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**Topic:** Symbolism in 'Brave New World' by Aldous Huxley, a science fiction novel about a dystopic future."

**Research question:** How does Aldous Huxley employ symbolism to portray authority in his novel *Brave New World*?

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## Table of Contents

|                                                                                      |           |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| <b><i>A-Introduction:</i></b> .....                                                  | <b>1</b>  |
| <b>A.1 Dystopic Society and Symbolism in Literature</b> .....                        | <b>2</b>  |
| <b><i>B- How Huxley Uses Symbolism to Portray a Dystopia</i></b> .....               | <b>4</b>  |
| <b>B.1 Hatcheries, Conditioning Centers and Predetermination of Human Life</b> ..... | <b>4</b>  |
| <b>Mottos, Slogans and Hypnopedia, the Mass Control Tools of the State</b> .....     | <b>6</b>  |
| <b>B.2 Soma, the Instant Problem Solver</b> .....                                    | <b>8</b>  |
| <b>B.3 Henry Ford and the Theme Fordism and Consumerism</b> .....                    | <b>10</b> |
| <b>B.4 William Shakespeare, the Symbol of Eradicated Emotions</b> .....              | <b>12</b> |
| <b><i>C-Conclusion</i></b> .....                                                     | <b>15</b> |
| <b><i>D-References:</i></b> .....                                                    | <b>17</b> |

## A-Introduction:

Aldous Huxley's books are well renowned not only for his clever and realistic character designs, but also for the presence of real-world issues in his literary works. Huxley frequently addresses these issues like overreliance on technology, loss of individualism, consumerism, propaganda, hedonism and education. Thanks to his philosopher trait, Huxley is also well known for his use of psychedelics in his explorations of human freedom, consciousness, free will and personalities, which can be observed in the novel *Brave New World*.

The novel *Brave New World* was written in 1931 and was published in 1932. It takes place in a distant future, where technology governs people's lives, where humans are not born but produced, where traditional values are forgotten, where psychedelic drugs are part of daily life and the government has full control over its subjects. The novel revolves around the protagonists Bernard Marx- who dislikes the society's status and is an outsider- and John, who is a 'savage', born and raised away from the modern society. In the novel, Bernard is unsatisfied with the life he is living and makes a radical decision to take a journey to John's home and introduce him to the society. This, however, is a turning point in the novel and completely destroys the lives of both men, while showcasing the modern societies' superficial value and satisfaction systems and how totalitarian governments use this control their subjects.

The book clearly reflects early twentieth century England's atmosphere. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, England was the science capital of the world. Breakthroughs in scientific knowledge were happening rapidly, one after another, and this trend led people

to believe that technology can be a perfect solution to all of humanities problems in the future. In fact, the idea 'Eugenics' -which refers to the selective breeding of humans to create 'superior' races through technology- arised just about then in England due to these advancements in technological capabilities. This rapid advancement in technology also brought forth the movement of consumerism and mass production. *Brave New World* criticizes all these socio-political ideas, serving as a warning to the future of modern technologically advanced societies.

In this essay, the literary work *Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley will be thoroughly examined, to explore the literary device symbolism used to portray a dystopic future of modern society. This investigation will focus the literary device symbolism, and its effect on portraying a dystopic society in the novel.

## A.1 Dystopic Society and Symbolism in Literature

A dystopia is defined as 'an imagined state or society in which there is great suffering or injustice, typically one that is totalitarian or post-apocalyptic' by the New Oxford American Dictionary. Since 1924, the theme of a dystopic future society has been explored continuously in the world of literature, and thus the genre of dystopian novels was born. A dystopian novel refers to a novel in which a dystopia or dystopic themes are present. The beginning of the modern dystopia genre in literature is considered as the book *We* (published in 1924) by Yevgeny Zamyatin. This is because this was the first novel that clearly established truly dystopic themes such as totalitarian government,

surveillance and governmental control. Since *We*, the genre evolved and broadened its scope to include themes such as gender inequality, environmental damage and technology.

