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**The Doors to Psychedelic Utopia:
William Blake's Influence on Aldous
Huxley's Evolution from the Dystopian to
the Utopian Genre**

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ABSTRACT

In the context of the American and French Revolutions, the Enlightenment and the increasing industrialization, William Blake's *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* became a universal manifest in favour of intellectual freedom and an earlier example of religious, political and social criticism. Two centuries later, in a complex period characterized by several international conflicts, economic crisis and the progressive emergence of counterculture movements and avant-garde artistic manifestations, Aldous Huxley similarly denounced the decline of Western civilization due to overpopulation, industrial dehumanization, scientific and technological overuse, cultural censorship and political oppression. Considering both authors have become emblematic figures against totalitarian governments denouncing how Rationalism has been used by the dominant class to discredit alternative ideologies, my purpose in this paper is to determine to what extent Blake's work influences Huxley's evolution from the dystopia *Brave New World* to the utopia *Island*.

Blake, Huxley, psychedelic drugs, dystopia, utopia, mysticism

En el marco de la Revolución americana y francesa, la Ilustración y la creciente industrialización, *El matrimonio del cielo y el infierno* de William Blake se convirtió en un manifiesto universal en favor de la libertad intelectual y un ejemplo temprano de crítica política, religiosa y social. Dos siglos después, en un turbulento periodo marcado por conflictos internacionales, crisis económicas y la progresiva aparición de movimientos contraculturales y manifestaciones artísticas de vanguardia, Aldous Huxley denunció el declive de la civilización occidental debido a la superpoblación, la deshumanización, el abuso tecnológico, la censura y la opresión política. Considerando que ambos autores han denunciado la imposición del racionalismo por parte de los regímenes totalitarios con el fin de desacreditar ideologías alternativas, mi propósito en este trabajo es determinar hasta dónde llega la influencia de Blake en la evolución literaria de Huxley, desde la distopía *Un mundo feliz* hasta la utopía *La isla*.

Blake, Huxley, drogas psicodélicas, distopía, utopía, misticismo

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Introduction: William Blake and Aldous Huxley, Two Sides of the Same Coin

Although *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1790-1793) has certainly become a universal manifest in favour of intellectual freedom and an earlier example of religious, political and social criticism in the eighteenth century, William Blake was not properly recognised during his lifetime and remained in the shadow of other well-known Pre-Romantic and Romantic authors, such as Lord Byron, Percy Bysshe Shelley or William Wordsworth, who fit in better with the literary conventions required in the complex period between the Age of Reason and Romanticism occurring in Britain at that time. It was not until the twentieth century when his literary work and his particular ideology began to be appreciated, standing out for being considered revolutionary, innovative and genuinely creative. He was a pioneer in his field by reformulating the contemporary thought and tradition, but his ideas proved to be excessively radical and progressive for Blake's generation.

Blake's legacy in the twentieth century is very extensive, covering almost all the sides of the cultural sphere. His reception in a fragmented historical period came with the gradual appearance of avant-garde artistic manifestations, the recognition of science fiction as a canonical literary genre, and the establishment of counterculture movements that embraced universal freedom, communal living and spirituality as opposed to the overwhelming advance of science and technology, intellectual censorship and capitalism. In this regard, Blake's influence on Aldous Huxley's literary work is probably one of the most remarkable, and surprisingly, less studied contributions over the last few years, considering both authors have become emblematic figures against totalitarian forms of government denouncing how Rationalism has been used by the dominant class as a political weapon to manipulate society and discredit alternative ideologies.

Huxley can be considered a representative figure of mysticism in modern English literature. His literary style embodies a perfect blending between the Western industrialized modernity and the Eastern primitive philosophy exploring the controversial dilemma between scientific dogmas and spiritual beliefs. Science is depicted as a powerful, dangerous tool that can create or destroy regardless of moral values, while spirituality is considered the only means to challenge Rationalism and achieve social harmony and individual freedom. Huxley's fascination with Blake can be considered a

decisive factor in his increasing interest on transcendental matters, which was put in practice in the development of his experiments with psychedelic drugs involving both a scientific and philosophical approach to the alteration of consciousness and the mind's role in human perception. The struggle between science and spirituality is reflected in the essays *The Doors of Perception* (1954) and *Heaven and Hell* (1956). Two years later, the release of *Brave New World Revisited* (1958), in which he openly discussed the weaknesses of his novel *Brave New World* (1932) as the result of a young, immature mind, marked a turning point in his critical perception of the future.

Henceforth, Huxley's literary style experiments a development from a pessimistic perspective in the dystopia *Brave New World*—denouncing the failure of the current system in the context of a future society characterized by overpopulation, social alienation, industrial dehumanization, scientific and technological overuse, artistic and intellectual repression and the loss of faith in democracy due to totalitarianism—towards a more optimistic (even conciliatory) one in the utopia *Island* (1962). The depiction of drugs as a recurrent literary motif in all his works is, therefore, crucial to identify this change of perspective since two opposite conceptions can be found: firstly, as tools of psychological manipulation and conditioning in *Brave New World's* soma, and later, as mind expanders in *Island's* moksha. Blake's influence on Huxley's experimentation with psychedelic drugs to reach new states of consciousness, just at the precise moment in which Huxley was questioning his belief in scientific Rationalism, can suggest a deeper relation between both authors and a possible explanation for the progressive transformation of Huxley's literary style.

Although considerable research has been devoted to demonstrate how Blake's ideology has had a great impact in a large number of twentieth century literary authors, few studies have been focused on the influence of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* on Huxley's *The Doors of Perception* and *Heaven and Hell*. Rather less attention has been paid to develop a proper research concerning a broader connection between both authors. One of the most notable essays on this issue is “Cleansing the Doors: Sense, Perception and Imagination in William Blake and Aldous Huxley”, published in 2007 by Matthew L. Miller. The author notes that “[a] discerning glance at the titles of these two works suggests a direct relationship with Blake's *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, but the

degree to which Blakean concepts actually form the foundation for Huxley's reflections has not yet been thoroughly examined". Of particular interest is Miller's analysis on how Blakean terminology is adopted by Huxley to describe his psychedelic experience depending on whether he supports or rejects Blake's ideology:

Blakean language is most clearly present when Huxley's argument is somewhat contrary to Blake's own, but when he reaches his essentially Blakean conclusion he fails to recognize the closeness of his thoughts to those of Blake. (1)

Considering a proper research on this matter is still undeveloped, my purpose in this paper is to determine to what extent Blake determines Huxley's evolution from dystopian to utopian literature. This hypothesis is based on *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*'s undeniable influence on Huxley's experimentation with psychedelic drugs since it marked a turning point in his literary career and highlighted the beginning of his mystic, utopian transformation. For this purpose, I will apply the following methodology: firstly, I will briefly describe Blake's revolutionary ideas in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* and its reception in the twentieth century; secondly, I will identify the key points of Blake's noticeable influence on Huxley's first and most relevant essay about the use of psychedelic drugs, *The Doors of Perception*; and then, I will analyse Huxley's literary transformation from the dystopia *Brave New World* (and its sequel *Brave New World Revisited*) to the utopia *Island*, which is Huxley's last novel and can be considered the synthesis of his thought. The present study ends up with the conclusions obtained from my research.

1. William Blake, a Visionary of the Romantic Age against the Establishment

The eighteenth century was a flourishing period in terms of intellectual, scientific and technological progress. The Industrial Revolution marked the transition from a rural, agrarian society to an industrialized, urban one, as long as the emergence of new philosophical theories, such as Empiricism and Rationalism, revealed the beginning of a new paradigm. Influenced by the theories of Francis Bacon, John Locke and Isaac Newton among other authors, the Scientific Revolution established the basis for modern thought and, for the first time in the history of mankind, people tried to explain and understand the laws of nature beyond the Christian faith. Meanwhile, a widespread social disconformity towards authoritarian governments, political corruption and religious dogmas led the world to several international conflicts in search of freedom and independence, as can be seen firstly in the American Revolution (1775-83) and afterwards in the French Revolution (1789-99), which can be considered the prelude to the Napoleonic Wars (1799-1815).

