

Research Article

STABILITY THROUGH SUBJUGATION: A READER-RESPONSE APPROACH TO HUXLEY'S BRAVE NEW WORLD

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ABSTRACT

Published in 1932, Huxley's *Brave New World* presents a dystopian society where eugenics, genetic engineering and conditioning are utilised to enforce social stability to the detriment of individuality, emotional depth and authentic human relationships. Using Reader-Response theory, this paper examines how readers focus on the emotional tensions arising from the suppression of suffering, engineered health, and the manipulation of sexuality and family structures. The analysis centres on two critical themes, such as biological control and engineered stability, and emotional regulation with the erasure of human connections. The analysis has revealed that characters such as Bernard Marx have experienced alienation and longing for authentic connection, while John the Savage struggles to resist societal control. These characters' positions have concretely demonstrated the cost of engineered conformity on humans, casting light on the need for emotional and moral autonomy.

Keywords: Brave New World, eugenics, Reader-Response Theory, genetic engineering, emotional control.

INTRODUCTION

Brave New World by Huxley presents a vision of society in which technological advancements and scientific progress are employed to reshape not only human bodies but also their desires, emotions and relationships. Individuals are confined within a world that appears to offer freedom while simultaneously suffocating individuality and authentic human connection. In the world state, health and social stability are prioritised over individuality, emotional depth, longevity and authentic human connections. The novel can be read in relation to the development of eugenic thought, social engineering and industrial development, raising questions about the boundaries of scientific and technological progress (Galton, 1883; Haraway, 1991; Huxley, 1932). The world state focuses on eliminating disease, ageing, loneliness and suffering but these goals also become instruments of social control (Foucault, 1976; Marcuse, 1964).

Reader response theory is used to examine character development throughout the novel while emphasising the role of readers in constructing meaning and interpreting its moral and emotional dimensions (Rosenblatt, 1995; Iser, 1978). Rather than treating the novel as a text with one fixed meaning or meaning, reader response theory allows for multiple interpretations and perspectives for the understanding of the novel. Readers can therefore evaluate whether a society presented as free from pain and suffering, truly represents progress or instead constitutes a compromised form of human existence (Jauss, 1982; Fish, 1980).

The world state's primary objective is to maintain social order. This objective is pursued through genetic engineering and the Bokanovsky Process, which creates rigid caste divisions and uniformity among citizens. Such practices enable the state to predict citizens' behaviours, reducing the possibility of uncontrolled conducts (Habermas, 2003). Psychological conditioning, particularly hypnopædia or sleep-teaching, suppresses individuality and fosters

Submissiveness (Althusser, 1971; Holland, 1975; Sheela, 2016). Citizens' malleability is reinforced through repeated conditioning, leaving little room for resistance. Soma, another mechanism of control, is used to suppress discontent and discomfort and maintain artificial happiness. These forms of control invite readers to interrogate the place of intimate relationships, family structures and sexuality, which are the custodians of human autonomy. The state's encouragement of promiscuity further weakens exclusive emotional bonds and facilitates social control (Foucault, 1978; Bauman, 2003).

Reader-response theory examines how readers use emotional and intellectual responses to clarify the tensions that exist between the engineered happiness and authentic humanity for which characters long. For reader response critics, the reader's subjectivity interacts with the literary text to produce meaning (Rosenblatt, 1995; Iser, 1978). Meaning is therefore not extracted solely from the text but emerges through an active interaction between the reader and the text (Fish, 1980; Rosenblatt, 1995). The reader's historical and cultural context, emotional investment and interpretive choices contribute to this process (Jauss, 1982). This paper discusses the dystopian construction of stability through eugenics, genetic engineering, psychological conditioning and emotional control. From a reader response perspective, Huxley's *Brave New World*, foregrounds questions about biological control and engineered stability, emotional regulation and the erosion of human bonds.

Biological Control and Engineered Stability

To understand the term eugenics and its concepts, one should discuss the matter going back to its roots. Galton and Galton (1998) define eugenics as the use of science for the qualitative and quantitative improvement of the human genome. Francis Galton similarly defined eugenics as a field concerned with influences that could improve the inherited qualities of humans (Galton, 1904, p.45). These definitions share an emphasis on the improvement of human populations, whether qualitative or quantitative. Eugenics is thus the intersection of science, society, and ideology, which spread in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. It emerged during an era when

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scientific advancements in genetics and Darwinian evolution were gaining prominence alongside growing interest in using science to improve human societies (Galton, 1904; Edwin, 2012; Panagopoulos, 2016; Lucassen, 2010; Illerhag, 2018; Chan, 1985; Galton and Galton, 1998; Aubert-Marson, 2009; Gillham, 2009).

