reflection of industrialism in *BNW* since it represent progress (Huxley 63). The individual is not important in *BNW* since industrialism as a religion is only concerned with keeping the wheels of production turning in perfect balance.

In the end, the rational choice from the World Controllers in *BNW* to remove Christianity and other religions from Civilization does depict a chasm between industrialism and religion. Analyzing the two discourses, however, signals a third discourse, that of totalitarianism. The God of Christianity and other monotheistic religions is problematic for totalitarian regimes since religious teachings will more likely than not conflict with the regime’s agenda.
John’s distaste for Civilization can from another perspective be viewed as stance against over-organization: the whole scheme of control is imposed by the subjugating government. The Savage’s passion and suffering embodies an outcry for ‘humanity’, a desire to break free. Government, although necessary to some extent, has opposite goals of individual beings. Men or women are driven by a desire for change and freedom, while governments worldwide by their very nature tries to limit freedom and establish control, implementing progressive infringement for the individual by the dogmas of progress and stability (Barr 848). The subject of God as a collateral damage by the discourse of rationalistic imposed industrialism, as mentioned previously, is just an example. From a new historical perspective, many events and characters satirize over-organization in BNW. The Savage’s entire persona is petrified by the vile extremity which rationalistic values of ‘progress’ and ‘stability’ has imposed on 2540 AD BNW: “‘Stability’, said the Controller, ‘stability...’” (Huxley 36). Stability and community are some of the dogmas which the BNW World Controllers hold most dearly. The loss of personal freedom as a sacrifice for societal gain is therefore satirized in the massive government in BNW:

“Sleep teaching was actually prohibited in England. There was something called liberalism. Parliament, if you know what that was, passed a law against it. The records survive. Speeches about liberty of the subject. Liberty to be inefficient and miserable. Freedom to be a round peg in a square hole.”... “Liberalism, of course, was dead of anthrax, but all the same you couldn’t do things by force.” (Huxley 34-35)

Decoding over-organization, apart from the rationalist and industrial discourse, points towards another identifiable discourse of contemporary 20th century Britain: Socialism (or Communism), which favors the group over the individual. The reflection in BNW of socialistic discourse, however, takes it to its extremity and nearly exterminates individuality in favor of the community. Class consciousness, is in this sense satirized in how the working class in contemporary Britain is marginalized by a minority which constantly aims to keep the population from a class revolution. The setting is so extreme in its quest for community-life that anyone who sully it is deported to some island (Huxley 199-200). As a result, personality and privacy is utterly marginalized in BNW. Much like in a dictatorship or a totalitarian regime, a sort of state-induced personality is enforced upon its citizens (Tyson 318). While a process as extreme as this hyperbolic satire in BNW is hard to find in contemporary Britain, a similar process is identifiable in contemporary political literature. Albert Russell Ellingwood, for one, published an exhaustive work called Social Forces - GOVERNMENT, POLITICS, CITIZENSHIP in which he highlights the process of individualism being replaced by socialism. Socialism, according to Ellingwood, had in contemporary Britain
already begun infringing the individual freedom of liberalism with state-induced values in economics, ideology and education. Ellingwoods’s work concludes with a question perfectly in sync with the satire of Socialism in *BNW*: “Where should the line be drawn between individualism and socialism?” (279-86).

Lenina Crowne, the ever gullible and loyal worker-bee, is in many ways John’s direct opposite. Lenina is a sheep susceptible to the sleep-induced brainwashing imposed on *BNW*’s citizens as a part of their ‘conditioning’. Such sleep-induced brainwashing, or hypnopedia, is a satirical reflection of how the media, public education and other information can be used by a modern totalitarian regime to enslave its citizens. The result, Lenina, depicts what happens when the transformation from individualism to Socialism is completed: “ ‘What a hideous colour khaki is,’ remarked Lenina, voicing the hypnopædic prejudices of her caste” (Huxley 53). Lenina exemplifies a frightening discourse during the 20th century, a fear of state-enforced brainwashing which originated from various nationalist discourses used to shape citizens in schools. Vladimir G. Simkhovitch describes this discourse in detail in an article published in 1930. From a skeptic’s point of view schools can be seen as a state-funded brainwashing machine used to minimize individualism and push socialism (or whatever universal values the state want to reinforce). Simkhovitch acknowledges that values transmitted by the state to its citizens do directly challenge freedom, a process which had already begun in early 20th century ‘liberal’ Britain:

If psychoanalysis is trying to bring to our consciousness the unconscious attitudes, what is it that the educational system of Soviet Russia is doing? It is sinking conscious attitudes into the unconscious. It is consciously endeavoring to create an unconscious framework for mental reactions. It is by sinking into the unconscious that these attitudes become undebatable; they become part of what we call "human nature". Russian discussions on education are very interesting, for, as a matter of fact, all education is doing something of this sort, but in a liberal state, with its love of freedom and its intellectual aspirations, the process is neither so obvious nor so crude. (490)

Simkhovitch admits that even in liberal states, this process had already begun in 1930, with state-forged brain-washing lurking in the shadows.

Lenina is ultimately a satirical personification of the 20th century fear of the discourse of state-enforced values which minimize personality and personal freedom. In fact, Lenina is so enthralled by *BNW*’s personality scheme that she has become an automaton which repeats state-enforced values:
“A gramme in time saves nine,” said Lenina, producing a bright treasure of sleep-taught wisdom. Bernard pushed away the proffered glass impatiently. “Now don’t lose your temper,” she said. “Remember one cubic centimetre cures ten gloomy sentiments.” “Oh, for Ford’s sake, be quiet!” he shouted. Lenina shrugged her shoulders. “A gramme is always better than a damn,” she concluded with dignity, and drank the sundae herself. (Huxley 77)

Lenina is an extreme example of what could happen if the discourse of state-induced character education would be allowed to run-amok. Her gullible automaton-like personality is thus a satirical depiction of how personality and freedom may be threatened by contemporary political agendas. In The Journal of Educational Sociology Hugh Hartshorne criticized how Britain during the 1930’s had even begun talking about how schools could provide ‘character education’. The Civilization which Lenina so obediently follows in the novel is built upon social participation and stability, much in line with the 1930’s political agenda of “experiences of fellowship, social participation, thoughtful consideration of values, and responsibility” as depicted by Hugh Hartshorne in 1930 (205). The conditioning in BNW is in that way satirizing a hyperbolic effect of character education where the state programs the population into drones:

“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.”

“But Bernard, you’re saying the most awful things.” “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’s happy nowadays.” He laughed, “Yes, ‘Everybody’s happy nowadays.’ We begin giving the children that at five. 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 78-79)

Ultimately, Lenina raises questions about what freedom really is, or rather how it may be manifested in the future. Are individuals free when they are free from concern, or as Lenina puts it “free to have the most wonderful time”? Through her the novel asks the question if citizens are free when the state does not allow them to form their own moral values and define what character traits are ‘good’ or ‘bad’ entirely on their own. Ultimately, in new historicist terms, Lenina Crow’s pale personality depicts a fear of ‘modernity’ and the rise of totalitarian governments, a rising concern in early 20th century (Harris 192). The fear of equality as satirized in BNW depicts a creeping rogue agent in state politics. It is not an immediate fear of people turning into mindless automatons overnight, but rather that people over time will lose the ability to question the state altogether if the marginalization of individualism carries on: “Government’s an affair of sitting, not hitting. You rule with the brains and the buttocks, never with the fists” (Huxley III). The new authoritarian
state is not feared for its ability to dictate by force, but rather for its persuasive ways and its array of distractive mirages which risk poisoning the population into political indifference. Justice and freedom, Huxley seems to argue, lie at the heart of a healthy democracy and if political indifference fester then democracy is at siege. It is then, that the elite has become the World Controllers and the majority of the population is effectively Civilization’s mindless automatons, given that they are distracted by bread and circuses (Giroux 30-32).