William Blake was born on 28th November 1757 in London and grew up in the bosom of a humble, hardworking Protestant family being educated at home by his mother. Imbued in the oppressive atmosphere of industrial smokestacks, imperial pretentiousness, alienation of the individual and the popular acceptance of rationalist discourse as the sole measure for reality, he identified himself with every revolutionary outbreak that emerged inside and outside Britain. During his lifetime, he was linked with important figures concerning social and political activism, including the liberal supporter of American independence and working class' rights Thomas Paine, the radical anarchist philosopher William Godwin, and his wife, the advocate of women's rights Mary Wollstonecraft. He openly disapproved the British monarchy—embodied at that time by George III—and condemned any form of political, religious and social oppression, such as colonial slavery, child exploitation, chastity, racial discrimination and even the commonly accepted arranged marriages.

His literary and artistic carrier was extremely influenced by his mystical visions that, apart from his wife and closest friends becoming progressively accustomed, were considered product of a serious mental disease (Balboa 101). Politically considered as a radical anarchist and accused several times of being a heretic, Blake progressively became

a symbol of non-conformist, revolutionary values, especially those concerning his particular vision of God and Christianity. His interest in Hermeticism and Esotericism contributed to the creation of a complex rhetoric made up by mythological references difficult to understand for the profane reader. His strong belief in the power of imagination and creativity as an essential tool for social transformation determined his lifetime, becoming a multidisciplinary artist—poet, painter, engraver and mystic visionary—that had a strong influence on subsequent generations. In this regard, Balboa underlines Blake’s contribution to consolidate Romanticism since he openly participated in the romantic rejection of the rationalist component of the Enlightenment and had already encouraged the perception of the infinite in finitude, while aspiring to reconcile the divided and advocated for creative freedom, the free flow of imagination that lies within the individual (228).

The recognition, however, arrived too late, and although he received a great amount of commissions as a professional engraver, his literature characterized by a naïve, chaotic style had little success and was severely criticised by his contemporaries. He eventually died on 12th August 1827 in London, surrounded by his wife and affected by celestial visions, perhaps convinced of reaching at last the New Jerusalem that he had tried to establish in England.

1.1. Blake’s Revolutionary Values in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*

One of the most significant manifestations of Blake’s religious, political and social criticism is *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*—a collection of 27 engraved plates in which prose and verse are skillfully combined with illustrations—conceived as a satiric parody of Emanuel Swedenborg’s *De coelo et ejus mirabilibus, et de inferno, ex auditis et visis* (1758). Along this revolutionary manifesto, Blake centers its attention on Rationalism and Christian religion as the main source of the intellectual oppression, cultural censorship, social inequalities, increasing poverty and ignorance the English society was suffering at that time. As Palomares notes, the author was able to foresee the long-term consequences of unrestrained technological progress, which had serious consequences in the lower social strata as they suffered precarious working conditions and the complete absence of labor legislation that protected them from abuse and exploitation (37-38).

According to Otto, Blake defends that

the wars ravaging Europe . . . are products of the philosophical systems developed and the cultural practices fostered by three of the most important pillars of the Enlightenment: Francis Bacon (1561-1626), John Locke (1632-1704), and Isaac Newton (1642-1727). In Blake's major prophecies these figures become synecdoche for, on the one hand, the technological and conceptual advances that make 'total war' possible and, on the other hand, the cultural practices that distance the modern (rational) self from the active powers of the boy that it attempts to repress, and from the world that it struggles to dominate. (30-31)

When Blake declares "I have always found that Angels have the vanity to speak of themselves as the only wise; / this they do with a confident insolence sprouting from systematic reasoning" (Plate 21), he specifically alludes to Rationalism as a system of ideas that actually limits the individual's ability to conceive and interpret his own existence without restrictions. Far from offering an enriching perspective, it turns the individual into a stooge at the service of pre-established dogmas in favor of a single, absolute truth. As a matter of fact, Blake did not consider the Age of Reason "as the rational triumph of human consciousness over the irrational", on the contrary, he argued that excessive rationalization and control had only contributed to generating a climate of psychosis (Woodman 198-99). As expected, dogmatic statements tend to bring with them totalitarian regimes that prioritize their own survival over the individual welfare. The repeated approach in first person is deliberate since it supports the depiction of his figure as a kind of devilish, but redeeming Messiah, that is, the main responsible for ending with the Establishment. Concerning this issue, Woodman defends that "*The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* is Blake's apocalyptic manifesto, in which he prophetically announces himself as the Second Coming" (87).

Repression can reach several dimensions: physical, through laws and politics of fear; mental, through philosophical doctrines; and spiritual, through guilt and eternal damnation. The claim "Prisons are built with stones of Law, Brothels with bricks of Religion" (Plate 8.21) criticizes the institutionalization of the soul as the ultimate form of oppression that get even worse when, as Palomares recognizes, Rationalism was accepted as a religion by itself, relegating the Christian faith to a system of empty assertions, but whose sacred character and authoritarian depiction of God conferred its institution an aura of impunity that contributed to feed the oppressive power of the Government (46-47).

Considering this issue, *A Memorable Fancy* (Plate 12-13) openly exposes through the words of Ezekiel how Judaism—the historical precedent to Christianity—had built its own faith by discrediting any other form of thought in order to impose its authority.

Blake's discrepancy with Swedenborg is especially evident in Plate 3: “Without Contraries is no progression. Attraction and Repulsion, Reason and Energy, Love and Hate, are necessary to Human existence. From these contraries spring what the religious call Good and Evil”. The author questions the universal dichotomy that divides the world based on opposing and irreconcilable approaches by deconstructing the pre-existing notions of “Good” and “Evil” negating in this way “the worth of any absolute value judgment” (Miller 3). Celestial redemption and eternal damnation are put close together in sacred matrimony to emphasize Blake’s denial of the traditional Judeo-Christian values. This union of contraries evidences his belief that the core axis of human essence is based on the balance of opposing forces, and its conscious acceptance can undoubtedly be considered the only path to reach transcendence beyond the material sphere. On this matter, according to Miller, “[t]he premise of Blake’s rebuttal is that while free will and passive adherence to God’s will may represent opposite forces in mankind, it is not morally superior to be governed by one and not the other—both are necessary in their opposition to one another” (3).

Furthermore, the clash between Reason and Energy is particularly interesting when, in Plate 16, Blake turns both terms into two classes of men: the Devouring that represents Reason and the Prolific that represents Energy. The first type refers to the dogmatic, rational one dominated by the scientific method that remains passive and fearful. On the contrary, the second type—also connected in Plate 12 with the notion of “Poetic Genius”—refers to the one that maintains a dynamic, challenging attitude through his unstoppable creative force (Palomares 43). In fact, Miller defends that all men are constantly forced to manage whether the Prolific or the Devouring rules their soul. He considers this struggle as “the perfect model of Blakean contraries” since “the two are entwined in an interminable state of conflict in which the prolific perpetually creates in the immediate media of life and energy while the devourer deadens his creations by imprisoning them in a system of symbols” (Miller 4).

