

UTOPIA WITHIN AND WITHOUT: DUAL FACETS OF PSYCHEDELIC ENLIGHTENMENT AMIDST EXTERNAL THREATS IN ALDOUS HUXLEY'S *ISLAND*

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Abstract

In Aldous Huxley's *Island*, protagonist Will Farnaby explores the utopian society of Pala, where a harmonious blend of Eastern and Western ideologies thrives. Pala's societal fabric is interwoven with moksha-medicine, a psychedelic catalyst for spiritual enlightenment, promoting a self-aware, interconnected community. The narrative delves into the ceremonial and daily practices employed to foster this enlightened society, contrasting with dystopian elements from Huxley's *Brave New World*. The story reaches a critical juncture when Farnaby experiences moksha-medicine, transitioning from scepticism to a transcendent understanding, albeit facing dark reflections of existential horrors. The narrative takes a bleak turn as Pala, rich in oil, faces invasion from a neighbouring dictator, symbolizing the peril of Western exploitation. Despite the looming darkness, the essence of enlightenment remains undeterred, suggesting a form of utopia within one's psyche, achievable regardless of external adversities. Huxley's text not only explores the synergistic potential of Eastern and Western thought but also delves into the transformative and transcendent potential of psychedelic experiences, positing a profound exploration of utopia, both as a societal model and a state of individual enlightenment.

Keywords: Pala, moksha-medicine, psychedelic enlightenment, dystopian contrast, Eastern and Western ideologies, existential horrors, internal utopia

Introduction

On a bright May morning in 1953, Aldous Huxley embarked on a psychedelic voyage under the supervision of Canadian psychiatrist Dr. Humphrey Osmond, marking his first encounter with mescaline. This experience, as documented in subsequent correspondences between the two, birthed the term "psychedelic" to categorize mind-revealing substances like mescaline, LSD, and psilocybin (Huxley795). However, the trivialization and sensationalization of psychedelics during the sixties somewhat overshadowed the profound implications Huxley envisaged for these substances in expanding human consciousness. Laura Archera Huxley, the second spouse of Aldous Huxley, noted that he held the uncovering of psychedelic substances in high esteem, considering it among the three most significant scientific advancements of the twentieth century, along with atomic fission and the advent of genetic engineering(Huxley131).These psychedelic endeavours were not merely a flight of fancy for Huxley; they manifested as a profound intellectual and spiritual turning point, significantly informing his literary and philosophical pursuits, notably in his final novel *Island*. The novel

explores the harmonization of Eastern and Western ideologies in sculpting a utopian society, with psychedelics serving as a catalyst for individual and collective enlightenment. This enlightenment transcends the utopic to dwell within the psyche, offering a serene refuge amidst external dystopian adversities. The narrative in *Island* intertwines Huxley's realizations from his psychedelic expeditions with a fictional yet palpable utopian society in Pala. His personal correspondence reveals, "I have known that sense of affectionate solidarity with the people around me, and with the universe at large—also the sense of the world's fundamental All Rightness, in spite of pain, death, and bereavement" (Huxley 938-39). This sense of universal solidarity and fundamental 'All Rightness' of the world resonates through the societal fabric of Pala, where the use of moksha-medicine facilitates a transcendent understanding, mirroring Huxley's personal revelations.

Transitioning into the philosophical domain, Huxley's heightened awareness resonates with Meister Eckhart's concept of Istigkeit or Is-ness, which he elaborates as a "sacramental vision of reality" in *The Doors of Perception*. This vision, facilitated by psychedelics, aligns with the thematic essence of *Island*, where the cleansing of perceptual doors unveils the infinite realms of existence, bridging personal enlightenment with a societal utopian model. That Huxley responded to these drugs as he did surely results in large part from the fact that they provided him personal, experiential verification of the Perennial Philosophy—a doctrine suggesting that there is a fundamental truth underlying all the world's religions—that he had espoused without ever (in Keats' phrase) proving it on his pulse. *Eyeless in Gaza* (Huxley 1936) is usually taken as the watershed work, the Great Divide in Huxley's opus, the work in which the satirical agnostic gave way to the 'religious quester.' However, the origins of this conversion can be discerned as early as in *Brave New World* itself, particularly in the agon between John Savage and Mustapha Mond: against the latter's Grand Inquisitor-like cynicism, John argues for a transcendent purpose for human existence, for a yearning after the infinite, for God. What Mond contemptuously dismisses as irrelevant to modern, 'scientific humanity,' eventually became essential to Huxley. The thematic debate in *Brave New World* serves as a precursor to Huxley's later philosophical inquiries, bridging his personal psychedelic experiences with his evolving literary and philosophical stance.

