In 1998, Random House, a well-established publishing company, selected one hundred fictional works written from 1900 onward as *100 Best Novels* of the twentieth century. The Random House selection represents yet another attempt at defining what literature should be and, like similar efforts at literary canonization, is bound to stimulate endless debates on the respective merits of the works that are, or should have been, included in the booklist.

Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World* is one of his two novels included in the Random House list, the other being *Point Counter Point*, and is without question the more widely read of the two. In fact, *Brave New World* has enjoyed such far-reaching popularity that the novel has in a sense eclipsed Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*, from which the title of the novel is borrowed, for, as Jerome Meckier observes in his “Preface” to *Critical Essays on Aldous Huxley*, “[hearing] the title, one thinks first of Huxley, then of Shakespeare” (2). This paper, then, argues that *Brave New World* deserves permanent critical and public attention and that it will continue to engage its readers in a creative dialogue more than half a century after it was published in 1932.

The term “creative dialogue” is worth considering, as it implies participation on the reader’s part in the creation of the meanings of any literary text. Terry Eagleton has neatly captured the significance of the reader and of the act of reading: “All literary works, in other words, are ‘rewritten,’ if only unconsciously, by the societies which read them; indeed there is no reading of a work which is not also a ‘re-writing’” (*Literary Theory* 11). What distinguishes memorable literary works from the easily forgettable ones, then, consists in how the former opens up a wide
discursive space for creative dialogues, or for possible “re-writings,” in the manner the latter does not.

That the reader takes an active role in determining what a literary text means can sometimes be unfortunate for the text itself, as when a particular reading gains too much prominence that it excludes all the other alternative readings. In a technologically advanced era when scientists are rapidly decoding the genetic structures of life, making themselves Modern Prometheus in every sense of the term, it is not surprising that Huxley’s *Brave New World* is read as a futuristic warning of biotechnology turned against human beings. William A. Galston begins his “What’s at Stake in Biotech?” with a favorable comparison of Huxley’s dystopian narrative with that of George Orwell:

While the fall of the Berlin wall and collapse of the Soviet Union have relegated George Orwell's *1984* to history's dustbin, the other great dystopian tract of the twentieth century, Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, is more timely than ever. The genetic revolution of the past several decades has apparently given us the ability to transform the human species itself. (103)

And Mark S. Frankel takes Huxley to task in an article which is tellingly subtitled “Did Huxley Have It Wrong?” To be more specific, Frankel criticizes Huxley for misleading “us to believe that when it came to our genes and reproductive futures, our worst nightmare was government involvement in procreative activities and a society that devalued individual decisionmaking [sic]” (31-32). Both of these articles were published in the twenty-first century, but while one may rejoice at the attention *Brave New World* still receives, be it appreciative or otherwise, one should bear in mind that there is more to the novel than genetic modification.

In addition to pointing out a possible reading of *Brave New World*, the
aforementioned articles are relevant to the present discussion in another respect. Both Huxley and Orwell imagine in their respective dystopias authoritarian regimes assisted either by omnipotent (bio-)technological domination on docile bodies or by omnipresent surveillance. Their political imagination is historically specific and is in need of revision. Robert S. Baker has traced Huxley’s new world political system back to one of its ideological sources in history: “[the new world is a] worker’s paradise where the state . . . has metastasized into a benevolent despotism that in a very general sense Huxley extrapolated from the secularist materialism of Marx and Lenin” (139). But, as Frankel sees it, “the greater danger . . . is a highly individualized marketplace fueled by an entrepreneurial spirit” (32). Frankel is of course thinking in terms of “our genes and reproductive futures,” but what he says applies equally well to the postmodern world as a whole. That is to say, what one should be wary of is perhaps not so much a centralist government with communist leaning, as capitalist corporations operating on a global scale.