As can be seen in Plate 5, the greatest weakness of mankind is not being able to accept its natural instincts and desires, establishing rational barriers that suppress their emotions and, by extension, their creative freedom: “Those who restrain desire do so because theirs is weak enough to be restrained; and the restrainer, or Reason, usurps its place and governs the unwilling. And being restrained it by degrees becomes passive, till it is only the shadow of desire”. Indeed, the previous statement is again developed in the *Proverbs of Hell* and can be summarized in the following quote: “He who desires but acts not, breeds pestilence” (Plate 7). For the author, passivity involves the acceptance of totalitarian forms of oppression and, consequently, condemning mankind to intellectual and spiritual degeneration. To quote Miller,

Passivity is always negative in Blake, as it implies a manner of receiving rather than creating, or reception rather than perception. Newton’s adherence to ratio and Swedenborg’s belief in the morality of restraint are joined as finite, and limiting, contraries to man’s infinite desire for life and creation. (4)

When Blake assumes the responsibility of accomplishing his own revolution, it should be understood not as a physical confrontation but as an intellectual argument, what he would later call “Mental Fight” in his preface to *Milton* (1810). His rebellion is a plea in favor of intuition, artistic creation and freedom of speech. Through imagination and creativity, the human being is able to pass through what the author calls the “doors of perception” (Plate 14) that separate the material sphere from the spiritual one. The power to create and imagine resides in the individual’s inner self as an emancipator energy that fights against intellectual repression, but it can only be achieved through the denial of systematic reasoning as the single measure of reality.

1.2. Blake’s Reception in the Mid-twentieth Century: A “Door” to the American Counterculture

Blake’s message was recovered almost two centuries later in a parallel historical background affected by international conflicts, economic collapses and social fragmentation. The achievements of modern Western civilization had brought with it a culture based on massive industrialization, technological progress and productive efficiency, placing capitalism as the ruling economic system that prevailed above individual freedom. Although a large part of the population took part of this *state of*

affairs with different degrees of acceptance, others publicly criticized the authoritarian role of the government, the inability of citizens to influence the political decision-making process, the controversial use of weapons in either military or civilian conflicts, the harmful effects of industrialization on the environment, and the traditional family and sexual relationship patterns, among other issues.

As a consequence of this worldwide crisis of values, there was a huge scepticism towards the universal truths that had dominated the Western culture so far, and every principle that had previously been accepted started to be questioned in favour of a radical revolution, which later on materialized in the appearance of social activism, counterculture movements and avant-garde artistic manifestations. North America, which had been ruling the world after taking up the torch of Britain, had a widespread desire of liberating itself from all the dogmas that had resulted in a dramatic post-war period; paradoxically facing once again incoming warlike events. In this regard, many people felt deceived by the paradox the American Dream represented: that a country arose from the principles of independence and self-determination could be so oppressive for its citizens.

Young people, who had inherited a deep anti-war feeling after the economic and social exhaustion caused by World War I (1914-18) and World War II (1939-45), considered Korean War (1950-53), Vietnam War (1955-75) and the beginning of Cold War (1947-91) a new source of conflicts that threatened its future. Rejection to war and concern about civil difficulties gained popular support thanks to the Berkley student protests taking place at the University of California in 1964, which later on turned into the Free Speech Movement. The impact of the protests depicted by the increasingly consolidated mass media helped these beliefs to quickly spread across America and Europe. The worldwide well-known Hippie Movement, which was based on the ideals of individual freedom, peace, justice and free love, emerged as a direct consequence of this anti-war feeling in a particular moment when drug effects were still being tested and contraceptive methods had been democratized.

Several segments of the society started to vindicate for their rights, especially those who had suffered from sexual and racial oppression in previous decades being politically ostracized and persecuted. Ethnic minorities—lead mainly by Black Americans—, women and the homosexual community could see their claims publicly

represented in the Civil Rights Movement, the Second Wave Feminist Movement and the Gay Liberation Movement, respectively. Another anti-establishment trend was related to the ecological concern opposing environmental degradation due to the overwhelming advance of industrialization and technological overuse, as can be seen in the Anti-Nuclear Movement. A more radical tendency, such as the Back-to-the-Land Movement, promoted to reformulate the means of production through alternative energy, organic farming and cooperative business enterprises in decentralized communes.

According to Mettler, the desire to challenge the modern construction of social order as a product of collective submissiveness and institutional Rationalism even contributed “to applaud mental illness as the ultimate form of rebellion, embracing mad people as a group whose presence posed a collective challenge to ‘the Establishment’”. The appreciation for chaos, absurdity and irrationality also motivated the development of an anti-psychiatry movement that “interpreted psychotic episodes like spiritual journeys or acid trips”. The author explains this fact since they believed mental disorders should not be considered a distortion of reality but the most reliable means of understanding. That is, only by looking through the eyes of madness, the world can be genuinely perceived (171). Apart from the metaphorical interpretation of insanity, this trend brought about the commitment to denounce social stigmas towards the disabled and stood up for mentally ill people's rights, as it was happening with race and gender discrimination. Therefore, it is significant 1960's Counterculture's contribution to raise awareness of the most oppressed social groups by giving them an important role to perform. To quote Mettler, “If conventional ways of thinking were responsible for society's problems, who better to provide new insights than those who were at times unable to think in conventional ways?” (172).

Theodore Roszak is considered the first scholar using the term “counterculture” for naming this non-conformist way of living and thinking opposed to the predominant values that spread beyond the North American boundaries and gained popularity all over the world, especially Europe. Roszak analyzes this social phenomenon in his best-known non-fiction publication *The Making of a Counter Culture: Reflections on the Technocratic Society and Its Youthful Opposition* (1969). Thenceforth, there have been many theorists who have delved into the particularities of 1960's Counterculture. A recent

example is the Spanish writer and cultural critic Jordi Costa, who, in an interview regarding the publication of his last work *Cómo acabar con la Contracultura. Una historia subterránea de España* (2018), stated that the meaning of “counterculture” is to say a big NO to the dominant culture of our parents to formulate a utopian revolution through the irrational, the chaotic and disordered, the anarchic. By definition, Costa concluded, the counterculture was inclusive since it broke the limits between high and low culture, turning life into a piece of art and a political project.

As Roszak notes, the revolution was conceived in the youngest social background since the adult generation was experimenting a pathological passivity due to the previous warlike climate, preferring the prosperous security that can be found in the American consumer society in which the basic needs were easily satisfied:

The remembered background of economic collapse in the thirties, the grand distraction and fatigue of the war, the pathetic if understandable search for security and relaxation afterwards, the bedazzlement of the new prosperity, a sheer defensive numbness in the face of thermonuclear terror and the protracted state of international emergency during the late forties and fifties, the red-baiting and with-hunting and out-and-out barbarism of the McCarthy years . . . no doubt all these played their part. And there is also the rapidity and momentum with which technocratic totalitarianism came rolling out of the war years and the early cold war era, drawing on heavy wartime industrial investments, the emergency centralization of decision making, and the awe-stricken public reverence for science. (23)

By recalling Romantic values, the Counterculture Movement assumed a similar disruptive role Romanticism had centuries before in favor of free expression and emotion. The interest on Orientalism and Eastern philosophies in contrast with the Occidental thought, the desire to escape from the constraints of Rationalism through a transcendental approach to reality, the idealization of madness and the exploration of hidden sides of the human nature that lie in the subconscious are recurrent topics in this period. As Ched alludes, the similarities between both periods can be appreciated, for instance, in Roszak’s devotion to Blake:

Rozzak is, of course—and openly admits to being—a latter-day Romantic. . . . He is, in a way, trying to work up a politics of Romanticism applied to a modern industrial society, and—just as Blake was doing—to raise questions about the adequacy of the scientific world view as a basis of

human culture. Blake's prayer, in fact, is Roszak's too: *God us keep, from single vision, and Newton's sleep.* (486)

It is no coincidence, therefore, that Blake became a very popular figure embodying counterculture ideals since its particular vision was progressively attached to the collective knowledge as a symbol of non-conformism, insubordination and mental fight against any form of oppression:

We must be prepared to entertain the astonishing claim men like Blake lay before us: that here are eyes which see the world not as commonplace sight or scientific scrutiny sees it, but see it transformed, made lustrous beyond measure, and I seeing the world so, see it as it really is. (Roszak 240)