Eugenics gained recognition as a social and political movement, driven by the belief that selective breeding could enhance desirable traits such as intelligence or physical health and reduce the prevalence of perceived undesirable traits (Galton, 1909; Allen, 2011; Lombardo, 2008). Its proponents often framed it as a means to promote public health and social progress. For Galton, instead of letting eugenics too broad in individual whim, he redirected the notion, merging it within biology and government for a plausible safety. He then redefined eugenics as: "the study of all agencies under social control which can improve or impair the racial quality of future generations" (Galton in Edwin, 2012, p.18). However, after his passing in 1911, the term was increasingly associated with racism, coercive reproduction and colonial superiority. As Garland (2011) demonstrates, eugenicists sought to control reproduction in order to increase births among groups they regarded as desirable and reduce births among groups they regarded as undesirable.

In *Brave New World*, Huxley maintains stability through the manipulation of human biology. All that concerns nature is cancelled with a focus on the control of reproduction, ageing and disease. Huxley brings forth the notion of Bokanovsky process, explained by the Director of Hatcheries and Conditioning as "one of the major instruments of social stability" (BNW, p.5). The method of creating nearly identical twins reflects the state's objective to control its citizens. The state, through its Bokanovsky process, creates three distinct groups: the Alphas, the Betas and the Epsilons (BNW, p.23-24). Each is weird in a way to receive orders and be content of the circle they belong. The state does not give any extra force to think about their current situation. By focusing on this, the state ensures it minimises conflict and inefficiency. Erasure of conflict because no caste would long for the position and status of another caste, pretending to be the best caste. Each caste assumes they are well-built and perform noble work, valued by the state.

Huxley's depiction can be read alongside the historical development of eugenic thought. Galton (1883) advocated the improvement of human populations through selective breeding. However, it is important not to equate Huxley's fictional system uncritically with Galton's historical ideas: the novel transforms eugenic concepts into a dystopian system of state control, mass production, and social conditioning. This distinction is important for a scholarly analysis of the relationship between historical eugenics and Huxley's fiction.

Ageing and disease are treated in the World State as obstacles to productivity and social stability. Measures are therefore taken to preserve youthful physical functioning and suppress the social consequences of ageing and illness. This system invites readers to question whether eliminating vulnerability necessarily constitutes human progress. The pursuit of biological perfection may increase physical efficiency while simultaneously reducing opportunities for reflection, dependence, and intergenerational experience.

The engineering program is designed to preserve physical health vitality and extend productivity life. The Director of Hatcheries and Conditioning contrasts the World State with the "bad old days," when old age was associated with retirement, religion, reading, and reflection (Huxley, 1932, p. 49). The contrast highlights the World State's redefinition of human life around productivity, consumption, and perpetual youth. The novel thus invites readers to consider

whether the elimination of ageing can be separated from the loss of experiences traditionally associated with maturity and reflection (Babaei *et al.*, 2013). The ideal sought by the world state is that of a redefined and reshaped human existence devoid of ageing (Babaei *et al.*, 2013). He explains the importance of the youth through his extension of youthful powers and tastes even at sixty. This mirrors the human desire to preserve youthful stamina by concentrating on productivity and flexibility at each level.

Contemporary genetic technologies have contributed to disease diagnosis, prevention, and treatment, but their development also raises ethical questions about human intervention in biological processes (Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2019). The comparison with *Brave New World* is therefore not that contemporary genetic technologies are equivalent to Huxley's dystopian system, but that both contexts raise questions about the purposes, limits, and governance of biological intervention.

Genetic engineering raises important questions. Racial hierarchies and sterilisation maintained by Social Darwinist concepts began with eugenics ideology and evolved to become the nightmare of the world (Edwin, 2012). Genetic engineering could also intensify existing inequalities if access to advanced technologies were determined primarily by wealth. Individuals and groups with greater financial resources could gain disproportionate access to biological enhancements, potentially widening existing social divisions (Theodore, 2022). Such a possibility reinforces the paper's broader concern with the relationship between technological power, social hierarchy, and control.