In *The Perennial Philosophy*, Huxley presents a concise statement of faith encapsulating the timeless and widespread principles common to global religious traditions.

the metaphysics acknowledging a divine Reality as the foundation of the world of objects, lives, and consciousness; the psychology perceiving in the soul a resemblance to, or unity with, this divine Reality; the ethics that identify the ultimate purpose of humankind in the understanding of the innate and overarching Basis of all existence...

(Huxley 35)

However, Huxley concedes, "the nature of this one Reality is such that it cannot be directly and immediately apprehended except by those who have chosen to fulfil certain conditions, making themselves loving, pure in heart, and poor in spirit"—that is, by saints and mystics, not by systematic philosophers and writers. Originally, Huxley's interest in the Perennial Philosophy as a writer and artist was predominantly intellectual and aesthetic rather than spiritual, depending primarily on literature and logic over the direct perception of Reality. Prior to his experiences with mescaline, he had not encountered the mystical experiences he understood only through indirect knowledge and theoretical contemplation. With mescaline,

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he synthesized that experience, gaining for himself “the immediate knowledge [that] unites the knower with that which is known” (13).

Huxley was not at all embarrassed that his mystical insight did not arise from ascetic rigor or hermetic renunciation, often characterized by strict self-control or rejection of worldly joys, but rather from the ingestion of a pill. He notes in his work *Heaven and Hell* that some might argue,

“An experience which is chemically conditioned cannot be an experience of the divine. But, in one way or another, all our experiences are chemically conditioned, and if we imagine that some of them are purely ‘spiritual,’ purely ‘intellectual,’ purely ‘aesthetic,’ it is merely because we have never troubled to investigate the internal chemical environment at the moment of their occurrence.”
(Huxley9).

The route to the Divine Ground through psychedelics is just as valid and feasible as any other path. Indeed, Huxley further contends,

“For an aspiring mystic to revert, in the present state of knowledge, to prolonged fasting and violent self-flagellation would be as senseless as it would be for an aspiring cook to behave like Charles Lamb’s Chinaman, who, as per the story, burned down the house in order to roast a pig. Knowing as he does (or at least as he can know, if he so desires) what are the chemical conditions of transcendental experience, the aspiring mystic should turn for technical help to the specialists—in pharmacology, in biochemistry, in physiology and neurology, in psychology and psychiatry”

(Huxley13).

Thus, Huxley envisions a fusion where Western empirical science complements Eastern mysticism, culminating in the ideal utopian society depicted in *Island*. Fifteen years subsequent to the creation of *Brave New World*, Huxley reflected on the alterations he would implement if he were to write the book anew. “I would offer the Savage a third alternative—the possibility of sanity.” (Huxley 695) In a balanced society that stands between the technocratic dystopia of “civilization” and the primitive regression of the savage reservation envisioned in *Brave New World*, there would exist a community comprised of those who have sought refuge from such extremes. This community’s economic system would draw on decentralist and Henry-Georgian ideals, referring to Henry George’s advocacy for land value tax and open markets. Its political structure would mirror the cooperative philosophies championed by anarchist Peter Kropotkin. In such a society, science and technology would serve humanity, akin to the way the Sabbath is designed to serve people, unlike the current reality and the more pronounced scenario in *Brave New World*, where humans are moulded and subjugated to technological demands. The approach to religion would be a deliberate and informed effort to attain man’s ultimate purpose: the unified understanding of the innate Tao or Logos, the supreme Divine essence or Brahman. The guiding life philosophy would resemble an elevated form of Utilitarianism, where the pursuit of the greatest happiness would be subordinate to achieving the ultimate purpose—the primary concern in every situation would be to evaluate how each thought or action contributes to, or hinders, the realization of humanity’s ultimate goal.