According to Otto, the flourishing interest in Blake was highly motivated by the publication of *The Complete Writings of William Blake* (1957) by Geoffrey Keynes and *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* (1965) by David Erdman. It is remarkable that the latter was commented by Harold Bloom, who can be considered responsible for making Blake's literature accessible for the wide audience. Furthermore, the most important works concerning Blake criticism were also published at that time, including Northrop Frye's *Fearful Symmetry* (1947), David V. Erdman's *Blake: Prophet Against Empire* (1954) and Kathleen Raine's *Blake and Tradition* (1968), among other examples (27). These authors considered Blake's legacy a trigger for the mid-twentieth century radical ideologies that wanted to break with previous cultural models in search of intellectual and spiritual freedom, giving us enough evidence of his influence on 1960's Counterculture. In this regard, Otto notes the following:

Ignored during his own lifetime, now channelled and amplified by these counter-cultural icons, Blake's bivalent voice seemed at last to have reached the audience that it had always been addressing: the young men and women of the Age of Aquarius. Perhaps still more surprisingly, this belated audience was eager to begin the tasks urged by Blake: to set their foreheads against the bureaucrats who serviced the machinery of War, and to build Jerusalem in the 'green & pleasant Land' of post-industrial society. (30)

It is important to consider, however, that echoes of Blake's voice can already be heard a decade before in the 1950's Beat Generation literary movement that is considered the preamble to American Counterculture and the origin of Psychedelia, which

popularized the use of LSD, mescaline and psilocybin mushrooms to experiment altered states of consciousness and achieve artistic inspiration. *Beatniks* like Jack Kerouac, William S. Burroughs and Allen Ginsberg—who openly recognized having had visions with Blake whispering poems to him—evidenced in their novels and poems their disagreement with the conformist and materialistic America characterized by old-fashioned convictions and social fragmentation. For them, breaking the chains of oppression involves spiritual transcendence, only attainable through meditation, sexual liberation and drug experimentation.

Some of the most outstanding literary works from this period in which Blake's trace can be found are Allen Ginsberg's poems "Howl" (1955-56) and "America" (1956), Norman O. Brown's *Life Against Death: The Psychoanalytical Meaning of History* (1959) and *Love's Body* (1966), Kurt Vonnegut's *God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater* (1965), Michael Horowitz's anthology *Children of Albion: Poetry of the 'Underground' in Britain* (1969) and, of course, Aldous Huxley's essays about the use of psychedelic drugs *The Doors of Perception* (1954) and *Heaven and Hell* (1956). As a matter of fact, attention should be paid to Huxley's approach to drugs since his experiments set the principles of psychedelic subculture and had a determining role in how drugs are differently depicted in the dystopia *Brave New World* and its counterpoint the utopia *Island*. Balboa considers that the emergence of radical ideas about alternative worlds accentuated the appeal of Blake's prophetic literature, which can be considered as a precedent of the dystopian science fiction genre (207).

Although Blake's influence on counterculture authors is boundless, it can be concluded that his major contribution is the construction of a revolutionary, nonconformist archetype against the Establishment. Whether there is an individual fighting the oppressive, ruling authority or questioning himself about the nature of his faith (understood not only as religious beliefs, but also as ideological principles), Blake's legacy is again revisited. Huxley took over this legacy through the spiritual understanding of the human mind as a liberating, creative force for the individual. By looking at the Oriental perspective, Huxley brings into question the reliability of the Occidental values and proposes a revolution of thought that could lead to a new cultural paradigm.

2. Aldous Huxley's Psychedelic Mysticism

The first half of the twentieth century was defined by brief intervals of economic growth, political stability and social welfare alternated with international conflicts, a great economic recession and social fragmentation. The establishment of authoritarian regimes motivated the outbreak of World War I (1914-18) and, subsequently, World War II (1939-45) causing irreparable harm and massive genocides. During the inter-war period, the Roaring Twenties meant a short parenthesis of optimism, extravagance and wasteful spending that abruptly ended with the Wall Street Crash of 1929 and the resulting Great Depression (1929-39), which brought back again poverty, mass unemployment and social discrimination. In parallel, the emergence of avant-garde movements encouraged a significant intellectual and cultural development, while the unstoppable desire for progress inspired the overwhelming advance of science, technology and industrial production that consolidated the United States as a global power.

Huxley was born on 26th July 1894 in Godalming, Surrey (England), as the third child of an influential upper-class family that included important scientists and intellectuals. The appearance of visual disorders at the age of 16 caused him a partial blindness and eventually determined his election to study English Literature instead of Medicine at Oxford University. The struggle between scientific dogmatism and creative freedom contributed to the creation of a distinctive literary style that reflects a perfect blending between both spheres in the first stage of his life, but he progressively tipped the balance in favour of spirituality at the end of it becoming a representative figure of mysticism in modern English literature.

Huxley's first visit to the United States in 1925 was very shocking, identifying in consumerism, overpopulation, technological dominance and sexual promiscuity a reflection of the immediate future in Britain. Clearly affected by the political and economic circumstances all over the world and the unstoppable advance of modernity, Huxley wrote *Brave New World* (1932) warning the reader about the dangers of the world to come. However, his definitive move to the United States in 1937 meant a radical change of mentality. He developed an increasing interest in oriental philosophies by associating himself with the Vedanta Society of Southern California, which embraced Hinduism through spiritual consciousness and meditation.

Experimentation with mescaline during the 1950's can be considered a determining factor in the application of Psychedelia to his literary work and the progressive transformation of his approach to the utopian tradition. However, his discourse regarding sexuality, drug consumption and alternative ideologies exposed him to criticism and censorship. Bradshaw notes that “[i]ronically, he was by now far more concerned with the virtues of non-attachment, anarchism, decentralization and mystical salvation than with the failings of contemporary society, the role of pacifism in national politics or the art of fiction”. This fact determines, Bradshaw continues, “his departure for the higher ground of mystical enlightenment where he would remain encamped for the rest of his life” (xxxiv).

In the last period of his life, Huxley was affected by a terminal laryngeal cancer and eventually died on 22nd November 1963 in Los Angeles, California (USA), surrounded by his wife. At his own request, he was injected with 200 µg of LSD. As if taking the moksha-medicine, he accepted his death and went through it quietly as Blake did many years before. As it can be appreciated, the similarities between both authors go beyond the personal and literary sphere. Although it seems Blake possessed an inherent talent to experiment mystic visions, Huxley deliberately tried to reach that spiritual state some artists encountered unconsciously by using psychedelic drugs. Bridges notes the following about Huxley's contribution to universal literature:

[I]t exemplifies the rising American interest in mysticism, especially oriental varieties, that is evident in the age of anxiety after the Second World War; and it more than exemplifies – it helped to engender – the present-day search for transcendent religious experience through psychedelic drugs. (352)

2.1. Psychedelic Drugs as the Key to Open the “Doors of Perception”. Blake's Influence on *The Doors of Perception*

Experimentation with psychedelic drugs during the 1950's had a huge social and cultural impact by challenging conventional behavior. The increasing fascination with the bizarre contributed to the production of several literary works promoting their use as mind releasing and source of inspiration. Despite sparking controversy, psychedelic drugs also helped to develop a proper medical research about a responsible, therapeutic use discussing their effects on the mind, especially when trying to offer a possible means to

understand mental illnesses. Such is the case of the psychology professors Timothy Leary and Richard Alpert, who were eventually dismissed from Harvard in 1963 due to LSD experimentation on his own body.

