

Love, Death and the Satirical Purpose: Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* and Evelyn Waugh's *The Loved One*.

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Abstract

This paper draws attention to the parallels between Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932) and Evelyn Waugh's *The Loved One* (1948). As satirical fiction, both novels are concerned with the way societies deal with basic human obsessions such as love, sex and death. Although they treat these themes very differently – *Brave New World* being a futuristic dystopia set in England while *The Loved One* is a contemporary satire set in the United States – there are some suggestive similarities in imagery which could arise from the fact that both authors had visited Southern California shortly before the respective novels were written. The paper goes on to compare the different approaches to political and social satire used by these authors, and discusses the aesthetic implications of these approaches.

Keywords: Aldous Huxley; Evelyn Waugh; satirical fiction; California; death in fiction.

Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932) has often been compared with George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, because of their futuristic, dystopian themes. And Evelyn Waugh's *The Loved One* (1948) has drawn comparisons with Huxley's *After Many a Summer* (1939), as they are both British Hollywood novels, satirical in intent. However, less attention has been paid to the parallels between *Brave New World* and *The Loved One*. As satirical fiction, both novels are concerned with the way societies deal with basic human obsessions such as love, sex and death, and although they treat these themes very differently, there are some suggestive similarities in imagery which could arise from the fact that both authors had visited Southern California shortly before the respective novels were written.

The Loved One is set in Los Angeles and clearly draws directly on Waugh's visit in 1947. Malcolm Bradbury writes, "such were Waugh's ironic but already highly excited expectations it seemed even Hollywood could hardly live up to them; but it did" (1996, 441). As he remarked in his 1964 monograph on Waugh "The visitor to Forest Lawn will attest that Waugh has been spared the need to exaggerate"(95). It seems inevitable that his satirical sense would be set in motion by such a place: "In Waugh's world, there are no Utopias. ... The great cemetery is the

sinless pastoral Utopia long familiar in American fiction ...; like most Utopias, as seen by the ever-ironic English imagination, it is corrupt” (1996, 444).

More than twenty years earlier, and a decade before he himself settled there permanently in 1937 and wrote *After Many a Summer*, Aldous Huxley had also visited California on a trip around the world. Peter Conrad has remarked that Huxley’s observation of California when he lived there “flatters his satiric foresight by showing California to be an actualization of his brave new world” (302). He gives as an example the introduction to a Californian prison in 1957 of what, in *Brave New World*, he had called ‘hypnopædia’, but it is arguable that the novel is not only prescient in this respect, but also actually influenced by Huxley’s personal experience of Los Angeles. Some aspects of the society in the novel echo the description of the city in *Jesting Pilate*:

The great Joy City of the West.

And what joy! The joy of rushing about, of always being busy, of having no time to think, of being too rich to doubt. [...] The joy of going to the movies and the theatre, of sitting with one’s fellows in luxurious and unexclusive clubs, of trooping out on summer evenings with fifty thousand others to listen to concerts in the open air, of being always in a crowd, never alone. [...]

[...] Its lighthearted people are unaware of war or pestilence or famine or revolution, have never in their safe and still half-empty Eldorado known anything but prosperous peace, contentment, universal acceptance.(226-227)

This picture of an unreflective, hedonistic city exhibits many parallels with the social life of London A.F. 632, with its motto “Community, Identity, Stability” (Huxley, *Brave New World*, 15). As Peter Firchow suggests,

Huxley almost certainly never intended *Brave New World* to be a satire of the future. ... For Huxley, it is plain, there is no need to travel into the future to find the brave new world; it already exists, only too palpably, in the American Joy City, where the declaration of dependence begins and ends with the single-minded pursuit of happiness.(77-78)

The busy, unthinking life of the citizens of this ‘civilised’ society may owe something to that of Californians in the 1920s, but other aspects of that society were already embryonic in Huxley’s earlier writing: for example, the way love and sex are regarded in *Antic Hay*, where love is a frightening emotion requiring a more serious and responsible commitment than Gumbril could

manage, and sex is little more than a recreational activity. In an essay he wrote in 1929, Huxley describes ‘two coexisting and conflicting conceptions of love’:

The older conception was [...] the product of Christianity and romanticism – a curious mixture of contradictions, of the ascetic dread of passion and the romantic worship of passion. Its ideal was strict monogamy. (“Fashions in Love”, 293)