Typically, a dystopian novel's main purpose is to serve as a caution to the society by extrapolating the current situation and criticizing the contemporary socio-political status of societies. They mirror up the real world and make the readers question and resist concerning modern trends. With regards to this information, *Brave New World* is a perfect example of a dystopian novel. The novel educates its readers about the impacts of overreliance on technology, totalitarian governments, and the cons of constant satisfaction, while employing symbolism to achieve this purpose.

Symbolism is the literary device of representing a deeper idea through emblematic figures. It enables authors to convey abstract themes, reinforce their emotional impact, build up the atmosphere and make the story intriguing. In literature, it is hard to encounter a successful novel without this technique, as it is considered the most efficient and aesthetic way to convey an author's message to its readers. This is the case with *Brave New World*, as there are several themes and socio-political ideas criticized and emblemized by physical objects and concrete figures in the novel.

## B- How Huxley Uses Symbolism to Portray a Dystopia

### B.1 Hatcheries, Conditioning Centers and Predetermination of Human Life

Hatcheries and Conditioning Centers in *Brave New World* show how predetermination of human lives contributes to totalitarianism. In the novel, citizens of the dystopic society live a predetermined and engineered life. They are produced in what is called 'Hatcheries and Conditioning Centers' – scientific labs advanced in genetic science to produce human embryos according to the society's needs. In a process called 'The Bokanovsky Process', they clone these human embryos and turn hatcheries into industrial human production centers (in fact the Hatchery center is described as a 'squat grey building' with a cold atmosphere just like a factory(p1)). The government produces embryos of varying qualities of humans, from 'Epsilons' whose embryos are disrupted with alcohol and lack of oxygen, and are working in extremely unpleasant hard labor jobs; to 'Alphas' who are physically and mentally superior and are tasked with running the state of the new world. In the novel, the Director of Hatcheries says, '96 identical jobs for 96 identical humans(p11)', indicating that they produce humans according to their needs and implying the predestination and predetermination of human lives in the dystopian society. This further enhances the feeling of constant control by the government.

These Hatchery centers not only produce but also condition these engineered human beings. They condition infants to link education and wilderness with pain and suffering by electrifying the babies as soon as they see books and flowers. The Hatcheries also consider the financial income of the government and promote consumption habits of their future citizens in these centers. "We condition the masses to hate the country" says

the 'Director' of one of the Hatchery centers in the novel, "But simultaneously we condition them to love all country sports. At the same time, we see to it that all country sports shall entail the use of elaborate apparatus. So that they consume manufactured articles as well as transport. Hence those electric shocks. (p18-19)." This quote evinces how the World State deliberately manipulates its subjects both by means of consumption behavior and leisure activities for economic benefit.

The Hatcheries represent the absolute control of the government of their citizens' life via technology and the mechanization of human life. They symbolize how the citizens' lives are predetermined by the government, how the free will is taken out from the equation, how consumption habits are forcefully imposed on humans and how technology can become a tool for these crimes against humanity. The totalitarian government in the novel ensures that themes like individuality are abolished in the society and every individual is engineered perfectly for its mission, therefore creating a seemingly happy community via these Hatcheries. This situation refers to the totalitarian governments' absolute control demands over its citizens in a dystopic novel. Therefore, the Hatcheries ultimately symbolize the government's control over people in a dystopian society by representing themes like predetermination and conditioned habits.

## Mottos, Slogans and Hypnopedia, the Mass Control Tools of the State

Mottos, Slogans and Hypnopedia are mass control tools in the novel and demonstrate how public manipulation eradicates individualism and free thoughts.

In the novel, masses are taught various mottos and slogans by the state of the new world. These mottos are intended to root inside citizens' consciousness and shape their actions. Such indented actions are; fulfilling satisfaction demands, suppression of individuality, and promotion of materialism and consumerism. The state repeated these slogans and mottos to the children out loud while they were asleep in an advanced scientific process called Hypnopedia. Later these mottos and the morals they represent become subconsciousness in the minds of citizens when they grew up because of this. Hypnopedia is therefore the symbol of mind control and indoctrination of totalitarian governments. By brainwashing its subjects with hypnopedia, the government ensures all its citizens act according to the state's interest without thinking critically. There are several slogans taught to citizens in the novel with this purpose.