As Miller notes, reading *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* caused Huxley a great impression and motivated him to experiment for the first time with mescaline in 1953 being supervised by the British psychiatrist Humphry Osmond (1). Huxley's visual disorder also contributed to challenge his critical thinking in favor of a mystical condition that could offer him a new perspective to face the rationalist monopoly of the mind. Blake's quote "If the doors of perception were cleansed everything would appear to man as it is: Infinite / For man has closed himself up, till he sees all things through narrow chinks of his cavern" (Plate 14) set the bases for Huxley's psychedelic trip, who became an earlier forerunner of psychedelic drugs research by making a record of their physical and psychological effects on the individual. Even though his experience is described in *The Doors of Perception* (1954) and *Heaven and Hell* (1956), as Miller claims, the former essay can be considered the most notable evidence that Huxley's psychedelic episodes are the beginning of Blake's influence:

There are many peripheral correlatives between the two authors' works, but *The Doors of Perception* is especially convenient for comparative purposes because of its direct and conscious relationship to Blake. . . . *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, Blake's most comprehensive philosophical poem and the text to which Huxley's work can be most appropriately compared. (3)

Bradshaw also underlines the essay's involvement in the emergence of 1960's counterculture values:

Not surprisingly, *The Doors of Perception* became a set text for the beat generation and the psychedelic Sixties, the Doors naming their band after the book which also earned Huxley a place on the sleeve of the Beatle's *Sergeant Pepper* album. (xxxvi)

Paradoxically, Huxley's research can be appreciated through both a scientific and philosophical approach. His desire to offer the most enriching perspective involves a detailed analysis of the process in order to discover how mescaline can alter the central nervous system and solve questions regarding brain mechanisms and their connection with consciousness and perception. For this purpose, Huxley introduces the notion of "Mind at Large" based on the previous theory developed by the Cambridge philosopher

C. D. Broad (1887-1971), who asserts that “the function of the brain and nervous system and sense organs is in the main *eliminative* and not productive” (10). This proposal determines that the individuals’ perception needs to be filtered through a reducing valve in order to

protect us from being overwhelmed and confused by this mass of largely useless and irrelevant knowledge, by shutting out most of what we should otherwise perceive or remember at any moment, and leaving only that very small and special selection which is likely to be practically useful. (11)

Although it would be interesting to discern if the valve has been genetically imposed from the beginning or progressively acquired to adapt human behavior to social relationships and communal living, conventional language can be considered the result of a rationalist imposition. Since the individual cannot voluntarily control the functioning of the valve—as he is not even aware of its own existence—psychedelic drugs play an important role in order to evade this mental barrier. In this respect, Huxley declares that

[m]ost people, most of the time, know only what comes through the reducing valve and is consecrated as genuinely real by the local language. Certain persons, however, seem to be born with a kind of by-pass that circumvents the reducing valve. In others temporary by-passes may be acquired either spontaneously, or as the result of deliberate ‘spiritual exercises’, or through hypnosis, or by means of drugs. Through these permanent or temporary by-passes there flows, not indeed the perception ‘of everything that is happening everywhere in the universe’ (for the by-pass does not abolish the reducing valve, which still excludes the total content of Mind at Large), but something more than, and above all something different from, the carefully selected utilitarian material which our narrowed, individual minds regard as a complete, or at least sufficient, picture of reality. (11-12)

Making a direct reference to Blake, the author reflects on the figure of the artist, the process of creation, the boundaries of imagination and its materialization in a restraining system of symbols with the intention to decode the mind of the visionary author and the means to achieve his altered state of consciousness. Huxley’s main hypothesis defends that only the mind of the talented, visionary artists is safe from mental oppression since “[w]hat the rest of us see only under the influence of mescaline, the artist is congenitally equipped to see all the time”. The artist’s perception is not determined to

see “what is biologically or socially useful” having free access to “the intrinsic significance of every existent” (18).

Blake’s influence is notable in Huxley’s approach to the nature of language. According to Miller, Blake “found language glorious, but believed that to use it as a substitute for an actual signified meaning would be to dwell in the finite”, as can be observed in the first lines of Plate 11 (*Marriage*). Due to its eliminative character, human perception needs to create its own system of symbols that allows the individual to capture reality by connecting abstract ideas with concrete mental or physical representations. As Miller notes, “assigning significance is a way for the self to impose itself” on the sphere of the unknown, but it is not truly reliable since it depends on personal attachments and expectations. The development of pre-conceived notions establishes a barrier between the signified inner world and the unmanageable outside one that can represent a threat for the individual’s creative energy. The conflict lies in the fact that “[d]ogma fails to recognize the structural gap between its own system of symbols and the things they stand for by making language an end in itself instead of a means to suggesting a greater potential vision” (6).

On this matter, Miller highlights Huxley’s concern regarding “whether or not the subjective boundaries of perception can be eclipsed temporarily to provide a glimpse into an objective enlightenment” and to what extent mescaline would help to go beyond “his normal, limited state” (2). The scholar introduces the concepts of Huxley’s “island man/universe” and Blake’s “myopic nature-worshiper” as metaphors of the finite, subjective reality that lies inside the individual and from which he is encouraged to actively transcend in order to reach the infinite, objective one where imaginative potential can be found—a correlation between the Devouring (passive) turning into the Prolific (active) can also be applied in this context. Achieving this aim, however, requires to diminish the ego filters that define consciousness as a self-created restraining system of symbols from which individuals extract a small part of knowledge about the world:

When the sense of self is allowed to assert itself, it fortifies the barrier between subject and object, . . . and any conception of the infinite is lost. . . . Diminishing the role of the ego in perception frees the mind through the elimination of the self/other, subject/object dichotomy, and thus reveals the infinite potential of a perception that creates rather than accepts. (Miller 5)

It is remarkable how both authors came to the same conclusion that every product of human imagination is limited when it takes a concrete shape since it has been domesticated by rational thought. As Miller argues, this argumentation was extensively developed by Blake in Plate 14 (*Marriage*). By presenting an “infernal method” to reveal “the infinite which was hid” that involves the usage of corrosives “to erode rather than reinforce the surface of an object” (7), Blake calls attention to the fact that creation and destruction are not always opposite forces. In parallel, Huxley declares that “the glory and the wonder of pure existence belong to another order, beyond the power of even the highest art to express” (18), suggesting that, independently of their aesthetic value, symbols are self-projections that cannot be equatable with the concepts they actually represent. Concerning this issue, Huxley recognizes that “the process of creation can never be more than partially cleansed, since both conceptualization and creation must take place within a manageable form” (Miller 7).

According to Racionero, Huxley supported that an adequate interpretation of the psychedelic trip required a framework of understanding superior to traditional medicine, such is the case of Eastern philosophies that can be recognized in the notion of unity promoted by Hinduism, in which the ego fades; the perception of fluidity introduced by Taoism, through which the energy of the individual merges with the universe; and, finally, the cessation of time that comes from Zen, which leads to immediacy (135-41). The Spanish essayist explains that the progressive recovery of alternative forms of thought during the second half of the twentieth century evidences the failure of Rationalism when giving a universal response to all the aspects of human experience. Instead of looking for absolute truths, Eastern philosophies encourage eternal joy—Blake's vital energy—and constant mutability by allowing that different realities of the same phenomenon can be harmoniously interconnected at the same time (162-3).