Guin Nance, one of the presenters at the Aldous Huxley Centenary Symposium, was asked in an interview to give her critical evaluation of *Brave New World*: “Not only is it the work of his most widely read . . . but it also forecasts the author’s later concern with drugs, hypnosis, and the United States” (qtd. in Dunaway: 145-146). Nance’s reference to the United States proves inspiring. Indeed, one should not take lightly the fact that, though much of the novel is set in London, the presiding deity in Huxley’s dystopian world is none other than the American automobile tycoon Henry Ford. That “Our Ford” succeeds “Our Lord” as the new world divinity suggests a reading of *Brave New World*, not as a scientific prophecy, but as a social satire against the kind of capitalism associated with the United States of America. “With Ford as synonym and stand-in”, writes Meckier in his analysis of Huxley’s textual revisions, “each new uncomplimentary use of his name further condemned the World State for
being America writ large” (“Aldous Huxley’s Americanization” 427). If Huxley did not at first write *Brave New World* with America being its intended target, he certainly made the correct decision in doing so in his subsequent revisions when he realized that “[to] universalize his antiutopia . . . was to Americanize it” (“Aldous Huxley’s Americanization” 434). His textual “Americanization” makes it easier for readers worldwide to project themselves into the novel, as the world is Americanized at the same time as it is globalized.

Meckier’s paper on Huxley’s Americanization of *Brave New World* is a starting point for the present study, which, taking a step further, examines Huxley’s Americanized new world from two perspectives. On the one hand, the new world’s capitalist mechanism and its accomplice, the entertainment structure, will be scrutinized in terms of how they are embodied in the urban landscape. On the other, the new world’s exploitative relationship with the Indian reservation will also be discussed. Perceptive as he is as a distinguished intellectual, Huxley is surprisingly reticent about the fates of his female characters. He seems content to watch his heroes struggle against the capitalist system and to grant them hope when they are defeated and exiled. Nor does Huxley have much to say about the improbable incident that John the Savage, one of his heroes, should be given a copy of Shakespearean works in the reservation. His silence on these matters betrays his inability to properly address the gender question and his own prejudice that are part of the same problems he tries to deal with in his work. And a study on capitalist domination and exploitation in a novel will never be complete without analyzing the limitation of the novelist himself in understanding and characterizing these issues.

The opening passage of *Brave New World* presents the reader with an impersonal, bureaucratic image of biotechnological domination on humanity: “A squat grey building of only thirty-four stories. Over the main entrance the words, Central London
Hatchery And Conditioning Centre, and, in a shield, the World State's motto, Community, Identity, Stability” (15). More significantly, it suggests the capitalist ideology that keeps the Conditioning Centre, and by extension the new world, functioning. The Centre, governed by capitalism, aims at producing the largest number of conditioned human workers in the least amount of time. Its striking efficiency is achieved by perfecting the means of human cloning and ignoring the end of such an undertaking and by each of the Centre’s employees dutifully carrying out his or her assignment. The result is the fragmentation of knowledge. Linda, the Centre’s former employee and John the Savage’s mother, therefore complains to her visitors: “[When] a child asks you how a helicopter works or who made the world—well, what are you to answer if you're a Beta and have always worked in the Fertilizing Room?” (*BNW* 103).

The new world is but a tremendous factory in which all the workers focus on the work assigned to them in accordance with their social ranks and hardly pause to ask themselves its significance and implications. The factory-worker metaphor is purposefully chosen to stress that none of the new world denizens, from Alpha World Controllers to Epsilon manual laborers, can escape from the social roles created for them by the overarching capitalist system.

Mustapha Mond, one of the World Controllers, constitutes a revealing case. An Alpha male, Mond is subject to less technological conditioning and is therefore able to develop his critical faculty to a much fuller extent than those from lower social ranks. As he acquires remarkable scientific knowledge, he also reaches the troubling understanding that the new world has no place for another Einstein. He is confronted with the choice either to be a technocrat as is expected and in due time promoted to World Controller, or to be expelled from the existing social structure. “I paid too,” says Mond, frankly admitting his regret for having to forego the pursuit of science.
Having assumed the office of Controller, Mond keeps a private collection of banned works by the great minds in history, but, powerful as he is, he is unable to disrupt the capitalist system. In public, he remains the most eloquent exponent of this system which disparages anything that cannot be measured by prices: “History is bunk,” says Mond to a group of students at the Conditioning Center (BNW 38).

