Aldous Huxley was fascinated throughout his career by the idea of Utopia, the society in which change has settled down into a stasis of perfection. In his last novel, Island, he saw it as a benign perfection in a peaceful & ecologically aware society guided by mystics. However, in his much better-known Brave New World, published 3 decades before in 1932, he saw it as a malign society controlled by technocrats whose aim is complete happiness, but in whose hands happiness is equated with the total absence of freedom.

Brave New World is both a fantasy about the future & a satire on present trends. In both roles, it carries conviction because of the expert & convincing handling of detail to create a plausible world. It is England 600 years ahead, & Huxley has been wise enough not to change it beyond recognition. It is the country we know & a different world, & this paradox sustains our attention.

The society of the future is a parody of Plato’s republic, with a small group of World Controllers ruling 5 castes of subjects, divided not merely socially but biologically, since they have been conditioned to their future tasks in the bottles where they were bred. To preserve happiness, the World Controllers discard everything that might provoke either thought or passion.

The world’s stable now [says Mustapha Mond, Controller for England]. People are happy; they get what they want, & they never want what they can’t get. They’re well off; they’re safe; they’re never ill; they’re not afraid of death; they’re blissfully ignorant of passion & old age; they’re plagued with no mothers or fathers; they’ve got no wives, or children, or lovers to feel strongly about; they’re so conditioned that they practically can’t help behaving as they ought to behave. There is no need for violent or overt repression.

Men are so conditioned from the time the spermatazoon enters the egg in the Hatchery that there is little chance of their breaking into rebellion; if they do become discontented there are always drugs to waft them into the heavens of restorative illusion. Thus, the Controllers are able to govern with a softly firm hand; the police use whiffs of anaesthetic instead of truncheons, & those over brilliant individuals who do not fit the established pattern are allowed to indulge their heretical notions in the intellectual quarantine of exile.

The daily lives of the conditioned inhabitants of the brave new world are passed in a carefully regulated pattern of production & consumption. Since it was found that too much leisure created restlessness, scientists are discouraged from devising labour saving inventions, & the working day is followed by gregarious pleasures so organized that elaborate machinery is needed & maximum consumption is encouraged.

Complete freedom of sexual behavior, plus the availability of drugs, provides release from all ordinary frustrations. The abolition of viviparous birth has made families & all other permanent attachments unnecessary; individuals have become merely cells, each occupying his special position in the carefully differentiated fabric of society.
Not all this would make a novel of its own. Huxley brings it to life by showing the hidden perils of any attempt at a perfect society.

The **higher castes**, the **Alphas & Betas**, cannot be as closely conditioned as the **worker castes**, because their tasks involve intelligence & the occasional need to use judgment, & even the best conditioning is not foolproof. Therefore, we get individualists

- like the **stunted Bernard Marx** who has a heretical longing for solitude,
- like **Lenina Crowne** who is inclined to remain too constant in her attachments,
- like **Helmholtz Watson** who secretly writes forbidden poems about the self instead of slogans for the state.

The crisis in the life of these 3 misfits is provoked by a journey into unfamiliarity.

**Bernard** takes **Lenina** on a trip to the reservation for primitive people.

There they discover a **woman** from their own society who was lost years ago & since then has lived & brought up a normally **born child** among the Indians.

The young man--**John**--is not only a savage; he has also acquired a copy of **Shakespeare**, which, with the mixed heathen-Christian native cults, has enriched his language & shaped his outlook. In our sense, he is far more “**cultured,**” if not more “**civilized,**” than the Utopians.

**Bernard** brings the **Savage** back to London, where he creates a sensation by his baroque behavior & Elizabethan speech. On **Bernard & Helmholtz**, he has the effect of crystallizing their sense of difference from society, while Lenina lapses into an old-fashioned attachment to the Savage, who meanwhile has conceived a romantic attachment to her.

**Bernard, Helmholtz, & the Savage** create a minor rebellion by interrupting a distribution of soma (a drug) to the workers. **Bernard & Helmholtz** are exiled to join those who have shown themselves **unreliable** (the real intellectual elite of the brave new world).

The savage is forbidden to join them, because the Controllers wish to continue the experiment of subjecting him to “**civilization**.”

Since he cannot go home, the savage tries to hide out in the Surrey countryside, but Utopia’s equivalent of newshounds discover him, & the fervent pleasure-seekers of the brave new world, hearing that he is flogging himself like a Mexican penitent, descend on him in their helicopters.

**Lenina** is foremost among them. **There is a great orgy in which he first whips & then possesses her.** The next day, revolted by Utopia & his surrender to its seductions, he hangs himself. It is the savage who alone, since he is the only character conscious of the nature of tragedy, can embody the tragic possibilities of man’s future.