Fifteen years on, Huxley envisioned exactly such a society on Pala, the fictional setting of *Island*. Plato had posited that while the utopia described in his *Republic* was unlikely to manifest, it wasn’t beyond the realm of possibility, particularly if a ruler were to embrace philosophy or a philosopher were to gain sovereignty. On Pala, a semblance of this unlikely scenario comes to pass when, in the mid-19th century, a Buddhist monarch’s life is

saved by a Scottish doctor, who is also a thinker in his own right. Together, they merge their visions to forge an ideal society on this secluded isle in the Indian Ocean. The central character of the novel, Will Farnaby, finds himself a stranded journalist on Pala, characterized by his cynicism and his admission that he struggles to accept affirmative answers. The narrative, which is typically limited in action as is common in utopian works, follows Farnaby's path to personal healing within the nurturing surroundings of Pala. While the plot of *Island* centres on Farnaby's journey towards embracing life, the book also statically portrays the society's structure. In line with utopian storytelling, the novel depicts the newcomer being taken on an exhaustive—and at times monotonous—tour of the utopia, during which the features of the society are elaborately described and praised. While the parts of Palanese society are highly interdependent, making it very difficult to extract individual elements for analysis, one crucial element that will be extracted for analysis is the role played by psychedelics in Palanese life. To evaluate that role, we first need to understand Huxley's distinctive conception of the purpose of a utopia. He once defined utopia as a society focusing more on the 'eupsychic' (pertaining to good mental health) than the 'eutopic' (pertaining to a good place), that is, focused more on the pursuit of personal excellence rather than societal flawlessness. In reshaping the society of Pala, the king and the doctor concur, "Private improvement was to be the preliminary to public improvement" (148).

The two objectives are not inherently contradictory, but there is a notable difference in their causal relationships from one cultural context to another. In Eastern traditions, such as the eupsychian perspective, there is a belief that a just and harmonious society will naturally evolve from the enlightenment of individuals. In contrast, Western eutopian thought often posits that the enlightenment of individuals will ensue from establishing a just and harmonious society. For example, in certain practices like Taoism or Theravada Buddhism, the pursuit of inner peace, or eupsychia, may lead to a disengagement from societal affairs, focusing on the inner self. Conversely, in the more radical forms of eutopianism, as seen in the philosophies of Plato or Comte, the individual is regarded almost exclusively as a public entity, lacking a private self to develop, and becomes an interchangeable part of the larger societal machinery. Plato, indeed, in *The Republic*, envisioned a model of society as different from that of *Island* as possible. Except for the few philosopher-rulers capable of enlightenment, the great majority of citizens of his 'just state' are assumed to be innately incapable of the just, reasonable, or enlightened life.

The balance struck between the system and the self in any utopia may be stated more or less explicitly. Comte, for example, in the *System de politique positive* declares that "individuals should be regarded, not so much as distinct beings, but as organs of one Supreme Being," (Comte 291). However, most of the time, one must deduce the significance attributed to eutopic and eupsychic aspects by analyzing their proportions within the presentation: how much space and interest are devoted to which aspects of the utopian model. In most models, the emphasis in presentation, if not in ideology, falls heavily on the functioning of institutions, not on the fates of individuals. Though the novel became, in the nineteenth century and after, the favourite vehicle for projecting utopias, the term 'utopian novel' seems almost a contradiction in terms, and even in the most interesting of them (Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward*, W.D. Howells' *Through the Eye of the Needle*, or

H.G. Wells' *A Modern Utopia*) the novelistic elements are seen as unnecessary add-ons or, at best, the sugar coating for the philosophical pill: though a few narrative gestures are fitfully struck, the drama resides almost exclusively in the play of ideas, not of personalities.