As the story unfolds, it turns out that human beings in the new world are not just conditioned workers but that they are literally raw materials that keep the wheel of capitalism turning. When their mortal lives come to an end, their bodies are sent to the Slough Crematorium, where “[more] than a kilo and a half [of phosphorus are recovered] per adult corpse. Which makes the best part of four hundred tons of phosphorus every year from England alone” (BNW 67). Not only is human nature violated by capitalism, but Mother Nature is encroached upon and its organic relationship with human beings distorted by the capitalist logic. As the director of the Centre explains it, whether or not the human relationship with Nature is encouraged is solely determined by its possible contribution to capitalism: “[The lower classes] had been conditioned to like . . . flower in particular and wild nature in general. The idea was to make them want to be going out into the country at every available opportunity, and so compel them to consume transport” (BNW 29). This “idea” later proves flawed, and the lower classes are accordingly discouraged from developing “the love of nature,” though they are still conditioned to “consume transport” (BNW 29).

Capitalism and entertainment go hand in hand in the new world, the former serving as the economic basis of the latter and the latter an effective tool of domination of the former. The following example offers a partial view of the economic scale of the entertainment business: “At Brentford the Television Corporation's factory was like a small town” (BNW 59). More appalling than its sheer scale, however, is the way the entertainment business assimilates news media and
religious institutions that have traditionally been regarded as enlightening rather than entertaining.

In “Power and the Perfect State,” Martin Kessler points out the use of happiness as an instrument of domination in Huxley’s new world: “Happiness . . . becomes a technique of power. Society makes people happy (rather than allowing them to be happy) and thus habituates them to the status quo” (572). The entertainment business is largely responsible for the success of such a technique, distracting the new world inhabitants from an awareness of their dehumanized conditions and at the same time inculcating in them the dominating ideology. It should be noted that in the new world the entertainment business is intertwined with propaganda: “The various Bureaux of Propaganda . . . were housed in a single sixty-story building in Fleet Street. . . . Then came the Bureaux of Propaganda by Television, by Feeling Picture, and by Synthetic Voice and Music respectively- twenty-two floors of them” (BNW 61).

The entertainment business in its specific forms of TV programs and movies is not to be overlooked, and again the comparison between Brave New World and 1984 is useful: “[These two novels] make use of cinema and television . . . emphasizing their role as essential means for . . . in the case of the fordian society . . . providing artificial pleasures which dim the mind. The big and the small screen . . . perform a crucial political function” (Varricchio 98). As Raymond Williams has observed, “[the] unique factor of broadcasting . . . is that its communication is accessible to normal social development; it requires no specific training which brings people within the orbit of public authority” (135). But this “accessibility” also implies a comprehensive scope of domination. Since “we can watch and listen to television” as long as “we can watch and listen to people in our immediate circle” (Williams 135) and since television is a space-saving invention when compared with cinema, practically all of us, regardless of gender and intellectual maturity, are liable to expose ourselves to the
domination of television in every place imaginable. This explains the uncanny presence of television in the new world: “At the foot of every [deathbed], confronting its moribund occupant, was a television box. Television was left on, a running tap, from morning till night” (BNW 160).

Roger Paden has a point in arguing that “Huxley constructs his world view in terms of a dichotomy between the kind of high culture capable of embodying and transmitting important values and the kind of low culture produced by the modern entertainment industry” (222). This “dichotomy” is nowhere more clearly demonstrated than in John the Savage’s visit to Eton College in the new world. Asked by the Savage whether students there still read Shakespeare, the Head Mistress replies with a definite “no” and the Provost with an explanation that if their “young people need distraction, they can get it at the feelies” (BNW 133). If the feelies, a technologically improved version of modern-day cinema, is to Huxley a form of “low culture” that provides nothing beyond mindless distractions and propaganda, such works as Shakespearean dramas and poems represent the best of human efforts that, through an elaborate use of language, allows one to grasp the external and internal realities.

