

A Study on John's Survival Predicament in Brave New World

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Abstract

Brave New World is a novel written by Aldous Huxley in 1931. Brave New World depicts a future world more than 500 years later, where human life is rich, science and technology are highly developed, people accept a variety of restrictions and education satisfied with the status quo, everything is standardized and unified, and people's desires can be satisfied anytime and anywhere. However, John, as a Savage living on a Savage Reservation, finds himself greatly impacted and faced with a serious survival predicament when he is confronted with the completely different moral concepts and lifestyle of Savage Reservation and World State. In view of this, this thesis adopts the text analysis method to interpret John's survival predicament in Brave New World. First, this thesis analyzes John's cultural struggle and social exploration in the Savage Reservation. Secondly, it analyzes the survival crisis and moral predicament John encountered when he came to a World State, where completely different from his original living environment. Finally, through the analysis of John's death, the author reveals the complicated situation he is facing, thus demonstrating the author's dystopian intention. After analysis, this thesis believes that although the World State in the novel seems to be a world where people can live without worry, but excessive mechanization and technological control will bring serious consequences, and cause many people to doubt and despair about their identity and real life. The interpretation of Brave New World from the perspective of John's survival predicament not only provides a new research perspective for the novel, but also provides a warning and educational summary for the high degree of control brought about by the rapid development of technology in modern society.

Keywords

Survival Predicament; Brave New World; Identity; Technical Control

1. Introduction

Technology is changing very fast today. It affects how we live. Smartphones make life easier. Transportation is better. Medical care improves. We have more entertainment choices. Life is more comfortable because of technology. But technology also controls us. People are easily influenced by outside forces. We depend too much

on technology. This control affects not just physical things but also our thoughts. Without realizing it, we lose ourselves. We become trapped by technology. This phenomenon has already been profoundly portrayed in *Brave New World* (1932) by English writer Aldous Huxley (1894-1963), who was gifted with an acute and far-ranging intelligence.

In the fictional world of the novel, which denotes a nightmarish vision of a future society, technology is highly advanced, and people's lives appear to be happy and fulfilling, but in reality, they are filled with hypocrisy and absurdity. The novel's protagonist, John, is born in the Savage Reservation, where relatively primitive lifestyles and values are preserved. However, when he is brought to the World State he faces a great shock. In the World State, people are enslaved by technology and materialism, losing their freedom and dignity. This is a politically indifferent country where people enjoy the boundless freedom it offers and abuse soma (Side, 2021). John attempts to resist this control but is powerless, eventually falling into a desperate situation. He witnesses the death of his mother, becomes disillusioned and enraged by the phenomena of the World State, and ultimately chooses death. John's story reveals the fragility of human nature in the face of technology and materialism, and the consequences of excessive pursuit of technological advancement and material wealth. This thesis adopts the text analysis method to interpret John's survival predicament and the relative implications.

2. John's Survival Predicament in the Savage Reservation

2.1. John's Cultural Struggle

"Linda was born in the World State. She had come from the Other Place long ago, before John was born, with a man who was his father" (Huxley, 2016, p. 141). However, Linda accidentally fell off a cliff, and some hunters from Malpais found her and brought her to the pueblo. Having grown up in the World State, Linda felt deeply unhappy about living in a place she had once scorned. Therefore, after John's birth, she constantly instilled the culture and knowledge of the World State into her son, gradually sparking John's interest in the World State.

Linda instilled in John the novel ideas of the World State, emphasizing its advanced technology, high efficiency, and rejection of religion and traditional beliefs. In Linda's eyes, compared to the World State, the Reservation was a primitive and backward place. "She felt deeply dissatisfied with life there and would often express her complaints, even resenting the existence of John, her own son. The happiest times were when she told him about the Other Place" (Huxley, 2016, p. 154). Linda frequently painted vivid pictures of the World State's prosperity and perfection. The innovative principles of the World State became deeply ingrained in John's mind, filling him with a profound longing for that distant world.