In between John’s disgust for Civilization and Lenina’s blind obedience lies Bernard Marx. The self-aware psychologist embodies a disbelief of certain aspects of Civilization, albeit that he is bolder in thought than in action. He is in a position of seeing many of the faults in society but ultimately does not want to change it. This satirical perspective reflects contemporary society’s ability to thrive in blind perception. Bernard’s example shows that people ultimately does not really want to change since one’s own well-being is worth more than ethics, morality and individual freedom. *BNW*’s society is highly organized and most elements of personality have been actively replaced by class-specific traits in this totalitarian industrialist satire of socialism. Anything or anyone who opposes uniformity is simply repulsive to Civilization. The two P’s in life – Private and Professional – have merged in *BNW*, where everyone belongs to everyone and your boss is as interested in your private life as your work ethics. Bernard, however, refuses to acknowledge this. He is initially quite determined to fight against the stream of blind sheep surrounding him, seeing them as victims to the sleep-inducing brain-washing which he himself knows all about since it was his profession to brainwash. The controversial psychologist, however, seems to be quite short on action since most of his thoughts remain just that. As such, Bernard is depicted as a stubborn, self-righteous and cowardly stain on society who just cannot fit in. In fact, the first information the readers get about Mr. Bernard is that he is neglected by his Alpha-Caste coworkers as a result of his unsavoury reputation: “Benito stared after him. ‘What can be the matter with the fellow?’ he wondered, and, shaking his head, decided that the story about the alcohol having been put into the poor chap’s blood-surrogate must be true. ‘Touched his brain, I suppose’ ” (Huxley 52).

Bernard thinks that he hates society, but a more accurate description would be to say that he hates his alienation from Civilization caused by him being different of other Alphas. Bernard’s true feelings of wanting to be accepted are displayed in two character-defining moments. The first reveals that he does not really despise society after all. When he brings back John the Savage and finally received some long-sought-for fame and fortune, he is absolutely lost in its intoxicating effect. He even shuns his disbelieving friends in a fame-induced high. This vanity propels Bernard’s character into a satirical reflection of people’s mindless hunt for success and status:
The days passed. Success went fizzily to Bernard’s head, and in the process completely reconciled him (as any good intoxicant should do) to a world which, up till then, he had found very unsatisfactory. In so far as it recognized him as important, the order of things was good. But, reconciled by his success, he yet refused to forego the privilege of criticizing this order. For the act of criticizing heightened his sense of importance, made him feel larger. (Huxley 136)

Vanity and frail morality it seems, therefore, are character traits which are cultivated in a class based system such as the one in BNW, a satirical reflection of the Power Elite. Bernard possessed every possibility act upon the possibility to change society but instead his desire for changed vanished almost instinctively as soon as he saw an opportunity for higher status. From another perspective one could simultaneously argue that morality is dependent on the dominant ideology which makes it perfectly normal for Bernard to reap the fruits of mass production instead of launching a political campaign against the stream. “Human nature” as subjected to biotechnological mastering in BNW is different from the cultural meaning of the term during the 20th century because it is devoid of morality in BNW (Smith 56). Origins of morality which question what is right and wrong has been removed from society on a campaign for happiness and stability. In short, it is not exactly Bernard’s loss of character which is being scorned by the novels satirical element. Rather, satire reflects the fact that without a moral backbone, society in its self will inevitably breed morality deprived citizens.