Helmholtz Watson, who, like Mustapha Mond, is an Alpha male, is exemplary of how sophistication of language mirrors that of reasoning and feeling. Of all the characters in the new world, Watson comes closest to unsettling the domination of capitalism and the entertainment business. He is conscious of something more significant than the pursuit of happiness, but he lacks adequate linguistic resources to clearly define it, not to mention express it: “I'm thinking of a queer feeling I sometimes get, a feeling that I've got something important to say and the power to say it- only I don't know what it is, and I can't make any use of the power” (BNW 63-64). His inadequacy is also reflected in his twice-repeated metaphor: “Words can be like
X-rays” and “can you make words really piercing— you know, like the very hardest X-rays” (BNW 64). It is not until he, via John the Savage from the reservation, comes into contact with Shakespearean works that he first experiences the part of humanity that has been suppressed in the capitalist system: “Helmholtz listened with a growing excitement. At ‘sole Arabian tree’ he started . . . at ‘defunctive music’ he turned pale and trembled with an unprecedented emotion.” (BNW 148).

“While the movies”, argues Laura Frost, “were increasingly thought of as an American product, Huxley portrays the feelies themselves as a markedly British industry” (449). Frost then gives an overview of the Feely industry: “The ‘Feeling Picture’ headquarters comprise 22 floors of the Bureau of Propaganda in London . . . and the College of Emotional Engineering includes on its faculty ‘professors of feelies’” (449). But in light of his Americanization of the new world, Huxley’s depiction of the feelies can be read as an attack at the nefarious influence of the movie industry led by American movie companies. After all, a few years before the publication of Brave New World, Huxley has in a scathing review of The Jazz Singer criticized the emerging sound films as “the latest and most frightful creation-saving device for the production of standardized amusement” (qtd. in Frost: 443).

What Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer have to say against sound films can be said against the feelies: “They are so designed that quickness, powers of observation, and experience are undeniably needed to apprehend them all; yet sustained thought is out of the question if the spectator is not to miss the relentless rush of facts” (126-127). Take Three Weeks in a Helicopter for example, its meager plot can be summed up as a lot of violence and sex and rescue of a Beta female from a black by three Alpha males, with the female eventually “becoming the mistress of all her three rescuers” (BNW 137). This feely is eye-catching for the new world citizens but is by no means thought-provoking. And since the feeling picture emphasizes
simulation of reality instead of stimulation of creativity, there can be no wonder that its most remembered feature is “a little love made on that famous bearskin, every hair of which . . . could be separately and distinctly felt” (BNW 137).

*Three Weeks in a Helicopter* should be further discussed, as it reveals a subtle domination of the capitalist society on women. The domination is subtle precisely because “there is nothing to suggest that within each [social class] women are regarded as inferior to men” (Deery 105). But this equality is nominal at best, for, though they are no longer child-bearers in traditional patriarchal families, both marital institutions and viviparous births being obsolete and ridiculous in the dystopian future, women in the new world are enclosed in a new form of capitalist patriarchy named after Henry Ford. There is a saying in this Fordian world that “everyone belongs to everyone else,” but the previously quoted “mistress of all her three rescuers” implies that, with the feelies repeating an objectified image of the female population, women are in effect treated as sexual objects and as the collective property of men. As men are subject to the capitalist society, women thus suffer from a double subjection.

It is not that the domination on human beings in general and on women in particular is absolute and that any resistance to the domination is impossible. In fact, even a mentally-challenged Epsilon worker would find himself temporarily relieved of the technological conditioning and “[take] pleasure in the natural light of the Sun that can be seen from the rooftop of his machine” (Paden 218). And Lenina, a Beta female entangled in an affair with John the Savage, “questions the code of sexuality” that dictates a promiscuous sexual behavior in the place of love (Higdon 81). The problem is that none of the instances above represent a sustained attempt at liberating humanity from the grip of capitalism.

Huxley is an essentialist, not an existentialist, as can be seen in the metaphor that explains the functioning of technological conditioning on human beings: “[Drops] of
liquid sealing-wax, drops that adhere, incrust, incorporate themselves with what they
fall on, till finally the rock is all one scarlet blob” (BNW 34). As the “rock” is
“incrusted” by the sticky “liquid,” so the essential human nature is “incorporated” into
a technologically-imposed social role. Though the metaphor seems to suggest the
irreversibility of conditioning, Huxley has throughout the novel described situations
where his characters, male and female alike, glimpse at their inner selves. Yet Huxley
seems to believe that it remains for some Alpha elite or for someone outside the
capitalist culture to fully understand the atrocity committed against humanity and to
restore humanity to its rightful state. Interestingly, both the elite and the cultural
outsider are males.