Linda taught him to read. With a piece of charcoal she drew pictures on the wall—an animal sitting down, a baby inside a bottle; then she wrote the letters. THE CAT IS

ON THE MAT. THE TOT IS IN THE POT. He learned quickly and easily. When he knew how to read all the words she wrote on the wall, Linda opened her big wooden box and pulled out from under those funny little red trousers she never wore a thin little book... He began reading. *The Chemical and Bacteriological Conditioning of the Embryo. Practical Instructions for Beta Embryo-Store Workers.* It took him a quarter of an hour to read the title alone. (Huxley, 2007, p. 156)

Using charcoal, Linda helped John acquire basic language and reading skills by drawing animals and writing sentences on the wall. In the context of the Reservation, where formal education was lacking, Linda's cultural teaching was particularly valuable. Through this learning process, John developed an initial understanding of the World State. He began reading books and gradually distanced himself psychologically from the traditional culture of the Reservation. "It was fairly easy, if he thought hard enough about the reading, to pretend that he didn't mind when they made fun of him" (Huxley, 2016, p. 157), John often thought to himself. He longed to learn about the World State's culture and even dreamed of one day entering that world.

Linda's frequent references to the World State not only instilled in John a longing for it but also gradually widened the gap between him and the traditional culture of the Reservation. As Liu Xiang noted, the intrusion of modern culture into traditional culture often triggers a sense of resentment through its superficial splendor, leading individuals to feel dissatisfaction and rejection toward their traditional environment (Liu, 2023). Linda's cultural education had a similar effect, causing John to struggle with fully embracing the culture of the Reservation while fostering an excessive longing for the World State.

Moreover, due to John's unique identity, he was subjected to rejection and ridicule in the Reservation. "Linda's disdain for traditional culture further exacerbated the cultural struggle he faced there. The more boys pointed and sang, the harder he read" (Huxley, 2016, p. 157). John attempted to gain confidence by aligning himself with his mother's culture, but this alignment was one-sided. His understanding of the World State remained limited to the realm of sensory modernity, as determined by his economic position and the nature of cultural transmission (Liu, 2023). This incomplete understanding caused John's fantasies about the World State to deviate increasingly from reality, ultimately serving as the catalyst for cultural conflict.

Linda's cultural education not only fostered John's expectations for the World State but also instilled in him a sense of resistance toward the culture and lifestyle of the Reservation. When individuals face survival pressures and cultural conflicts, they often fall into a state of being present but not belonging (Lu, 2023). This is particularly evident in John's case: although he lived in the Reservation, he could not integrate into its cultural traditions. At the same time, his idealized vision of the World State could not reasonably exist in reality. This cultural conflict and crisis, experi-

enced in a liminal space, ultimately led John to his tragic fate..

2.2. John's Social Quest

John's mother, Linda, is from the World State, but John himself grew up on the Savage Reservation. Due to John's normal outsider heritage and a different upbringing than traditional Savages, he is neither fully accepted by the reservation nor able to identify himself as a member of the World State. This predicament of identity puts John in a marginal position on the Savage Reservation, and he cannot find his own sense of social belonging.

Linda came from the World State, where she had long been accustomed to a highly technological and automated way of life. The social environment of the Reservation was entirely foreign to her. Even after arriving at the Reservation, Linda continued to adhere to the lifestyle of the World State and chose to engage in relationships with multiple men. To the relatively conservative people of the Reservation, such behavior was considered highly immoral and promiscuous. The social structure of the Reservation was built upon strict traditional norms and religious beliefs, and Linda's actions not only violated the moral code that everyone rigorously followed but were also seen as a desecration of local culture and values. "The boys began to point their fingers at him. In the strange other worlds they said that Linda was bad" (Huxley, 2016, p. 156). The people of the Reservation regarded Linda as a "loose woman" and ostracized her from mainstream society.

These stigmas not only affected Linda but also directly impacted John. As Linda's son, John bore the burden of his mother's tarnished reputation and suffered the social rejection that came with it. Since Linda was considered "unclean", John was likewise deemed an "illegitimate" child. He was mocked and excluded by his peers. They called her names he did not understand, but that he knew were bad names. "One day they sang a song about her, again and again. He threw stones at them. They threw back; a sharp stone cut his cheek" (Huxley, 2016, p. 156). John was not only unable to form friendships with other children but was also regarded as "impure" or even as someone who should not exist.

Linda had an admirer named Pope, toward whom John harbored complex and contradictory emotions. It was Pope's presence that intensified John's resistance to the predicament in which he found himself.