However, Huxley's' psychedelic trip had not the expected results since “his altered state was still only a partial cleansing and should not be confused with enlightenment” (Miller 8). To quote Huxley, mescaline “gives access to contemplation”, but it is incompatible “even with the will to action” (24). A debate regarding how Blake's action and Huxley's contemplation can become or not complementary forces to confront Rationalism is necessarily developed. The former's visionary condition cannot be

artificially acquired by means of synthetic substances, while the latter's contemplation through psychedelic drugs is accessible to every individual, but it prevents him from being creatively productive. As Miller notes,

The question of how to reconcile the mescaline state with the productive state is the climactic problem in *The Doors of Perception*, and leads Huxley to a discussion of contraries, during which, oddly enough, he does not directly invoke Blake despite the strikingly Blakean nature of both his question and conclusion. . . . A textual, rather than legendary, reading of Blake leaves no doubt that he was arguing the same point as Huxley, that both poles are necessary for human progression, but on this point the legend has traditionally polarized Blake on the side of his devils. (8)

As a matter of fact, Huxley's conclusion offers a conciliatory approach by recalling Plate 21 (*Marriage*) to promote the necessity of contraries:

Systematic reasoning is something we could not, as a species or individuals, possibly do without. But neither, if we are to remain sane, can we possibly do without direct perception, the more unsystematic the better, of the inner and outer worlds into which we have been born. (49)

2.2. Huxley's Progression from the Dystopian to the Utopian Genre: *Brave New World* and *Brave New World Revisited*

During the twentieth century, dystopian literature became very popular among readers and progressively acquired new literary features associated with science fiction. The recent imposition of authoritarian regimes by means of violence and censorship, the social fragmentation that had been aggravated due to the fierce capitalist system, and the lack of spiritual values to face the popular acceptance of consumerism and mass media entertainment to tame individuals legitimized the appearance of this genre which opposed the utopian tradition rooted in Plato's *The Republic* (c. 375 BC) and later on developed in Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516). According to Kaplan, "the mood of dystopia is usually dark, pessimistic, and often reflects paranoia, alarm, or hysteria". The lack of humor and the portray of future—instead of present—states "based on brutality, dictatorship or totalitarianism", distinguish them from Menippean satires (Kaplan 200-1). What deserves special attention, however, is that dystopian authors eventually assumed a predictive, prophetic consciousness—almost visionary—by presenting the failure of the current system as the result of humankind's bad decisions, projecting its negative consequences

in the context of an ideal future society governed by an over-controlling regime that punishes through physical and psychological suffering every act of rebellion.

Following the general pattern, *Brave New World* depicts the futuristic World State city of London in the year AF 632 (AD 2540) governed by a non-violent, totalitarian technocracy whose scientific advances have managed, as if they were machines, to artificially create, modify and control human beings at will, thus ensuring a free-pain society in which every individual knows his place. In this regard, Henry Ford's *My Life and Work* (1922), the autobiography of the business magnate in automobile manufacturing who popularized the assembly line, can be considered the basis of Huxley's first dystopia. Given the absence of religion or supernatural deities that could offer a spiritual refuge to material existence, along the novel the figure of Ford is similarly worshiped as the creator of this "perfect" society. The analogy between Fordism and the Cristian Faith can be frequently appreciated in the use of "Oh, my Ford" and "AF" (*Anno Ford*) replacing "Oh, my Lord" and "AD" (*Anno Domini*), respectively. By the same token, Charing Cross station is transformed into the Charing T Tower alluding to the famous Ford Model T.

Ford's main principles on mass production are applied with reproductive purposes through eugenics and ectogenesis to create a limited caste system based on prearranged physical and mental attributes that assigns from birth a predefined social role to every individual. The clear supremacy of the highly intelligent ruling class—the "alphas", together with the subordinate "betas"—over the marginal servant class—the "gammas", "deltas" and "epsilons"—evidences to what extent human life is predetermined, giving the individuals no option to change his fate. In order to avoid any trace of uprising against the Establishment, every citizen is subjected to psychological manipulation, classical conditioning and indoctrination by means of hypnopedia, while censorship prevents any chance of critical thinking. As emotional engagement is disapproved and interpersonal relationships are trivialized in favour of sexual pleasure, individuals' submission is also preserved through promiscuity, immersive entertainment, unlimited consumerism and soma consumption that, taking its name from Hinduism, is used as a recreational, hallucinogenic drug to suppress any negative feeling or emotion. On this matter, Mond describes the following to John the Savage:

And if ever, by some unlucky chance, anything unpleasant should somehow happen, why, there's always *soma* to give you a holiday from the facts. And there's always *soma* to calm your anger, to reconcile you to your enemies, to make you patient and long-suffering. . . . Now, you swallow two or three half-gramme tablets, and there you are. Anybody can be virtuous now. You can carry at least half your morality about in a bottle. Christianity without tears—that's what *soma* is. (209-10)

Racionero suggests that, as the Establishment fails in its attempt to rationalize human nature, at least, it gets control over the individual by manipulating reality (187). Throughout dystopian literature, drugs are depicted as both a mechanism of mental domination and a door to spiritual liberation. This double aspect does not confer them a positive or negative nature by itself, but it does make them a powerful tool in the hands of the author. This is the reason why Silverberg considers that “because science fiction is a form of fantasy, it is ideally suited for the exploration of drug-related phenomena” and distinguishes two different approaches: firstly, as “panaceas”, containing the individual's natural instincts in favor of social stability, thus contributing to the consolidation of totalitarian governments; and, secondly, as “mind expanders”, exploring the self by acquiring extraordinary aptitudes to reach a higher state of consciousness (3-4). Notable examples of these two trends are *Brave New World's* soma and *Island's* moksha, respectively.

In a parallel scenario, the Savage Reservation located in Malpais (New Mexico) is portrayed as the tribal, uncivilized community that opposes the modern, civilized World State by recalling primitive, indigenous traditions and beliefs, including natural birth and death, familiar bounds and mysticism. This nostalgia for a non-technological lifestyle inspired in the Zuni and Hopi Puebloan culture struggles, however, with the chaotic atmosphere of physical and psychological suffering, misery and cruelty Huxley represents. Paradoxically, although the World State could be considered a utopia as its perfectly designed to meet fundamental human needs, it requires a deliberate attack on individual freedom in favor of artificial comfort. As a matter of fact, Matter suggests that the novel is a clear “attack upon utopianism” since none of the scenarios described in *Brave New World* are ideal. On the contrary, they are “‘perfectly’ terrifying to the creative individual who wishes to test the gates of heaven and hell, and who seeks to find doors of perceptions not conveniently opened for perverse purposes by the state” (148). When

artistic, intellectual or emotional expression is not allowed, individuals' conformity becomes the key to ensure the survival of totalitarian forms of government. Thus, subjugation is guaranteed. To quote Huxley,

A really efficient totalitarian state would be one in which the all-powerful executive of political bosses and their army of managers control a population of slaves who do not have to be coerced, because they love their servitude. (Foreword xlvi)

According to Matter, Huxley was alarmed at the institutionalization of men, which is the high price individuals pay for synthetic happiness. As opposed to other contemporary views optimistic about a new utopia forged from the luxuries of technological and industrial advance,

Huxley strongly opposed the belief that progress, especially progress through science, would bring about a perfect world. The general view that industry could not fulfil all of man's needs led some utopists to espouse an increasingly popular and pessimistic negation of the machine. Reflective of the mood of the times, dystopian fiction assumed the leading role in the utopian genre. (147)

Matter notes that the "subjugation of the individual to a central authority" is the main axis of dystopian fiction (147). In parallel, anti-establishment behavior is commonly found in the figure of the anti-hero, who is unable to fit in the community and eventually struggles to free himself from oppression; thence, dystopias tend to focus on his fall and redemption conferring the character a martyrdom aura. Although a glimpse of non-conformism can be firstly detected in Bernard Marx, it is definitively embodied by John the Savage at the end of the novel. Both characters suffer from being forced to live in a hostile world; however, while Bernard develops an inferiority complex that makes him desperately seek popularity and acceptance among his caste-mates and superiors, John actually defends his true human nature even if it means a self-imposed isolation. The tragic end of both characters in a context of loneliness, humiliation and self-destruction constitutes the most convenient punishment for the oppressor to prevent others from following the path of treason.

