

“If one’s different, one’s bound to be lonely”

BNW is a futuristic utopia set around 2500AD where everyone is conditioned to accept what the state tells them to – there is no sense of self identity and everyone is told what social group they belong to, be it Alphas, Betas, Gammas, Delta or Epsilons. The world state motto is “Identity, Community, Stability” which the reader realises is very ironic when they have read further into the book and the phrase is repeated over and over again. The world is based around consumption and those who think and do differently to others do not belong, those who “have got too self-consciously individual to fit into community life” are social outcasts.

The novel begins by describing the process of human creation. Here, each person is stripped of anything that would make them an individual and they are conditioned to believe anything that the world state wants them to. By doing so, they will “belong” per se to the world however they will lack any form of individualism.

The novel explores belonging and alienation through 3 key characters.

Bernard Marx, an Alpha male with the body of a Gamma has never fit into the caste for which he was conditioned because he simply looks different. As a result of his exclusion, Bernard is a thinker, a rebel against society. He does not partake in “normal” activities such as sport and the feelies, he is not very public about things and would be described as introverted.

Bernard is a rebel against society, the establishment because he resents that fact that he is not accepted and does not belong. In a letter to the World Controller, he states the society that has been created is too infantile and cheap. He rejects the idea that “everybody’s happy nowadays”. We see an interesting change in Bernard as the book progresses. When Bernard gains fame through the guardianship of the Savage, he suddenly becomes very popular with prominent people currying his favour. This makes him feel accepted into society as people are now talking to him feels as if he finally belongs somewhere and most importantly, he’s getting all the girls he wants.

However, when the Savage refuses to follow Bernard’s order, Bernard one again becomes unpopular. People treat him differently again because he did not grant them access to the Savage. He is once again alienated.

Another character through which Huxley explores belonging is Helmholtz Watson. Helmholtz and Bernard share the fact that they both know that they don’t belong however they are for completely different reasons.

Bernard is unhappy because he is not accepted by his fellow humans and therefore does not fit in. Helmholtz challenges society and questions whether he really belongs and fits in due to his higher than average intelligence.

The Savage is an interesting character as he has been raised on the Reservation but taught by his mother who came from Civilisation. The novel documents his struggle to find where he really belongs and who to.

It explores his attempts to belong to a person when he is infatuated with Lenina. This is demonstrated when John wants to have it with Lenina (and vice versa) however his morals and values that he has been brought up with tell him no, wait until marriage whereas Lenina believes in the idea that “everyone belongs to everyone else”. This shows a conflict in John’s belonging, does he belong to the society in which he was raised or to the Other World?

The phrase that “everyone belongs to everyone else”, as well as many others, is repeated throughout the novel as the basis of the “moral education” process hypnopædia with repetition a key language technique in the book. Usually these phrases are juxtaposed with an action or phrase that clearly shows the phrase to be false creating a sense of irony. Being a satirical novel, Huxley uses irony significantly in the novel to emphasize his point.

John also struggles with belonging to society and the world at large. When you cannot belong to any single society on this world, what are you to do? John does not belong on the Reservation because he is white and his mother was not of that place, he longs for that “Other Place”, that Brave New World. After having “tasted civilisation” and finding it unpalatable, the Savage decides to live his own life, away from the hub-bub of London, he cannot and will not accept the values and morals of the new world. John feels as if there is no place in the World where he belongs.

As well as showing a struggle with belonging to society, this action clearly demonstrates an individual’s decision not to belong. John does not fit in on the Reservation and he has rejected the new world making a conscious decision to be alienated for the rest of his life.

BNW also explores belonging over time. The Savage, having experienced both worlds can use this understanding and knowledge of his to contrast how belonging has changed over time. Through Shakespeare, the Savage can see the great differences that have happened over nearly a thousand years as humans adapt their society to reflect their new values.

I think it is important to recognise the context that this novel was written in. Huxley himself was an introverted child and an eye infection left him nearly blind, this caused him to withdraw even more. Huxley would have understood what it felt like to not belong, be isolated and alienated and these feelings are revealed in some of his characters, notably the Savage.

Huxley was not interested in developing characters, more so getting his message out there which may cause some readers difficulty in understanding his message.

The novel ends with John’s suicide simply because he does not fit in anywhere. The last paragraph “slowly, very slowly, like two unhurried compass needles, the feet turned towards the right; north, north-east, east, south-east, south, south-south-west” this compass simile to me suggests that perhaps the Savage is seeking direction, finding a place where he may, at last, belong to.