His heart seemed to have disappeared and left a hole. He was empty. Empty, and cold, and rather sick, and giddy. He leaned against the wall to steady himself. Remorseless, treacherous, lecherous ... Like drums, like the men singing for the corn, like magic, the words repeated and repeated themselves in his head. From being cold he was suddenly hot. His cheeks burnt with the rush of blood, the room swam and darkened before his eyes. He ground his teeth. "I'll kill him, I'll kill him," he kept saying. And suddenly there were more words. (Huxley, 2016, p. 161)

Pope's presence symbolizes Linda's promiscuous lifestyle, and it is precisely this

lifestyle that renders John an unaccepted outcast in the society of the Reservation. In the quoted passage, John's actions and psychological state exhibit extreme anger and loss of control. This irrational state is a manifestation of his existential crisis. The repeated appearance of the words "remorseless, treacherous, lecherous" symbolizes John's resentment toward the behavior of both his mother and Pope. This is not only an accusation against Pope but also a desperate reflection of John's own predicament. He can neither accept Linda's World State ideals nor fully integrate into the moral system of the Reservation. The social isolation imposed by others, combined with John's internal turmoil, leaves him emotionally and socially estranged.

The reservation is a simple place. People follow old traditions. They perform special ceremonies often. These ceremonies help them honor their ancestors and gods. They also help keep their culture alive. The ceremonies are both religious and social. By doing them, people feel they belong. They know who they are and where they fit in their community.

John, however, is a special case. As a "half-breed", he carries a different cultural background and set of values from the local people. This difference makes him somewhat of an outsider, excluded from participating in the ritual ceremonies that symbolize the core activities of society. This exclusion is not only a way for the locals to maintain traditional order but also a form of control and ostracism directed at John.

Suddenly, one of the men stepped forward, caught him by the arm, and pulled him out of the ranks. He broke free and dodged back into his place among the others. This is the man struck him, pulled his hair. "Not for you, white-hair!" "Not for the son of the she-dog," said one of the other men. The boys laughed. "Go!" And as he still hovered on the fringes of the group, "Go!" the men shouted again. One of them bent down, took a stone, threw it, "Go, go, go!" (Huxley, 2016, p. 165)

The crowd physically struggled against John, tearing him away from their ranks. Although he desperately "broke free and dodged back into his place among the others" (Huxley, 2016, p. 165), his resistance only provoked more violent attacks. The barrage of insulting words cut into him like a sharp blade, wounding not only his self-esteem but also completely denying his legitimacy as a member of society on both cultural and hereditary levels. John was ruthlessly cast onto the opposing side of this society.

The ceremonies mean a lot to the Reservation people. They show who they are. John can't join these ceremonies. This makes him confused about where he belongs. He is neither fully a member of the Reservation nor entirely aligned with the World State as described by Linda, leaving him unable to clearly define his place (Mu, 2019). John thinks joining the ceremonies will make people accept him. He wants this badly. But people reject him completely. This hurts him deeply and he starts

doubting whether his life has any purpose. The oppression he experiences makes him feel that his freedom and rights have been violated, preventing him from living according to his own will and forcing him to conform to societal expectations (Lu, 2023).

However, it is precisely after being denied participation in the ritual that John begins to recognize the deprivation of his freedom and develops a yearning to break free from the constraints of the Reservation and pursue true liberty. This pursuit of freedom becomes a driving force within him, compelling him to resist societal oppression (Xiu & Yang, 2024). It also serves as a crucial factor in his decision to accept Bernard's invitation to the World State.

3. John's Survival Predicament in the World State

3.1. John's Identity Crisis

John comes from a reservation, a place that, although lacking the highly structured rules and advanced technology of the New World, is a world filled with warmth. With great anticipation, John enters the New World, where towering skyscrapers reach toward the sky, flying cars weave through the air, and crowds of people, impeccably dressed but with blank expressions, move through the streets. What unsettles him the most, however, is the strict and rigid caste system of this world. From the embryonic stage, individuals are assigned to different castes—Alpha, Beta, Gamma, and so on. Essentially, the five castes are differentiated by intelligence, which can be controlled by the amount of alcohol and oxygen administered during their embryonic development (Kuang, 2022). Each caste has specific physical traits, intelligence levels, and predetermined life scripts.

The Alphas, with their superior genetic endowments, occupy the highest echelons of society, controlling power, knowledge, and advanced technology, living lives of luxury and excess. Betas, though not as distinguished as the Alphas, work steadily within their respective fields. Meanwhile, the Gammas and lower castes are deliberately stunted during the embryonic stage, destined for monotonous and menial labor. “Behind the outward appearance of a calm and harmonious society lies, in fact, a grotesque new world” (Lv, 2021, p. 23).