The replacement of natural variation with technologically engineered traits could also produce new forms of exclusion. Individuals who are not able or willing to access enhancement technologies could be treated as inferior, while technologically enhanced groups could seek exclusive social spaces. From a reader-response perspective, these possibilities encourage readers to connect the fictional world of Huxley with contemporary ethical debates about equality, disability, enhancement, and human dignity.

For Wolfgang Iser, the reader is amidst the literary work of art, and he alone could give concrete meaning to the text. He suggests that a literary text contains blanks or gaps that only the reader can fill (Selden, 1993). Through this lens, it could be said that Huxley's *Brave New World*, though it presents human capacity to transcend nature barriers, raises questions on how genetic engineering, being the result of eugenics, could be implemented. It can be remarked that genetic engineering destined to boost the disabled is becoming a controversial issue. The focus constantly shifts as time goes on, allowing the reader to be more sceptical about the benefits of discoveries. The insight of the reader from their moral, personal and cultural framework is necessary to enable the writer to rediscover their own work (Rosenblatt, 1995).

In addition to genetics, psychological conditioning (J.C. & Fatima, 2016; Porselv & Muneeb, 2026) is employed to maintain citizens in a state of dependency. This is done through hypnopedia or sleep-teaching. Individuals are indoctrinated from childhood to carry state norms, obedience and desires without leaving space for personal reflection (BNW, p.24). The suppression of individuality and psychological conditioning is rampant within the World State. Individuals are prevented from using their creative spark and fulfilling their future aspirations. The suppression of individuality is also evident in characters such as Helmholtz Watson, whose creativity conflicts with the state's narrow expectations (Huxley, 1932, p. 163).

The psychological oppression can be observed throughout the World State despite characters' attempts to conceal or manage their dissatisfaction. Each character lives with some burdens. The inner state of characters highlights their fear and anxieties. Theodore makes a parallel with the real world, explaining the extent of control over human behaviour in different parts of the world. Although it is fictional, psychological conditioning provides readers with clues to determine the impact of conditioning on individuals. Taking away individuals' choice, freedom and capacity to reflect, readers experience a sense of discomfort, allowing them to shift the situation to real-life situations. For readers, the conditioning read throughout the narrative not only allows them to judge everyday situations but also to comprehend the significance attached to the creation of this type of world. For Iser (1978), the absence of Huxley's open moral judgments gives power to every reader to withdraw meaning based on their cultural, intellectual level and understanding of the world. Ghandehari (2013) believes that leaving readers to deduce meaning could give authority to the writer by opening other horizons the writer failed to grasp. He argues that "It is quite interesting to comprehend that history has proved that in several cases, a reader's analysis of a text has shocked the author and even given new insights to him. In other words, the author had never imagined such perceptions in his text as he was creating it word by word" (p. 1382).

Emotional Regulation and the Erasure of Human Bonds

While biological control through the Bokanovsky process and genetic engineering contributes to social stability, the World State's emotional regulation and the erasure of human bonds maintain this stability through intimate and psychological control of its citizens (Ehsan & Sheenam, 2024; Nicol, 2007; Abdeldjalil and Ali Mohamed, 2023). In the world state, soma is used to erase negative and irritating emotions, anxiety and dissatisfaction. It also ensures individual pacification to avoid rebellious thoughts. The state creates a form of power where individuals are stuck, unable to shape their own behaviour and adjust their internal experience based on the various actions they undergo (Hamamra, 2017).

Relationship and sexuality are central to the creation of emotional attachment between people. By regulating these relationships, the World State prevents human connections that result from emotional attachment between two individuals. The World State's eugenic philosophy rejects the unpredictability of moral individuality. Instead of allowing people to struggle and develop their own consciousness, it programs virtue through conditioning and drugs. In a eugenic society, individuals are not trusted to choose virtue; they are designed to behave virtuously. Moral freedom is abolished and taken over by the state. Individual behaviour is harmless because of the conditioning they go through. This performed conditioning, thanks to soma, helps push them to consider all that they do as good, provided it goes in line with the state's ideologies. Virtue and morality become measurable, predictable, and chemically reproducible, perfectly marching the principles of social engineering. For Lawrence, "without responsibility to balance freedom, freedom will degenerate into mere chaos. Only a moral people are free. Freedom from bondage and self-alienation signifies freedom for authentic self-hood" (2020, p.65). The novel invites readers to consider whether happiness remains meaningful when it is achieved through the elimination of moral choice and personal responsibility.