The second event to define how Bernard truly feels about society happens right before he is deported for his inability to fit in and for his critical views of Civilization. Sharing John the Savage’s critical views of society, when the time came to do something he breaks down and only thinks about how to best save his own skin from prosecution. Bernard is a bold critic, but lacks the courage to be a revolutionary or martyr. Or alternatively, the sleep-induced systematic brainwashing which Bernard thinks he has defused by learning about it in his profession might have been more effective than he thinks. In the end, he is no more of a civil hero than any educated yet passive person plagued by the knowledge of past and present injustice. While Bernard is unhappy with parts of the society in which he lives, he loves the fruits of the civilized world far too much to give it all up:

The words galvanized Bernard into violent and unseemly activity. “Send me to an island?” He jumped up, ran across the room, and stood gesticulating in front of the Controller. “You can’t send me. I haven’t done anything. It was the others. I swear it was the others.” He pointed accusingly to Helmholtz and the Savage. “Oh, please don’t send me to Iceland. I promise I’ll
do what I ought to do. Give me another chance. Please give me another chance.” The tears began to flow. “I tell you, it’s their fault,” he sobbed. (Huxley 199)

The fear of being deported is so shameful and unthinkable that poor Bernard breaks down and cries as if his life is in danger. This very moment spoils his entire façade. He does not want to leave society, and it seems he does not even want to change it. Bernard merely wants to be popular like all the other Alphas, it is Civilization’s fault for not accepting him as the wonderful, self-conscious and smart philosopher that he thinks he is.

Analyzing Bernard’s actions, it becomes more and more apparent that he is in conflict with his own feelings towards the discourse of Civilization. He thinks that Civilization is wrong to minimize personalities and encourage uniformity. At the same time, he is perfectly fine with many of the aspects of class society and the luxuries he can enjoy as an Alpha citizen. In this light Bernard can be compared to the discourse of colonialism where a slaver might find it ethically wrong to support slave trade but might at the same time own slaves because it is just so handy not having to work (Tyson 317). From the perspective of blind perception, the novel satirizes the contemporary lack of morality and action-deprived ethics. Ignorance being bliss, Alpha-caste critics do not want actual change, but merely use their status to exploit morals. The novel shows the evil of the few enlightened individuals who can see past the mirage of blind perception choosing ignorance over awareness. Then there is no longer any chance of freedom, it having been replaced by artificial happiness. The totalitarian regime has enslaved everyone to the point where even the self-aware citizens obediently fall back in line when something threatens their level of comfort. This is the true danger of political indifference as embodied by Bernard Marx in the satirical mirror that is BNW.

To conclude, from the perspective of new historicism, Aldous Huxley’s novel BNW, published in 1932, displays multiple satirical elements seen in its setting and characters that display how future manifestation of contemporary discourses afflict human nature. The novel’s satirical personifications of hyperboles reflect contemporary discourses of early 20th century Britain. A clash between industrialism and religion is depicted, yet the battle of God against Industrialism is not what is satirized. Ultimately the novel satirizes industrialism as a religion in contemporary Britain. Consumerism, be it alcohol, cars, clothes or jewelry, and its accompanying rituals act the part of religion. Over the course of the novel, John the Savage’s character highlights how love, compassion, hate, and anger are needed as parts of human nature. John’s incapability to adapt to civilized society portrays a satire of the dangers of contemporary society endangered by the mass-production of goods and state-induced values of character as tools for successively marginalizing freedom. The new state, as the novel puts it, is a business of sitting, not hitting. In Lenina Crowne
*BNW* depicts how the state ‘conditions’ its citizens. She is completely subjugated by her conditioning, incapable of seeing anything but what she is ‘supposed to’. Lenina is satirized as a mindless automaton of the plebs working nine to five, rinse and repeat. Bernard Marx, finally, embodies an educated and intelligent man who sees the world for what it is, but who is ultimately unprepared to rise against the totalitarian regime, political indifference having festered for so long that freedom has been obliterated. The satire of *BNW* thus uses hyperbole to warn against a blind perception rooted in contemporary 20th century Britain which, if left unchecked, will creep towards the subject of the hyperbole. In short, towards a brave new world.
Works Cited


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