John does not belong to any established class. He lacks the inherent superiority and dominance over the world that the Alphas possess. His rough, unmodified appearance and naturally developed physique make him stand out awkwardly in a crowd of handsome, well-proportioned individuals. When confronted with profound academic discussions or the sophisticated social rituals, he feels like an awkward duckling in a swan's flock. The strange looks from others pierce him like a thorn, marking the beginning of John's identity crisis. He begins to realize that he is different, and in this society that strives for absolute conformity, “difference” becomes original sin.

From an existentialist perspective, John's identity crisis stems from his profound

questioning of his own existence (Chen, 2023). In the World State, people don't choose who they are. Society tells them how to be. They don't think for themselves. John is not like them. His time in the Reservation made him see himself clearly. He wants to know who he really is. He wants to understand life's meaning. But the World State stops him. He feels alone and lost. He doesn't know what to do. As Chen Qianyu (2023) points out, in an absurd world, individuals often face the loss and crisis of their self-identity. How to find oneself and the meaning of life in such a predicament is a challenge everyone must confront. John, in the World State, finds himself in exactly this situation, where his unique upbringing and values make him feel out of place in this highly ordered society.

3.2. John's Moral Predicament

All babies in the World State are born in test tubes, and unqualified embryos are disposed of directly. People here regard words like "parents" as dirty words. On the Savage Reservation, life is seen as a gift of nature, and each life has its own unique value. John is angry at the World State's arbitrary handling of life, and this conflict over the value of life makes him deeply question the moral limits of the World State.

John grew up in the Reservation. There, family was most important. Family bonds were strong and precious. This made John very attached to his mother Linda. She was his stability in life. She helped shape his sense of right and wrong. Then John came to the World State. He was completely shocked. Here, people threw away family values. Words like "mother" and "father" didn't exist. Relationships meant nothing. When Linda was dying, no one cared. To them, death was normal. They showed no feelings about it.

The nurse stood irresolute, looking now at the kneeling figure by the bed (the scandalous exhibition!) and now (poor children!) at the twins who had stopped their hunting of the zipper and were staring from the other end of the ward, staring with all their eyes and nostrils at the shocking scene that was being enacted round Bed 20. Should she speak to him? try to bring him back to a sense of decency? remind him of where he was? of what fatal mischief he might do to these poor innocents? Undoing all their wholesome death-conditioning with this disgusting outcry - as though death were something terrible, as though anyone mattered as much as all that! It might give them the most disastrous ideas about the subject, might upset them into reacting in the entirely wrong, the utterly anti-social way. (Huxley, 2016, pp. 253-254)

"At this moment, Linda had already passed away, and John had long fallen on his knees beside the bed, covering his face with his hands, sobbing uncontrollably" (Huxley, 2016, p. 253). His grief stemmed from the deep emotional bond he had with his mother. To John, his mother was the one who gave him life and accompanied him through his upbringing. However, this emotional connection was com-

pletely out of place in the World State. When the nurse saw John's sorrowful display beside the bed, her first reaction was not to offer comfort, but to worry that his behavior might have a "bad influence" on the other children, fearing he would disrupt the children's "death conditioning" in the process. This highlights the stark contrast between the residents of the World State and John in their attitudes toward death and family ties.

At this moment, John was facing a profound moral dilemma. His inner moral code told him that his mother's death was an extremely sorrowful event, and he needed to express his grief. However, the moral standards of the World State required him to suppress his emotions and accept death with indifference. His emotional outburst was seen as "unseemly" and "antisocial", leaving him confused and in pain. This conflict in moral values made it impossible for him to find understanding or comfort in the World State.

John attempts to mourn his mother in his own way, but his efforts are met with rejection and misunderstanding from those around him. Throughout this process, he gradually becomes aware of the insurmountable gap between himself and society.

"Any tolerance he might once have felt for the practices and people of World State disappears" (Phillips & Ward, 2003, p. 122). According to Qin (2023), when an individual's values clash with the mainstream values of society, the individual often falls into a state of existential crisis. John's situation is a prime example of this, as his moral beliefs appear incompatible with the new world, and his existence becomes that of an "other" in this society, making it difficult for him to survive within it.