In *Brave New World*, this conception of love is embodied and taken to extremes in the Savage. His worship of Lenina, which turns to disgust when she displays what is, to her, perfectly normal sexuality, is the result of his upbringing with its curious mixture of superstition, Christianity and selected readings from Shakespeare. In contrast,

the new generation knows that there is no such thing as love with a large L, and that what the Christian romantics of the last century regarded as the uniquely natural form of love is, in fact, only one of the indefinite number of possible amorous fashions. [...] Love has ceased to be the rather fearful, mysterious thing it was, and become a perfectly normal, almost commonplace, activity – an activity, for many young people, especially in America, of the same nature as dancing or tennis, a sport, a recreation, a pastime. (“Fashions in Love”, 294)

What Huxley is really talking about here is sexual activity and, taken to its logical extreme, this is the sex life of the inhabitants of his brave new world. ‘Real’ love has been eliminated – or at least that is the intention of the World Controllers. Mustapha Mond says, ‘People are happy; they get what they want, and they never want what they can’t get’ (*BNW* 173). As long as gratification can be instant and complete, they assume that discontent will not exist. But people in *Brave New World* do want what they cannot get. Bernard wants Lenina for some time, without knowing whether he will get her. Bernard, of course, is not a normal citizen and has apparently suffered some developmental accident. Lenina is more ‘normal’ but even she falls in love with the Savage and is made unhappy by his avoidance and final rejection of her. In spite of the fact that ‘the greatest care is taken to prevent you from loving anyone too much’ (*BNW* 185), the Controllers have failed to allow for the potentially destabilising influence of an attractive young man who is not amenable to the free love fashions of seventh-century A.F. London on the females of that society.

Huxley runs into contradictions here. In order to convince us that the *Brave New World* society is plausible, he needs to show that all deep and abiding love for others, love of nature, and feelings of individuality have been eliminated. But to keep enough tension in the narrative to

ensure the reader's continuing engagement, he must introduce characters like Helmholtz, Bernard and Lenina, who all in one way or another exhibit these deviant characteristics. Helmholtz 'had realised quite suddenly that sport, women, communal activities were only, so far as he was concerned, second bests. Really, and at the bottom, he was interested in something else' (*BNW* 62). Bernard at first alarms Lenina by wanting to be alone with her at times other than bedtime, and by stopping his helicopter halfway across the Channel to share the night sky with her, but later in the novel Lenina herself has to be hurried along by the Arch-Community Songster, having 'lingered for a moment to look at the moon' (*BNW* 141). In her longing to love and be loved, Lenina resembles a twentieth-century human. The people of *Brave New World* are supposedly created to a formula on the conveyer belt at the Central London Hatchery, but the Controllers do not have everything quite under control.

Huxley talks in his "Los Angeles Rhapsody" of thousands and thousands of flappers and almost all incredibly pretty. Plumply ravishing, they give, as T.S. Eliot has phrased it, a 'promise of pneumatic bliss': "Of pneumatic bliss, but of not much else, to judge by their faces. So curiously uniform, unindividual and blank" (226). The idea of mass-produced American womanhood also occurred to Waugh:

Which came first in this strange civilization, he wondered, the foot or the shoe, the leg or the nylon stocking? Or were these uniform elegant limbs, from the stocking-top down, marketed in one cellophane envelope at the neighbourhood store? Did they clip by some labour-saving device to the sterilized rubber privacies above? Did they come from the same department as the light irrefragible plastic head? Did the entire article come off the assembly-lines ready for immediate home-service? (*The Loved One*, 70)

Where Huxley has almost talked us out of believing in his loveless society by giving his characters too much emotion, Waugh does nearly the opposite, and many readers have been persuaded by passages like this that Dennis Barlow is an unfeeling cad – "a tower of selfishness" (McDonnell, 126). Waugh's spare, detached style almost allows this conclusion – almost, but not quite. Dennis is a silent observer during much of the novel, and at other times talks either in the language of poets some of whom, as Aimee points out, 'passed on hundreds of years ago' (*LO* 108), or in a facetious tone, typically English, designed to disguise any true feeling.

But true feeling Dennis does have. If there are hints of it only two or three times in the novel, that should be enough for Waugh's subtle purpose. When he meets Aimee for the first time, we are told that "she was what Dennis had vainly sought during a lonely year of exile" (*LO* 46).