Eagleton’s comment on cultural domination and resistance is pertinent here:
“Anti-theorists make the mistake of seeing cultures as more or less coherent. . . . But
there are many different, contradictory strands to a culture, some of which allow us to
be critical of others” (After Theory 62). In a homogenous new-world culture, however,
the “different, contradictory strands” can only be found from the marginalized Indian
reservation, and this is why the friendship between Watson and John the savage is of
critical importance in the novel. John has brought with him a cultural experience
which allows Watson, a non-conformist Alpha male, to discover the human emotions
of which he has never before been able to give a cogent utterance. And it is the riot
caus ed by John among the Delta workers that prompts Watson to turn his
nonconformity into an open rebellion: “‘Free, free!’ the Savage shouted, and . . . he
punched the indistinguishable faces of his assailants. ‘Free!’ And suddenly there was
Helmholtz at his side” (BNW 172).

This failed rebellion leads to John’s suicide and Watson’s exile, but one need not
be pessimistic concerning this seemingly tragic ending, for the Falkland Islands, to
which Watson is deported, may well be an unlikely promised land where “Our Ford”
and its capitalist logic no longer hold the reign and where Watson can complete his transformation into a soundly developed human being, a process which has been initiated for him by John the Savage. In his foreword to a 1946 reissue, Huxley imagines for John the Savage a humane “community of exiles and refugees from Brave New World, living within the borders of the Reservation” (BNW 8). And one is entitled to hope for Watson to build one such community on his own, for, as Meckier says in his evaluation of the character, “Watson . . . proves hardest to condition. . . . [He] develops into a true genius” (“A Neglected Huxley ‘Preface’” 8).

It is lamentable that Huxley fails to conceive a female “genius” in Brave New World. That the female characters discussed in this paper, i.e. Linda, Lenina and the blond in the feely, are all of them from the Beta class is not a chance coincidence. Huxley seems to suffer from an imagination failure that prevents him from characterizing credible Alpha females that are capable of being intellectually and emotionally sophisticated, and therefore “it is two men who are ostracized for confronting the sexual status of women and, in the case of John, ultimately maddened into committing suicide” (Daniels and Bowen 429). The new-world female citizens, in life as in cinematic simulation, gladly wait for their male counterparts to save them.

It is true that Lenina for a considerable period rejects the socially-sanctioned sexual promiscuity, but it is also true that her rejection, personal and temporary, does not evolve into any public protest that disturbs the capitalist hegemony. Lenina’s situation reminds one of the difficulty facing female writers: “[For] the female artist the essential process of self-definition by all those patriarchal definitions that intervene between herself and herself” (Gilbert and Gubar 17). Lacking discursive strength, Lenina is on the one hand defined in the new world “as ‘meat,’ and (as in our society) meat which must be lean, not fat” (Deery 106). On the other she is defined by her love interest, John the Savage, as innocently girlish and then as whorish:
“Strumpet! Strumpet!” shouts the Savage (BNW 201). It is unfair to characterize Huxley as a sexist, because not only should he be distanced from the female-degrading ideology in the new world, but he should be distinguished from John the character. Still, it is deeply regrettable to see that he who bestows so much thought on the future of mankind does not spend as much care on the subjectivity of womankind.

If the new world is littered with conditioning centres and crematoriums, symbolizing the capitalist domination on human beings from birth to death, and with bureaus of propaganda for feeling pictures, TV, etc., suggesting for each new-world citizen a lifetime of subjection to entertainment, the Indian reservation preserves a cultural hybridity on its stark landscape. The culture and the landscape of the reservation, unfortunately, serve but as tourist attractions for people in the new world. In their introductory paragraph to their selection of Jamaica Kincaid’s A Small Place, Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan explain a new form of colonialism, “secondary colonialism occurs when inhabitants of wealthy, highly developed northern or western countries convert poorer, formerly colonial, usually southern and eastern countries into sites or objects of useful pleasure,” and they lose no time in pointing out that “[tourism] is the most obvious example of such colonization” (1224).