At the same time, this also reflects the influence of the social environment in shaping and repressing human nature. In the study by Naem and Janoory (2019), the impact of the societal backdrop on individual destinies is examined in the context of Egyptian society. In *Brave New World*, the new world continuously suppresses human nature in favor of social order, stripping individuals of genuine emotional and moral judgment. John's experience serves as a powerful critique of such a society in *Brave New World*.

4. John's Death in the Old Light-house

4.1. The Peculiar Case of John's Demise

John comes from the Reservation, where traditional cultural values are preserved, while the new world he enters is a highly modernized, technologically advanced society. The stark contrast between these two cultures causes him significant shock (Mu, 2019). In the new world, people pursue material pleasures, while values such as nature and family, which John holds dear, are viewed as outdated and primitive. For instance, the casual attitude toward sex in the new world conflicts with John's traditional views, and he cannot accept this moral disparity, making him feel out of

place in the society (Qi, 2023).

After arriving in the new world, John make friends with several people, such as Bernard and Helmholtz, but they neither truly understand nor respect John's inner world and values. Bernard brings John into the new world to exploit him, while Helmholtz is unable to form a genuine connection with him (Mu, 2019). People in the new world listen to public opinion. They judge John unfairly. This hurts John deeply. He feels helpless. When he needs help, no one supports him. This makes him feel more alone and sad.

John's mother dies in the new world. He feels deep sadness. He sees no one understands his pain. People around him are cold and uncaring. This makes him stop believing in the new world. In complete hopelessness, John finds no reason to live. He dies.

4.2. John's Death as a Mirror to Society

Brave New World portrays a highly totalitarian society where various methods are used to strictly control individuals, depriving them of their freedom. John's death is an inevitable result of this authoritarian regime. Unable to adapt to the rules and values of society, and in direct opposition to the mainstream consciousness, he becomes a challenge to the totalitarian order (Qi, 2023). People in this society cannot think or act freely. They have little freedom. John challenges these strict rules. Because of this, society pushes him away.

In Brave New World, society's values are wrong. People chase physical pleasure and constant fun. They forget what really matters in life. As Wang (2024) analyzes, society shapes people's thoughts and actions through various means, turning them into obedient subjects of social order. John, however, refuses to accept these values and attempts to break free from this constraint. John fights against society. This makes the conflict worse. In the end, he dies. This shows something important: when society's values are wrong, it's very hard to resist alone. Sometimes, trying to fight back can kill you.

John's story profoundly reveals the dangers of the misuse of technology on humanity. In this society, technology is widely applied. The World State controls and manipulates people's thoughts and behaviors through the use of technology, leading to the alienation of human nature and the distortion of society. John's resistance to and rebellion against technology reflects the public's concerns and reflections on technological development. As Ji and Kang (2023) point out, technological development should be human-centered, rather than becoming a tool for controlling humans.

John's death serves as a reminder that humanity must maintain a clear mind when facing technological advancement and make the right choices. We cannot blindly pursue technological progress while neglecting its impact on humanity. People's free choices in the faces of life's predicament, their different choices will diverge

them into different results(Li, 2023, p. 8). During the course of technological development, we must fully utilize human agency to ensure that technological progress aligns with human interests and values.

5. Conclusion

In the Reservation, although John led a relatively free life, he faced various conflicts and found it difficult to integrate. Upon entering the World State, he encountered numerous challenges. The highly advanced technology and rigid social order made him feel suffocated, while relationships between people had become cold and superficial. The values he held dear were in stark contrast to the mainstream ideals of the World State.

John's death had a multifaceted impact on society. It was a powerful critique of the World State's false prosperity, highlighting the dangers of excessive technological development and materialism, which could distort human nature and lead to societal alienation. His death also prompted people to reflect on their own existence, questioning how to maintain human dignity and freedom while pursuing progress. For society, John's story serves as a warning. We must be vigilant against the erosion of humanity by technology, avoiding the trap of materialism, and place greater emphasis on cultivating the spiritual world and shaping our values. While enjoying the conveniences brought by technology, we must remain clear-headed and uphold the beliefs of truth, kindness, and freedom. In doing so, we can strive to build a more humane society, one that better aligns with the essential needs of humanity. Only in this way can we avoid repeating John's tragic fate and achieve truly meaningful survival and development.

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