Family is frequently presented in scholarship as a central institution of social life (Rajamohanam *et al.*, 2021). In *Brave New World*, the family is abolished and replaced by the state-controlled hatcheries and conditioning (BNW, p.4). Family is made up of a father, mother and children, while the former educates the latter to be a role model for

society, a model the state finds good to hire and gives opportunities to contribute to the development of society. This is the result of family education, ensuring greater outcomes for society's benefit (Jaramillo *et al.*, 2015). The state is unable to perform such work since it does not have trained individuals who have mastered the art of caring for children. The power of the family and community is interrelated since the child is part of the community.

The world state's rejection of the family can be interpreted as a response to the unpredictable emotional loyalties that family bonds may create. Huxley portrays a world in which power holders fear family ties. This fear stems from the fact that family bonds are incompatible with complete social control. Family bonds constitute a world that believes in loyalty among individuals for the society's growth. These core values prevent the world state from maintaining its power, thus creating a clash between the conventional family and the world state.

The rejection of family bonds is closely connected to the World State's broader obsession with social control. Family becomes a variable that must be fought because it introduces attitudes that disrupt the state norms. The Controller's description of motherhood illustrates both the intensity of familial attachment and the World State's attempt to stigmatise it (BNW, p.33). The description of the family as "appalling dangers" (BNW, p.34) discourages citizens from traditional familial experience.

Family ties can strongly influence individual identity by providing emotional support, cultural values, and a sense of belonging. The social environment in which children grow can shape their behaviours, attitudes, and perceptions. This does not mean that families produce identical individuals; rather, family experience contributes to the development of personal identity and social understanding. Family relationships can foster individuality by providing emotional support, cultural values, and a sense of belonging (Arslan & Arzu, 2023; Ramanovaa *et al.*, 2020). Without intimate bonds, citizens may lack some of the diverse influences that encourage personal growth and self-discovery. In Huxley's World State, the absence of family relationships contributes to the production of homogenised individuals who are easier to regulate.

The state uses promiscuity to counterattack emotional connection. It is taken to be normal to distance people from the bond they could create when they leave that promiscuous state. For Bauman (2003), this situation provokes moral and emotional resistance in readers who understand the meaning and fulfillment that come from intimacy, loyalty and commitment. Love, which creates intimacy and commitment, becomes irrelevant and instrumentalised by the state for social efficiency (Rosenblatt, 1995; Holland, 1975). Haraway (1991) considers life manipulation, which is performed by the world state, to be a potential loss of authentic human experience. Thus, depriving individuals of authentic human experience highlight the tension between engineered stability and innate human desires as found in characters like Bernard and Helmholtz Watson.

CONCLUSION

Brave New World presents a society in which technological prowess has conquered human life. It relies on the fact that technological advancement in engineering creates unparalleled stability, stimulating readers' questioning. This situation has provoked a profound cost to human depth, autonomy, and authentic emotional experience. The loss of uniqueness creates an imbalance in characters' performance, which is visible through readers' interpretation. Through the use of eugenics, genetic engineering and psychological conditioning, the

state has stripped away citizens' autonomy, deconstructing their internal longing at the expense of that of the state. Citizens exist to please the state through their conform to behaviour. The World State builds a superficially harmonious society that suppresses individuality and reshapes happiness as the absence of pain. It reshapes happiness as the absence of pain, focusing on soma and promiscuity as the alternative that ignites that happiness. Soma, promiscuity, and social conditioning become mechanisms through which this artificial happiness is maintained.

By psychologically and biologically controlling citizens, the state gets the drive to scrutinise every citizen to ensure that all conform to the pre-established norms. Biological and psychological interventions eliminate all vulnerable traits, desires and tiny conflicts that could exist in traditional human life. This elimination makes readers question the very essence of life, in which pain, human desires and vulnerabilities are suppressed. Readers thus critically interpret these dynamics as ambiguous, condemning the overall engineered life that encompasses stability and happiness, and call for an engaging emotional and intellectual response. A response that does not exclude human suffering, authentic human experience and deep relationships.

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