This is the first tiny chink of light upon Dennis' inner being. Throughout the course of his romance with Aimee, we see his actions, hear his words, and occasionally read his thoughts, but we never feel his emotions, and finally we may see why. When he hears that she is dead, Dennis conducts a flippant conversation with Joyboy, displaying no grief at her loss; but once Joyboy has left, Dennis "went out alone into the pets' cemetery with his own thoughts, which were not a thing to be shared with Mr Joyboy" (*LO* 121). Dennis' reticence contrasts with Joyboy's blubbing incoherence, just as his capable handling of the situation contrasts with the mortician's helpless ineptitude. Deep feelings are an essential part of "the artist's load, a great shapeless chunk of experience" (*LO* 127). That Dennis has loved Aimee, and suffers at her loss, is something which we must take for granted, but it is not part of the satirist's task to lay that love bare. Dennis' thoughts are not only 'not a thing to be shared with Mr Joyboy' they are also to be kept from the reader. Waugh's mere hints of emotional life, like a skilful thumbnail sketch, give a more convincing representation of reality than Huxley's over-fussy anatomising of his characters' feelings. For Waugh this is perhaps as much a matter of taste as technique: like Dennis, who seeks 'the intangible, the veiled face in the doorway, the secret graces of a body which hid itself under formal velvet' (*LO* 46), Waugh prefers his characters to have depths at which the reader can only guess.

In the end, however, Dennis does choose Art over Love. He knows from the first that "sooner or later the Muse would have to be placated. She came first" (*LO* 84). Dennis is not the author's mouthpiece, but many of his implied views are those which the reader is tacitly invited to endorse. Love exists – and the commonplace language of love is present in the novel, even though it is constantly subverted and subordinated to a higher power: Aimee's "heart was broken perhaps, but it was a small inexpensive organ of local manufacture", unlike her spirit which existed "in the mountain air of the dawn, in the eagle-haunted passes of Hellas" (*LO* 105), and Dennis was leaving "his young heart' behind in California, but it was 'something that had long irked him" (*LO* 127).

Conrad believes that "California is immune to Waugh's satire because its truths are stranger than his most wounding fictions. [...] The only way Waugh can subdue the unruly, fictitious actuality of California is to import codes of honor and gentility which California has never recognized." Therefore, his characters are "English expatriates, constrained by the rules of clubmanship and fearful of social disgrace. [...] The satirist can threaten the penalty of 'exclusion from British society,' but in California that is hardly a deterrent" (304). But the British characters are themselves the subject of satire nearly as broad as that focused on the Americans. Their attempt to uphold Englishness in this far outpost of empire is surely portrayed with heavy irony;

their efforts to impose their rules on the wayward Dennis not a sanction either he or Waugh regards seriously. “Death and satire are both disabled’ by the euphemisms of Forest Lawn cemetery, the original of Waugh’s Whispering Glades, according to Conrad, ‘for death is the satirist’s final sanction’”(241). Though Conrad is particularly referring to Huxley here, as a general statement it seems to be contradicted by Waugh’s achievement in *The Loved One*, where suffering and death are dispensed to several characters and the euphemisms are exposed. Anyway, for Waugh, death often seems a lesser punishment: one might think, for example, of Tony Last trapped in the South American jungle reading Dickens to Mr Todd for eternity in *A Handful of Dust*.

The denial of death is satirised in both novels. In *Brave New World*, the aim of removing positive emotions like love is to eliminate what the Controllers see as their inconvenient and destabilising side-effects, such as jealousy, unrequited passion and, of course, grief. But they have not completely removed all notion of the awfulness of death. Even the egregiously orthodox Henry Foster, who makes the first mention of death in the novel, laughing cheerfully over “the amount of overtime I had to put in after the last Japanese earthquake” to make up the “unforeseen wastages” (*BNW* 20), takes on an “almost, for a moment, melancholy” tone when contemplating the incineration of “some human being” (*BNW* 67). But the nurse in the Park Lane Hospital for the Dying is intended to represent the civilised view of death, in her outrage at the Savage’s uncontrolled sobbing by Linda’s deathbed, “as though death were something terrible, as though anyone mattered as much as all that!” (*BNW* 163). The Savage’s extremes of grief and remorse at Linda’s death, especially the way he tries to flagellate himself into remembering his dead mother and forgetting Lenina, are treated satirically, and the contrast with the other extreme of death-conditioning does nothing to make him less ridiculous. When the Savage claims the right to be unhappy – “not to mention the right to grow old and ugly and impotent; the right to have syphilis and cancer [...] the right to be tortured by unspeakable pain of every kind”, Mustapha Mond shrugs and says, “You’re welcome” (*BNW* 187). We are apparently invited to question with him the Savage’s choice, and it takes an effort on the reader’s part to restore real happiness and joy to the Savage’s side of the equation. Theoretically, if the Savage can be desperately unhappy, he should have a corresponding capacity to enjoy life to the fullest; but this he completely lacks. In his ambivalence, Huxley gives us only the choice between the Savage’s chronic inability to enjoy life and his final despair and suicide, and the anaesthetised so-called happiness of the ‘civilised’ society. Even Helmholtz, who seems to have the best chance of a fulfilled existence in his exile, has been deprived of his ability to love, which is surely a necessary part of that freedom without which ‘human beings cannot become fully human’ and which is “therefore supremely valuable”