Huxley's pessimistic vision concerning the circumstances in which a future society could develop started to be questioned by himself, and a more reconciliatory approach was presented in his Foreword (1946) to *Brave New World*. Living under the threat of an atomic warfare, Huxley regrets not to have been more lenient with the future

that awaits his characters, since neither the civilized World State nor the primitive Reservation seem a suitable option to reach “sanity”:

The 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 others hardly less queer and abnormal. . . . If I were now to rewrite the book, I would offer the Savage a third alternative. Between the utopian and the primitive horns of his dilemma would lie the possibility of sanity – a possibility already actualized, to some extent, in a community of exiles and refugees from the Brave New World, living within the borders of the Reservation. (Foreword xlii-xliii)

A third option between industrial dehumanization and primitive ignorance is then proposed. It involves a general reform of the political and economic system, emphasizing the notion of community as the epicentre of social authority and paying special attention to the individual’s autonomy:

In this community economics would be decentralist and Henry-Georgian, politics Kropotkinesque and co-operative. Science and technology would be used as though, like the Sabbath, they had been made for man, not . . . as though man were to be adapted and enslaved to them. Religion would be the conscious and intelligent pursuit of man's Final End, the unitive knowledge of immanent Tao or Logos, the transcendent Godhead or Brahman. And the prevailing philosophy of life would be a kind of Higher Utilitarianism, in which the Greatest Happiness principle would be secondary to the Final End principle—the first question to be asked and answered in every contingency of life being: "How will this thought or action contribute to, or interfere with, the achievement, by me and the greatest possible number of other individuals, of man's Final End?". (Foreword xliii)

According to Huxley, private monopolies must disappear, while taxes and incomes should be equally divided and distributed among citizens. Everyone would have the same control over the land, which equally belongs to the whole community. A cooperative social order made up by free individuals would prevent inequalities and encourage them to work together for mutual benefit. The use of science and technology must be responsibly regulated to satisfy the individuals’ primary needs instead of being a form of industrial slavery. Religion is depicted as a necessary source of self-knowledge while Utilitarianism would help the individuals to find the balance between his thoughts and actions, thus contributing to common self-realization. Each citizen governs himself, but needs the others to survive.

A critical review of his earlier literary work, the approach to the psychedelic phenomenon and his conversion to Vedanta Hinduism led him to the publication of *Brave New World Revisited* (1958), a collection of short essays analyzing the accuracy of his former predictions. It constitutes a detailed reflection on the consequences of overpopulation in Western civilization, the clash between totalitarian governments and individual freedom, and the gradual dehumanization caused by chemical and psychological manipulation. This work cannot only be considered the product of his literary maturity but also the warning that the miserable future he had depicted in the novel was even closer. At this point, Huxley acquires a remarkable social commitment when encouraging the reader to face the Establishment before it is too late: “Perhaps the forces that now menace freedom are too strong to be resisted for very long. It is still our duty to do whatever we can to resist them (154)”. Furthermore, his disposition evidences a clear transition to utopian literature that had previously begun with his Foreword (1946) to *Brave New World*. As Matter notes,

The key to the change in Huxley's philosophy is found in the 1946 foreword to *Brave New World*. . . . But in *Island* the final realization of the author's preoccupation occurs. It is evident, then, that Huxley's last novel is the result of a gradual progression of his utopian philosophy. (150)

2.3. Blake's Legacy in the Utopia *Island*

Huxley's last literary stage involves the reaffirmation of his anti-capitalist ideology and a significant commitment to alternative sociocultural constructions. His concern about the individual's alienation within the consumer society, who is forced to prioritize economic survival over intellectual freedom becoming a passive accomplice of the Establishment's perpetuity, reached an effective response in the 1960's Counterculture phenomenon. The emergence of anti-establishment movements supported the immediate need for solidarity systems of mutual cooperation, decentralized power and economic self-sufficiency, thus allowing collective forces to gain political prominence. According to Racionero, underground movements tend to overthrow authoritarian regimes by testing communes as a means of production, cooperatives as a means of distribution, sexual freedom as a means of social interaction, and press and artistic manifestations as a means of information and communication (11-15).

Otto compares Romanticism with Counterculture by suggesting that both marked “the oxymoronic resurgence of primitive powers that modernity was meant to dispatch” in favor of radical social change. The objection to traditional socio-cultural structures together with the fascination with exotic religions, the use of narcotics and the recovery of the “active energies of the body” contributed to the foundation of a narrative that opens the door to a utopian future in which the individual plays an important role in the construction of his own reality (37-38). In this regard, Roszak argues that the ultimate goal of the countercultural revolution is to achieve utopia:

Is the primary Project of our counter culture: to proclaim a new heaven and a new hearth so vast, so marvelous that the inordinate claims of technical expertise must of necessity withdraw in the presence of such splendor to a subordinate and marginal status in the lives of men. To create and broadcast such a consciousness of life entails nothing less than the willingness to open ourselves to the visionary imagination on its own demanding terms. (240)

Melano recognises the second half of the twentieth century as a flourishing period for utopian literature, especially the one that offers an environmentally and socially inclusive approach, thus becoming a literary genre in itself. In the words of the author, “utopias of reharmonisation” oppose to the industrialized modernity characterized by social alienation and ecological degradation, and reveal an “environmental anxiety and growing awareness of dwindling resources and scientific warnings of wide-scale environmental problems”. Therefore, they tend to focus on the communion between nature and human life through the description of egalitarian, participatory societies distributed in small rural areas whose citizens assume the local government and lead a sustainable lifestyle in which overconsumption, overexploitation, discrimination or corruption have no place (75-76).

Following the guidelines previously expounded in the last chapter of *Brave New World Revisited*, Huxley presents in *Island* the offshore kingdom of Pala, an isolated oil rich island located in the Indian Ocean between Sumatra and the Andaman Islands with a population of about one million inhabitants. The quiet life of this peaceful, cooperative community is disrupted by the arrival of the English journalist Will Farnaby, who deliberately is shipwrecked on the coast as a secret spy under the orders of Pala’s enemies, including Lord Joseph "Joe" Aldehyde and its neighboring territory of Rendang-Lobo,

who yearns to exploit its natural resources thanks to the Rani and her son Murugan's betrayal, both of them raised under the Western civilization. Farnaby's stay in Pala constitutes the main axis of the novel by discovering with skepticism the particularities that define this free and spontaneous society culturally opposed to his own, in which diversity is tolerated, eroticism is enjoyed, solidarity is encouraged and introspection is openly venerated to comprehend the self and not-self.

According to Beauchamp, "Huxley imagines Western empirical science reinforcing Eastern mystical philosophy to inform the best-of-both-worlds" (61). By combining selective use of technology and psychedelic mysticism, the Old Raja's grandfather—the Raja of the Reform—and the Scottish physician Dr Andrew MacPhail, contributed to the foundation of the Palanese philosophy, which was recorded in the Old Raja's *Notes on What's What, and What It Might be Reasonable to do about What's What*, a significant compendium of their ancestors' knowledge preserved by Dr Andrew's grandson Robert. Melano affirms that the struggle between sophisticated technology—Pala's non-life science—and low-impact technology is usual in utopian communities. Organic farming and modern industry tend to coexist when they bring about ecological innovation and integral preservation of the natural environment (77-78). As the Under-Secretary of Education Mr Chandra Menon states,

Our primary emphasis . . . [is] on the sciences of life . . . we don't really have any practical need for that kind of research—no heavy industries to be made more competitive, no armaments to be made more diabolical, not the faintest desire to land on the backside of the moon. Only the modest ambition to live as fully human beings in harmony with the rest of life on this island at this latitude on this planet. (210)

Based on Mahayanist Buddhism, the Palanese culture is focused on living in the present moment. Thus, several mynah birds croaking the words "Attention" and "Karuna" can be found along the island as a reminder "to experience every moment of every day with the fullest possible awareness" and compassion (Beauchamp 67). Supporting this approach, *Maithuna*—the yoga of love—is widely practiced to reinforce interpersonal bonds based on confidence and mutual respect, while *coitus reservatus* is used as a natural method of contraception to control the population growth. The notion of traditional family is replaced by Mutual Adoption Clubs (MACs), open multifamily communes in which

members can voluntarily enter and leave to avoid parental prejudices about the adult's world. As part of their basic education, Palanese young people must climb a dangerous rock precipice to remind them of the omnipresence of death and the fragility of all existence. To conclude the rite of passage from childhood to adolescence, they are introduced for the first time to moksha-medicine—a hallucinogenic toadstool meaning “spiritual liberation” in Sanskrit—praising the Lord of the Dance, Shiva-Nataraja.