The slogans 'Ending is better than mending' and 'The more the stiches the less the riches' encourage consumerism and materialism among the masses to feed the government financially. These slogans ensure that the economy of the state is stable, and citizens are preoccupied with superficial satisfactions by implying that repairing goods and not buying new ones instead is undesirable; because mending, repairing and not consuming new goods instead doesn't improve the wellbeing of the state, and therefore is not encouraged by the World State.

Another example of these mottos is 'Community, Identity, Stability'. This slogan refers to the core societal values of the state in the novel. While the slogan might seem



like it considers the wellbeing of the citizens and a healthy social harmony within the society, it does not. Because in fact, the method which achieving this kind of stability do not rely on the improvement of human morality and the progress of ideology, but the government's totalitarianism (1). In this motto, 'community' symbolizes how individualism is destroyed and replaced in the society. In the new world, the government despises and discourages individualism and loneliness. This is because the world state believes that on their own, citizens don't have anything to keep their strongest emotions in control and therefore have the potential to degrade the mechanism of the dystopic society. Therefore, highlighting the theme of collectivism aids the state in their efforts to stay in absolute power. 'Identity' represents the loss of personal sovereignty. Rather than developing naturally, identity is enforced and applied upon the citizens by the government through manipulation, hypnopedia and other slogans. Therefore, the slogan serves as a cover up which disguises the government's intentions. Lastly, 'Stability' symbolizes the primary concern of the government, which is keeping the society in check and under control. In the novel, stability is achieved in the society through eradication of individualism and promotion of collectivism, which connects the other phrases in the slogan to the message behind it.

Ultimately the words 'community', 'identity' and 'stability' refer to the fact that the government wants to keep its citizens in check by ensuring that they are never alone, are never a free individual and are carrying on the roles that are determined by the government. This slogan acts as a tool assuring the citizens that the governments values are holding the society together and symbolizes the conditioning of the masses in the novel to obey the state like mindless and emotionless beasts.

The slogans show how governments obtrude consumerism and other themes and socio-political ideas to their subjects for their benefit; they show how societal values are shaped for obedience and economical profit. Hypnopedia represents how scientific advancements can be used to achieve this purpose and how governments impose those ideas to their subjects. Therefore, these abstract symbols representing social control and conformity, ultimately symbolize control mechanisms of totalitarian governments to maintain order in the society by eradicating personal thought and emotions.

## B.2 Soma, the Instant Problem Solver

Soma in *Brave New World* show how instant satisfaction demands of humans are used against them by contemporary governments to erase their individualism and freewill.

In the novel, citizens of the new world would often feel despair or sorrow, they become stressed or anxious... In those times, '*Soma*' aids them. *Soma* is a psychedelic drug that eases one's mind, calmes him/her and makes one lose touch with reality. *Soma* variants are issued to every citizen by the government in the novel and there are even *Soma* holidays, holidays where people take *Soma* and lay off. The government also encourages soma by using slogans and mottos like 'a gram (of *Soma*) is better than a damn' and they even hand out free *Soma* to citizens in need. But the main reason of this act is to numb the citizens with constant satisfaction and tighten their control over them.

The main function of *Soma* is mass control. The government in *Brave New World* wanted obedient and duteous subjects to have a better grip on governing them. They also

wanted people to seek out comfort, pleasure and immediate satisfactions with these drugs in order to prevent any rebellion against the current social system. *Soma* numbed the public, served as a brief run away from the real-world problems into the realm of contentment and satisfaction, and made the citizens believe that their society is perfect the way it is. By swapping out authentic feelings with instant satisfaction, *Soma* symbolizes the government that controls its citizens through engineered pleasure. Mustapha Mond, a world leader in the novel talks about soma as: 'And if ever, by some unlucky chance, anything unpleasant should somehow happen, why, there's always soma to give you a holiday from the facts. And there's always soma to calm your anger, to reconcile you to your enemies, to make you patient and long-suffering. In the past you could only accomplish these things by making a great effort and after years of hard moral training. Now, you swallow two or three half-gramme tablets, and there you are. Anybody can be virtuous now. (p209-210)' These words not only imply that soma is what keeps the government in full control of the citizens, but also that it is what citizens crave in the society. *Soma* attracts citizens because of the desire and governmental enforced necessity during hypnopedia and other processes to avoid pain and discomfort, preventing citizens from ever becoming an individual with free will. This is because all their thoughts are silenced while they are under the influence of *Soma*, and they are constantly in this state.