(*Brave New World Revisited*, 189). In his 1946 Foreword to *Brave New World*, Huxley recognises the novel's 'defects as a work of art' – that “[t]he Savage is offered only two alternatives, an insane life in Utopia, or the life of a Primitive in an Indian village, a life more human in some respects, but in other hardly less queer and abnormal”(BNW 7).

In *Brave New World* the removal of love is intended, among other things, to remove the fear of death. In *The Loved One* the fear of death is challenged by the belief that death hardly exists. The Dreamer's creed talks of “a New Earth sacred to HAPPINESS” (LO 34). It is interesting that the Dreamer's creed differs from its original, the Builder's creed at Forest Lawn, in excluding all mention of religion. It is only if we are already aware of Waugh's Catholicism that we can see the significance of this change, and of the fact, for example, that “the Dreamer does not approve of wreaths or crosses” (LO 36), and that at Sir Francis' funeral

the Cricket Club's fine trophy in the shape of cross bats and wickets had been admitted. Dr Kenworthy had himself given judgement; the trophy was essentially a reminder of life, not of death, that was the crux. (LO 60)

(The choice of the word “crux” carries with it an extra irony here, deriving as it does from the Latin word for “cross”.) Waugh's Catholicism, which Dennis does not share, nevertheless silently haunts the novel and informs the attitude to death that the reader senses rather than comprehends. As George Weigel writes, Waugh was “appalled by ... the America of materialistic, optimistic, Panglossian humanism that [he] skewered in *The Loved One*: an America that was, on the one hand, afraid of life and on the other, repelled by and in love with death” (33). In an essay written after his trip to Los Angeles but before *The Loved One*, Waugh notes that religious symbols are rare at Forest Lawn, and remarks that “by far the commonest feature of other graveyards is still the Cross, a symbol in which previous generations have found more Life and Hope than in the most elaborately watered evergreen shrub” (Waugh, “Half in Love with Easeful Death”, 332). The message of Waugh's religion is that death is real, damnation is as possible as redemption, and that once the body has died it is of no significance. In Dennis' cool attitude to Aimee's corpse, as well as his shock at the ‘painted and smirking obscene travesty’ (LO 61) which Aimee and her colleagues have made of Sir Francis' body, we can infer these attitudes, once we are aware of them.

Suicide is, however, another matter. The suicide of the Savage in *Brave New World* is clearly designed to shock. The discovery by sightseers of his hanging corpse is a carefully constructed piece of rhetoric: the uncomprehending ‘first arrivals’ alighting from their helicopter, pushing open the door of the lighthouse and walking “into the shuttered twilight. Through an archway on the further side of the room they could see the bottom of the staircase that led up to

the higher floors. Just under the crown of the arch dangled a pair of feet. (*BNW* 201). The pathos of the Savage's self-destruction is given ample expression, and we are surely intended to see his inability to cope with life, death and love as a tragic outcome. By contrast, in *The Loved One*, Waugh presents two suicides remarkably coolly. The context in which Sir Francis' body is discovered by Dennis is carefully cushioned by an explanation of the "vicarious intimacy with death" (*LO* 33) that he shares with his generation, and we know already, from the scene immediately before, that Sir Francis is dead. A Catholic message is hard to find here, even implicitly. To a Catholic suicide is a mortal sin, but we see no hint that Sir Francis is damned by his act. It does, perhaps, add to the anti-religious nature of *Whispering Glades* that he is able to be buried there, whereas the Catholic Church would not bury a suicide in consecrated ground: Waugh writes in his essay, "suicides [...] who, in the 'old customs of death' would lie at a crossroads, impaled, come in considerable numbers" (336) to *Forest Lawn*. In his novel, however, the very absence of any comment is his satirical method.