By recalling Huxley's investigation on the use of psychedelic drugs to stimulate certain areas of the brain in search of a genuinely, mystical state of mind, Dr Robert persuades Farnaby of the moksha's benefits as an emancipator force that drives the individual to enlightening:

[I]t does something to the silent areas of the brain which opens some kind of neurological sluice and so allows a larger volume of Mind with a large 'M' to flow into your mind with a small 'm'. . . . Even if it doesn't refer to anything outside itself, it's still the most important thing that ever happened to you. . . . And if you give the experience a chance, if you're prepared to go along with it, the results are incomparably . . . therapeutic and transforming. So maybe the whole thing does happen inside one's skull. Maybe it *is* private and there's no unitive knowledge of anything but one's own physiology. Who cares? The fact remains that the experience can open one's eyes and make one blessed and transform one's whole life. (138- 39)

As Farnaby assimilates into the Palanese society, we travel throughout his past, which he confronts until reaching enlightenment in a traumatic but redemptive process with the help of Susila. On this matter, Racionero adds that acquiring higher states of consciousness through psychedelic drugs also reaches the political dimension when the individual no longer needs intermediaries to communicate with divinity, therefore, the rationalist hierarchy based on the Christian dogma and the system of symbols that legitimates its authority is definitively dismantled (176, 182).

The paradox of this utopia and what makes it different from other novels of this genre is precisely its deliberate vulnerability to foreign invasions by not having any type of military defense to protect its most precious asset: its natural resources. As Matter notes,

[U]topians often find it necessary to prepare themselves for the danger of attack. Plato's citizens are warriors; More's island is strongly fortified; and Campanella's city is encircled by high walls.

Huxley's Pala, in contrast, does not have the typical defenses; thus it is easily invaded by armored vehicles and foreign troops. (146-47)

Pala's inhabitants, mainly focused on the spiritual sphere, neglect their earthly paradise by naively forgetting that their benevolent and compassionate character is what actually distinguish them from their enemies. Of particular interest is Racionero's consideration about the notion of power and private property. Without material possessions, any external invasion is harmless and absurd. However, when property materializes and emotional bonds appear, they immediately generate the need to defend them against the threat of external authority and war, that is, from civilization (64-65). In an unexpected turn of events, the reader attends both Pala's fall to the Rendang's army led by Murugan at the head of Colonel Dipa's forces and Farnaby's remorse and humiliation when he realizes, just after achieving spiritual transcendence, that his selfish motivations have contributed to Pala's destruction, in a clear reference to civilizational collapse at the hands of Western colonialism.

Island can be considered the conclusion of Huxley's literary carrier and the ideological counterpoint to *Brave New World* by promoting selective use of science and technology, environmental concern, cooperative communal living, meaningful intimate relationships and introspective meditation to achieve a higher state of consciousness as the suitable means to achieve social harmony and individual freedom. As a matter of fact, Matter notes that, while the society of *Brave New World* is "directed toward goals which Huxley regards as unprofitable and frequently destructive to the human spirit ... *Island*, on the other hand, describes a society with a sound sense of direction" (149-50). The main difference between the two novels lies in the relationship between the individual and his social environment, and to what extent his role within the community is genetically imposed or intellectually developed. In the World State, Blake's Devouring man can be found. Children are indoctrinated to assume a permanent and preconceived identity within the productive machinery, as a result, individuality is repressed. Through rationalist dogmatism, human nature is dominated instead of understood. In Pala, however, Blake's Prolific man interprets the environment by building a dynamic relationship with his human condition, his vital energy flows and transforms with it. Children are encouraged to find their maximum potential by promoting individuality and self-knowledge, learning

in this way to build an empathic, constructive and symmetrical relationship with the members of their community.

Conceived on the main principles of Buddhism, Taoism, Hinduism and Confucianism, the Palanese philosophy maintains that the unknown should not be feared or mistrusted, on the contrary, it should be considered an opportunity of learning; both negative and positive emotions define vital existence and help the individual to find spiritual balance. We can appreciate Blake's contribution in Huxley's belief that opposite approaches complement each other, which is evidenced in Farnaby's mystical experience with moksha: "What he was seeing now was the paradox of opposites indissolubly wedded, of light shining out of darkness, of darkness at the very heart of light" (279). Systematic reasoning is incapable of giving a convincing, universal response to human existence, but it is effective when it comes to explaining industrial and technological processes. In their fight against dogmas, both authors do not reject Rationalism, but they definitively defend its coexistence with other forms of thought that fill the gap when dealing with uncertainty.

Huxley reflects on the contradictions of a perfect world being conscious of its little chance of survival. Despite evidencing Pala's failure, *Island* is the clearest manifestation of the author's desire for a genuinely better future. Due to his progression towards a more conciliatory approach in the recent past, the novel's tragic ending seems to offer a discouraging resolution to his utopian commitment: "The work of a hundred years destroyed in a single night" (285). Even so, in the last paragraph Huxley paradoxically recovers a most inspiring significance: "Disregarded in the darkness, the fact of enlightenment remained" (286). In other words, the key to enlightenment lies in oneself who, by choosing intellectual freedom, masters his own destiny. Even though it is difficult to reach the doors to utopia, going through them depends exclusively on the individual's will. The conclusion serves as a final warning, reminding the reader that hope is worthless without action.

3. Conclusion

In the attempt to master human beings' free will, Rationalism has fostered modern Western societies over the last two centuries to equate the logic of the machine with the existence of the individual. Thus, traditional Christian dogmas has yielded to the evidence that capitalist systems based on overconsumption, technological efficiency and industrial productivity successfully ensure submissive individuals, who are too busy to question their sociopolitical environment and whose creative force is completely nullified in favor of a restraining system of symbols. Romanticism, on the contrary, flees from systematic patterns, being frequently recalled in the construction of unlimited universes in which the individual can escape from oppressive realities. The political materialization of Romantic values through 1960's countercultural voices, along with the growing interest on Eastern philosophies, turns this much-needed spiritual flight into an attainable fact. The similarities between both historical periods, particularly developed in Blake and Huxley's literary framework, evidence that the anxiety about losing our intellectual freedom is a recurrent theme that have afflicted humankind throughout history.

A continuous update of the dystopian genre allows us to reformulate how we look at the past and future, being impelled not only to imagine but also to significantly change the cultural construction of our environment. However, we do not tend to imagine utopias for considering them impossible, while we passively praise dystopias for accomplishing our most terrible omens, assuming that they were inevitable. Both authors reflect on the creative and destructive force of the human being, who, by losing the chance to govern himself, becomes both victim and executioner. In this regard, Blake and Huxley's revolution is the one of the individual, and their acceptance of contraries as complementary vital forces constitutes the clearest example towards self-knowledge. Their vision is not restrictive but conciliatory. While Blake uses religion to oppose totalitarian regimes, Huxley does so through science. For Blake, the visionary transformation involves a diabolical exploration; for Huxley, embracing the wild and the primitive is required to face technological dogmas. For both, reaching the mystical experience, through either an innate ability or artificial means, is the last act of rebellion. Following Blake's footsteps, Huxley's dystopian deconstruction of reality constitutes an inevitable path towards the ultimate utopia.

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