The backbone of the society in the new world is constant and instant pleasure and satisfaction. By ensuring everyone is content every time, the government strategically eliminates any risk of opposition and criticism. *Soma* makes people forget their troubles, hallucinate and experience whatever they want virtually and offers citizens a comfortable

place for relaxation and happiness. Thanks to the widespread distribution and consumption of this drug, every citizen in the novel is content and satisfied with their life and no one opposes the rule of the government. Therefore, *Soma* eventually functions as the states harness of the public, as a way of self-sustaining control mechanism that never fails because it is what the citizens want, instant satisfaction over independent individualism.

### B.3 Henry Ford and the Theme Fordism and Consumerism

In *Brave New World*, “Ford” represents how modern humans enslaved themselves with technological advancements.

In the novel, the government tries to please its subjects as much as possible in order to improve its authority over them. They think that their subjects need to connect to a higher entity, to seek resolve and salvation, and need rituals that connect them socially and mentally in order for them to be obedient and calm towards the government. The government fills out that need with the theme ‘Fordism’. Fordism revolves around the modern society’s creator, Henry Ford, in the novel and replaces religion in a safe way for the government. Ford, in the novel, was the pioneer in the industrialization of humans, abolishment of history and the act of imposing people with overconsumption habits. Therefore, its divinization symbolizes the replacement of genuine spiritual comfort with a mechanized and industrialized belief system to promote consumption. Fordism represents the state’s industrial ideology and the quasi-religious force that governs the

thoughts of its citizens, further enhancing the totalitarian government's grip on their subjects.

In the novel Ford functions as a control mechanism influencing citizens' actions by a number of ways. One of these ways is its application in everyday language. The Fordist phrases and words embedded inside the language in the novel, dictate the thoughts of the citizens. The phrases 'Ford be praised' and 'Fordship' replace Christian idioms ('lord be praised' and 'lordship') and shifts the focus and source of conformity from spirituality and authentic feelings to consumption and industrialization. This reform on religion showcases how ideological worship becomes a tool for public control via everyday language. Another example would be the 'T' symbol which is used on many buildings and governmental institutions. The 'T' is a reference to the Ford's Model T car, and the Christian cross in the outside reality of the novel. The transformation of a sacred symbol to a corporate image showcases the degradation of human spirituality and emotions, illustrating that the government appropriated the symbolic power of emotional and spiritual affection to support their consumerist and industrialist ideology. Eventually the theme 'Fordism' symbolizes the consumerist ideology in the industrialized dystopic society.

## B.4 William Shakespeare, the Symbol of Eradicated Emotions

In the novel, the great English author William Shakespeare from outside the novel's fictional reality and his literary works, represent the emotional and intellectual side of mankind that the totalitarian government conscientiously extirpated from the society. Shakespeare's books often portray moral dilemmas, linguistic and intellectual richness, individual passion and thoughts in depth. His books urge their readers to question their morals and ideas about various topics ranging from love to fear of death, from power and ambition to identity and self-discovery... These themes, and the act of questioning and thinking about these themes, are considered as a danger to the perfect society in the novel by the world leaders. This is because the leaders of the new world rule the society on a constant satisfaction and happiness promise. They retain their control over their subjects by ensuring them that everything will go their way in life and if it doesn't, the government is there to help them and satisfy their unending demand for happiness-immediately. But when questioning the morals established by the government, engaging in ethical dilemmas, making choices that have dire consequences and love relationships based on emotions and feelings enter the equation, this promise of the state fades away. The state starts to lose its grip on its subjects as people start to suffer and experience unease and upset. To prevent this, the government banned all works of William Shakespear from the public, aiming to terminate individual thoughts and unpleasant conundrums. This improved the mental happiness of the citizens and the government's authority over them, but reduced their ability to evaluate and solve problems, eradicated free-will, emotions and genuine human interactions.

