MIT and Dr. Huxley

MIT is about to go Huxley-happy; the question is, as his public lectures and class sessions open, in what way. Many of those who swear to the lectures will be coming just for a peek at the Great Man. But others will be seeking something more.

If they seek a definitive plan to avert the Brave New Worldian nightmare of complete technological control, chances are they won’t get one. What they will get from Huxley — what Huxley has always given — will be a key introduction to introspection.

We must ask what we are and what is going on about us. We are part of our generation, which Huxley sees as well on the point at which we are no longer entertained by irrelevancies and pleasures. We tend not to care — really care — who wins the election, who is determining our future, just as long as we eat regularly, have a car, TV, and hi-fi, and get a girl and a good job. We are amused, not shocked, by the thought that advertisers can dictate to us.

As scientists and engineers, we have been accused by many liberals of being of a fascist mentality. The engineer, they say, is concerned with getting things done, but he does not consider the consequences of his acts. He subjects himself to superiors and accepts their word as gospel. He works for large organizations controlled by small groups, and is engaged in the bureaucracy immersed in the work of systems made necessary by the manifold requirements of modern technology. In the system, they claim, he is dehumanized. Hitler kept the young Germans marching to keep them from thinking; institutions like MIT impose an academic load which has the same effect. MIT is the Brave New Worldian nightmare of complete control; it cannot be denied.

At MIT we can see ourselves developing both as members of our generation and as scientists and engineers. As undergraduates we are molding both socially and academically; the question is how? Are we being taught to think — to use the dictionary? What outlook on life are we developing? Our failure to ask these questions is the basis of the danger. First we must question, we must look closely at ourselves and our environment. We must discern facts and, by reason, choose the relevant ones. We are going and if we want to go there; if not, we must do something about it.

We welcome Mr. Huxley, and hope that he will indeed give us a key to introspection.

ORE MORE UNTO THE BREAM, DEAR FRIENDS

Today, if I am a little misty, who can blame me? For today I begin my seventh year of writing columns for the makers of Marlboro Cigarettes.

Seven years! Can it be possible? It seems only yesterday I walked into the Marlboro offices, my knickers freshly pressed, my cowlick wetted down, my oilcloth pencil box clutched in my tiny hand. “Sir,” I said to the makers of Marlboro — as handsome an aggregation of men as you will find in a month of Sundays, as agreeable as the cigarette they made; a man with merely heaty, robust yet gentle, flip-top yet soft pack — “Sir,” I said to this assemblage of honest tobacconists, “I have come to write a column for Marlboro Cigarettes in college newspapers across the length and breadth of this great free land of America.”

We shook hands then — silently, not trusting ourselves to speak — and one of the makers whipped out a harmonica and we sang sea shanties and bobbed for apples and played “Run, Sheba, Run,” and smoked Marlboro Cigarettes until the campfire had turned to embers.

“What will you write about in your column,” asked one of the makers whose name is Trueblood Strongheart.

“About the burning issues that occupy the minds of college America,” I replied. “About the vital questions as: Should the Student Council have the power to levy taxes? Should a fraternity be armed? Should coeds go out for football?”

“Well, and will you say a kind word from time to time about Marlboro Cigarettes, sir?” asked one of the makers whose name is Honor Bright.

“Why, bless you, sir,” I replied, chuckling slyly. “There is no other kind of word except a kind word to say about Marlboro Cigarettes — the filter cigarette with the unruffled tar — that happy combination of delicious tobacco and exclusive selecione filler — that loyal companion in fair weather or foul — that joy of the forest never serene.

There was another round of handshakes then and the makers squeezed my shoulders and I squeezed theirs and then we each squeezed our own. And then I hied me to my typewriter and began the first of seven years of columnizing for the makers of Marlboro Cigarettes.

And today as I find myself once more at my typewriter, once more ready to begin a new series of columns, perhaps it would be well to explain my writing methods. I use the term “writing methods” advisedly because I am, above all things a methodological writer. I do not wait for the muse; I work every single day of the year, Sundays and holidays included. I set myself a daily quota and I don’t let anything prevent me from achieving it. My quota, to be sure, is not terribly difficult to attain (it is, in fact, one word per day) but the important thing is that I do it every single day. This may seem to you a grueling schedule but you must remember that some days are relatively easy — for example, the days on which I write “the” or “a.” On these days I can usually finish my work by noon and can devote the rest of the day to happy pursuits like bird-walking, monoply, and smoking Marlboro Cigarettes.

The makers of Marlboro are happy to bring you another year of Max Shulman’s free-wheeling, uncensored column — and are also happy to bring Marlboro Cigarettes, and for non-filter smokers — mild, flavorful Philip Morris.