“Secondary colonialism,” in short, is colonialism in capitalist apparel. It is noteworthy that the exoticness of the reservation for new-world tourists is of a nature that is at once fascinating and repelling and that confirms the economic superiority of the Fordian world. In the early chapters of the novel, Lenina is invited to take a trip to the reservation, a trip aptly referred to as “the New Mexico holiday” (BNW 77), with her then-lover Bernard, who happens to be an Alpha and who later figures as a minor but supportive role in the John-Watson rebellion. Unlike the new world and its mechanical urban-scape, the reservation greets its visitors with a rocky landscape:
“The mesa was like a ship becalmed in a strait of lion-coloured dust. . . . On the prow of that stone ship in the centre of the strait, and seemingly a part of it, a shaped and geometrical outcrop of the naked rock, stood the pueblo of Malpais” (BNW 92). The landscape is met with disapproval from Lenina: “Very queer” (BNW 92). And our heroine is further shocked when she sees “what awaited her at the entrance to the pueblo, where their guide had left them while he went inside for instructions. The dirt, to start with, the piles of rubbish, the dust, the dogs, the flies” (BNW 93). The religious ritual at the pueblo is not very inviting, either: “[There] had swarmed up from those round chambers underground a ghastly troop of monsters. Hideously masked or painted out of all semblance of humanity, they had tramped out a strange limping dance round the square” (BNW 96). If anything, these unpleasant, not to say disgusting, experiences remind Lenina of the convenience and comfort of the new world: “Oh, I wish I had my soma” (BNW 98).

Lenina is to the local Indians in the reservation what a modern tourist is to the aborigines in the less industrialized areas, and in either case there is a tension between the two, a tension resulting from their respective economic strengths that determine who the visitors are and who the visited:

But some natives- most natives in the world- cannot go anywhere. . . . They are too poor to escape the reality of their lives; and they are too poor to live properly in the place where they live, which is the very place you, the tourist, want to go- so when the natives see you, the tourist, they envy you . . . they envy your ability to turn their own banality and boredom into a source of pleasure for yourself. (Kincaid 103)

With an unappreciative view of the reservation, Lenina fails to perceive that the religious ritual there contains a mixture of native and Christian symbols: “there emerged from the one a painted image of an eagle, from the other that of a man, naked,
and nailed to a cross” *(BNW* 97). This mixture, ironically, is purely of the author’s creation, for “[the] Pueblo Indians . . . are anthropologically a separate entity from the Penitentes” (Firchow 275). In “combining an Indian fertility cult with a Christian penitential ritual,” Huxley makes Christianity the “the most important shared element” between the new world and the reservation (Firchow 276-277). Apparently, the importance of the native religion for Huxley lies not in itself but in offering an opportunity to mount his attack on Christianity from a different angle. All concerns about a truthful portrayal of an aboriginal culture in its religious practices become secondary.

“There is a scene,” says Homi Bhabha, “in the cultural writings of English colonialism which repeats so insistently after the early nineteenth . . . It is the scenario . . . of the sudden, fortuitous discovery of the English book” (1167). This “scene” is “repeated” once again in the reservation when John the Savage receives a copy of *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare*. Huxley seems to take this discovery as literary expediency and admits in his foreword that, granted that he is given Shakespearean works, “the Savage is more often permitted to speak more rationally than his upbringing . . . would actually warrant” *(BNW* 7-8). But, congruous with his portrayal of the native religion, the “discovery of the English book” actually exposes Huxley’s colonialist prejudice. For him, the reservation is, in Chinua Achebe’s words, “setting and backdrop” (12) against which he stages his social critique. Huxley’s intention is to use John the Savage, who grows up in the reservation but whose parents are Fodian Londoners, to contrast the capitalist discourse with the rich imagery of the Shakespearean language and, in doing so, to bring to light the baneful capitalist domination on humanity. Therefore, once John the Savage is introduced on the scene, the cultural and physical landscape of the reservation is soon relegated to the background, on occasion foregrounded in the Savage’s flashbacks.
Works Cited


Frankel, Mark S. "Inheritable Genetic Modification and a Brave New World: Did Huxley Have It Wrong?" Hastings Center Report 33.2 (2003): 31-36.


---. "A Neglected Huxley "Preface": His Earliest Synopsis of Brave New World."