Shakespeare represents the loss of genuine human thoughts and emotions and how totalitarian governments use this to their advantage and strengthen their authority. With regards to this, it can be concluded that the censorship of William Shakespeare isn't only about suppressed individuality and free-will, but also governmental control in the dystopia. Shakespeare is the symbol of collective cultural and historical memory of the society that the government tries to get rid of in order to sustain its control over the world.

The conflict between genuine emotions and free-will versus art censorship and governmental control is addressed in the novel by Mustapha Mond's and John's separate thoughts and their interactions. In the novel Mustapha Mond, a world leader who represents the totalitarian authority, believes the art that stimulates questioning and nurtures emotions are an obstacle in front of public happiness in the society. He argues that such literary works introduce unpredictability and dissatisfaction within the community, disrupting the perfect system the state has established. On the other hand, John, a so-called savage by the state, argues that the happiness that comes without individual emotions, decisions, and thinking are just superficial and temporary. According to him, authentic human experience is inseparable from suffering, stress and dissatisfaction. In the novel, the Savage says. "But the tears are necessary. Don't you remember what *Othello* said? If after every tempest come such calms, may the winds blow till they have awakened death. (p210)". This reference from Shakespeare's *Othello* play indicates that problems and unpleasant situations-like violent storms- are welcomed by the protagonist because they bring calm and happiness with them. With this statement, the savage conveys that, it is the burden that comes with contentment that makes our happiness actually valuable. However, Mustapha Mond, the representative of the state,

refutes this idea and says that it was righteous to “shift the emphasis from truth and beauty to comfort and happiness”. He adds; “Mass production demanded the shift. Universal happiness keeps the wheels steadily turning; truth and beauty can’t (p201) ”. This perspective of the state showcases that in the eyes of the government; genuine emotions, facts and burdens that come with natural happiness- all of which are symbolized by Shakespeare- are hurdles in front of a calm, peaceful and obedient consumerist society. This conflict demonstrates Aldous Huxley’s critique of the modern society: a society that eliminates emotion and free will to preserve stability and authority, rendering their citizens as lifeless and obedient products serving the state and the societies collective comfort rather than individual happiness and emotions.

William Shakespear represents authentic human emotions, thoughts and free will; attributes which oppose the totalitarian government’s mechanized and stabilized happiness industry and absolute authority. It demonstrates the modern societies and governments’ superficial value systems and how these values undermine free-will and bona fide emotions.



## C-Conclusion

The novel *Brave New World* is a forewarning about the future of the modern society. It alerts its readers about the dangers of new technological advancements in the purpose of controlling the public, the hazards of seeking out temporary wellbeing and satisfaction, and how totalitarian regimes could take advantage of all of that by eradicating the society of its core values and manipulating them both emotionally and socially by scientific means. The novel points out that governments can't only use violence, brutality and fear, but they can also use sedation and manipulation to control its subjects.

In this investigation, it has been found out that the novel employs symbolism frequently to address these issues of the contemporary society of the world. The soma symbolizes the neediness for instant gratification and contentment of modern humans. It shows how temporary satisfactions can destroy societal values and the order of the society. The predestination of humans through Hatcheries represents how modern governments produce similar individuals according to their financial needs, eliminating individualism and free will while feeding consumption and materialism. The slogans and mottos symbolize the social engineering and the omnipresent government propaganda that humans experience in their everyday life. The Fordism theme and the works of Shakespeare illustrates how the authority mechanizes everyday life of its subjects by replacing individuality and genuine spiritual and emotional satisfaction with consumption and industrialization.

Ultimately, with the use of symbols, the author Aldous Huxley conveys the message that how instant satisfaction pursuits, and the shallow demands of the modern society enable authoritarian control by eliminating individuality and free-thinking. Through

symbols such as *Soma*, *Hatcheries*, *Fordism*, *Shakespeare* and *Slogans*; Aldous Huxley illustrates a society where the people desire totalitarianism. This showcases that when individuals don't employ critical thinking and cease to be an individual themselves in exchange for social comfort and stability, the totalitarian governments easily gain power over them.

This novel serves as a warning to both modern governments and citizens about the dystopic state, where freedom and individuality are absent, that the world can turn into if they ignore the importance of individuality and critical thinking via frequent employment of symbolism.

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