The description of Aimee's suicide is free from even implied condemnation. She reaches her decision, having

communed perhaps with the spirits of her ancestors, the impious and haunted race who had deserted the altars of the old Gods, had taken ship and wandered, driven by what pursuing furies through what mean streets and among what barbarous tongues! Her father had frequented the Four Square Gospel Temple; her mother drank. Attic voices prompted Aimee to a higher destiny; voices which far away and in another age had sung of the Minotaur, stamping far underground at the end of the passage; which spoke to her more sweetly of the still Boeotian water-front, the armed men all silent in the windless morning, the fleet motionless at anchor, and Agamemnon turning away his eyes; spoke of Alcestis and proud Antigone. (*LO* 116)

Aimee is linked not with hell and mortal sin but with the spirit of the willing sacrificial martyrs of Greek legend. Her unconscious spiritual links with a past of which she is quite ignorant (as a result of her acquisition of "the sparse furniture of her mind" at "the local High School and University" (*LO* 105), are what allow her to transcend the "standard product" of her culture. By failing to condemn her, Waugh the artist has outpaced Waugh the evangelical Catholic. As Sean O'Faolain remarks,

being a man of genius, he should never, under any circumstances, have opinions, for wherever he has written out of his opinions it becomes all

too plain [...] that imagination is a soaring gull and opinions no more than a gaggle of ungainly starlings, chattering angrily on a cornfield. (68)

And this in the end explains the differences between Huxley's less than convincing, overdrawn, all-thinking, all-talking caricatures in *Brave New World*, and Waugh's sparely sketched but convincing characters in *The Loved One*, with suggestions of depths left in shadow. Both novels are intended to be instructive satires on disturbing tendencies in modern life, such as the subordination of real human values like love to materialism, and the refusal to face mortality. Dustin Griffin, in his re-examination of the theory of satire, suggests that

since critics now regularly find evidence in the greatest satire of a fascination with folly, imaginative excitement or ambivalence, we need to reexamine our narrow notions of satire. It is not that satire is *accompanied by* nonsatiric fascination; the satirist *as satirist* is both repelled and attracted by the world of folly. (51)

"Good satire," Griffin says, "is often "nonmoral" (51). However, Huxley surely had a moral intention in *Brave New World*. He writes in *Brave New World Revisited* that it is our duty to resist for as long as possible "the forces that now menace freedom" (189) – and the encouragement of this resistance was his object in much of what he wrote, and it could be argued that his satirical purpose was blunted by his fascination with the technologies he invented for *Brave New World*, and that, despite its prescience and intrinsic interest, the novel does not measure up to the greatest examples of the satirist's art. Similarly, Conrad observes in the later Californian novels *After Many a Summer* and *Ape and Essence*, "The nature which offends the satirist can be disinfected by technology, and once that happens (as it does in Huxley's California) the satirist grows into a mystic" (Conrad, 256).

Griffin, in excluding the satirical novel from his study because "what happens when satire invades the novel is a subject so vast and unwieldy that I do not attempt to treat it here," nevertheless claims that "what satire wants to do can generally be done within the generous confines of the novel without disturbing its economy", though "Evelyn Waugh's comic novels may be thought of as a limiting case, and in them 'novel' may be swallowed up in 'satire'" (3-4). There is a kind of focused purity in novels like *The Loved One* that does seem to negate to some extent the "generous confines of the novel", the messiness and plurality more often found in fiction. Waugh states that among the ideas he had in writing *The Loved One* were that "there is no such thing as an American. They are all exiles uprooted, transplanted and doomed to sterility [...] [and] *memento mori*, old style, not specifically Californian" (Cited in Hastings, 521-2). As George Weigel points out, "Waugh was never a proselytizer, but he was a committed Christian apologist," and wrote such works as *Helena* (1953), a historical novel about the mother of the

emperor Constantine, “to be a full-bore confrontation with the false humanism that, for Waugh, was embodied by such well-meaning but profoundly wrong-headed naturalistic-humanist critics of modernity as Huxley and George Orwell” (). But in *The Loved One* Waugh allows his ideas to explain themselves. He allows his readers to draw their own conclusions, with almost invisible guidance, which makes the message more forcible when understood. As Peter Venne writes, “Its peculiar attraction or fascination – one can hardly speak of charm in this case – seems to lie in the delicate overtones, the subtle travesty of speech, the rich allusions and the hidden implications.” (26). Huxley, on the other hand, gets stranded among the ‘gaggle of ungainly starlings’. He seems to be unable to help being circumscribed by his ideas, and his fascination with the minutiae of technology in the end seriously interferes with the message he is so clearly trying to convey.

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