These very objections are levelled against *Island* and not without justification: "its message," (Archera273) Laura Archera Huxley wrote, "could have been conveyed in a form other than a novel, but Aldous felt that by fusing the message with a story, he would reach a larger and more varied audience" (Archera273). Critics have found the characters flat and stereotypical, given less to feeling and acting than to talking, forever talking. Although *Island* might seem lacking in depth and instructional when assessed by the standards of a novel, it possesses a greater complexity of character and narrative than is common for utopian literature. It is true that Huxley has the inhabitants of Pala educate the newcomer—and through him, the reader—about their culture, covering economics, education, technology, and the arts in a manner typical of utopian works. Yet, the detailed exploration of the Palanese spiritual awakening and its transformative impact on the skeptical Farnaby shifts the novel's emphasis towards the individual rather than the collective, favouring the psychological development over the utopian structure.

Beyond Dualism: The Praxis of Attention in Huxley's Utopian Pala

In Pala, the gateway to awakening is accessed via a fictional substance akin to LSD, called "moksha-medicine," (56) described as "the revealer of reality, the pill of truth and beauty" (57). The term 'moksha' is derived from Sanskrit, denoting release, and it is through this toadstool-derived drug that the Palanese seeker is "freed from the constraints of the ego" (158). In Huxley's later works, liberation becomes a central theme, reflecting the full scope of the mystical epistemology that facilitates the expansion of consciousness to new dimensions of perception. One of Farnaby's guides explains, "Just how the moksha-medicine produces those unusual stimuli we haven't yet found out," but it "does something to the silent areas of the brain which opens some kind of neurological sluice and allows a larger volume of Mind with a large 'M' to flow into your mind with a small 'm'" (160). The skeptical Farnaby, protests that such experiences are merely subjective with "no reference to any external fact except a toadstool" (161). He is answered by Dr. McPhail, grandson of the original Palanese McPhail, and the island's chief minister and guru:

Even if this experience doesn't correspond to an external reality and is purely an internal event, it remains the most significant event one has ever undergone. If one is willing to embrace the experience, to truly engage with it, the outcomes can be exceptionally therapeutic and life-changing. So, perhaps it all unfolds within the confines of one's mind. Maybe it is a solitary experience with no collective insight beyond an understanding of one's own biology. But ultimately, does that matter? The essential truth is that such an experience can be eye-opening, bestow a sense of bliss, and utterly transform one's life. (Huxley159)

It is, Dr. McPhail concludes, "much more real than what you call reality" (160).

In contrast, the calming effects of soma in *Brave New World* highlight divergent utopian and dystopian conceptions. Soma's impact is sedative, not psychedelic, offering "an escape from reality rather than an intensification of reality" (42). The distribution of soma in the novel's society is a means of maintaining social order: any arising discontent is swiftly neutralized by administering soma. The narrative critically addresses the concept of 'drugging' a population, a satirical nod to the preoccupation with control found in many utopian visions — a control

that extends to not only actions but thoughts of the populace. This critique is a precursor to similar themes explored in dystopian narratives such as Anthony Burgess's *A Clockwork Orange* (1962) and Ira Levin's *This Perfect Day* (1970). These tales probe the stark discrepancies between idealistic utopian visions and the grim dystopian outcomes that result from excessive infringement on personal freedom.

In only one other utopia before *Island* does drug use figure significantly, and that is John Macmillan Brown's *Limanora, The Island of Progress* (1903), an obscure yet oddly fascinating work. This narrative foreshadows *Brave New World* (1932) much more than it does *Island*. *Limanora* lends substantial credence to the claim that the line separating utopias from dystopias lies in authorial intent. It's challenging to find readers who wouldn't find the chemically-conditioned virtues of Brown's utopia as distasteful as the somatic narcosis of Huxley's dystopia. Although *Limanora* is too complex to be examined here, it serves as the perfect foil for *Island* regarding the deployment of drugs in an 'ideal' society. With a phobia-like fear of "human nature" (Brown46)—evident as Limanoran children grow up in complete isolation for fear of corruption—Brown envisions chemicals as a means to restrain natural behaviour, contrasting sharply with the liberating, psychedelic effects of moksha-medicine in *Island*. As the narrative transitions to *Island*, we find a unique ritual unfolding. The protagonist, Farnaby, witnesses a Palanese initiation ceremony, culminating in a communion where moksha-medicine serves as a sacrament. The ordeal in Pala's mountains and jungles is designed to impart a mystical reconciliation of the world's beauty and horror to the young. The subsequent service resembles the solidarity services of *Brave New World* in its external form but differs vastly in spiritual content. Instead of the synthetic specter of Our Ford, the deity celebrated is Shiva-Nataraji, symbolizing release or moksha, as explained by Dr. McPhail. The initiates are then administered moksha-medicine, dubbed "four hundred grams of revelation." (159) Through moksha-medicine, individuals momentarily transcend into a state of timeless bliss, offering beatific glimpses and liberating grace. The experience is transient yet profound. It leaves individuals with a choice to cooperate with the grace and seize the opportunities for enlightenment provided by the teachings and social arrangements in Pala. As Dr. McPhail's peroration suggests, the Palanese are not moksha addicts, akin to the *Brave New World* links who are soma addicts; instead, the drug experiences are special, sacramental occasions, likened to banquets. "You can't have banquets every day," (160) one woman explains, "They are too rich and too long." (161) Instead, meditation constitutes their daily spiritual fare, as another character adds:

"In theological terms, the moksha-medicine prepares for the reception of gratuitous graces—pre-mystical visions or the full-blown mystical experiences. Meditation is one of the ways in which one cooperates with these gratuitous graces... by cultivating the state of mind that makes it possible for the dazzling ecstatic insights to become permanent and habitual illuminations." (Huxley215)

The states brought about by drugs are not final goals but rather instruments for fostering a specific lifestyle, one that emerges from or indeed epitomizes the religious life of Pala. The inhabitants of Pala have their roots in Buddhism and continue to follow its tenets: not the Hinayana sect, which tends towards monastic life and individual sanctification, but the Mahayana branch, which is characterized by a more active participation in the practical world. Farnaby learns that "our Buddhism is shot through with Tantra" (89). While much of

Tantra is dismissed as silliness and superstition, there's a "hard core of common sense" (89) adopted by the Palanese.

"If you're a Tantrik, you don't renounce the world or deny its value; you don't try to escape into a Nirvana apart from life... Instead, you accept the world, and you make use of it; you make use of everything you do, of everything that happens to you, of all the things you see and hear and taste and touch, as so many means to your liberation from the prison of yourself." (Huxley85)

Therefore, the Palanese are complete materialists, seeing the sacred not as existing outside the world of phenomena, but as present and interwoven within it. In the West, Dr. McPhail observes, people "worship the word and abhor matter," (170) rendering Western materialism abstract and inadequate, "Abstract materialism is as bad as abstract idealism; it makes spiritual experience almost impossible" (172). The critique extends to Plato—the Idealist par excellence—who's separation of being from becoming and identification of it with the mathematical abstraction of the Idea, Huxley criticizes in *The Doors of Perception* (1790).

The Palanese have a distinct way of perceiving the world, grounded in a form of concrete mysticism. Their religious devotion is encapsulated in a single concept: paying attention. This concept becomes apparent the instant Farnaby arrives in Pala, as the initial word he encounters is "attention," (6) which is continuously spoken by a trained mynah bird. The bird serves as a living reminder—a 'memento vitae'—to live each moment with utmost consciousness. In contrast to the dualistic views of Platonism, Cartesianism, or Christianity that draw lines between mind and body, spirit and matter, self and the external environment, the Palanese spiritual perspective embraces a monistic philosophy. It locates the transcendent in the imminent, striving for a mystical awareness through a focused attention on the concrete. In Pala, the practice of attention is woven into the fabric of daily life. For instance, rather than saying grace before meals, they practice a form of mindful eating—chewing the first mouthful of each course with a deliberate focus on the experience.

"And all the time you're chewing you pay attention to the flavour of the food, to its consistency and temperature, to the pressure on your teeth and the feel of the muscles in your jaws." The practice refrains from the use of words during this ritual as "that would distract your attention, and attention is the whole point. Attention to the experience of something given, something you haven't invented, not to the memory of a form of words..." (Huxley31).

This philosophy extends to the sacramental use of moksha-medicine in Pala, which is viewed as a tool to heighten awareness, fuse the self with the world, and reveal the essential oneness of all things. The practice serves to elevate the experience of the mundane, grounding the spiritual in the tangible and real.

Exploring Inner Realms: Psychedelics, Mysticism, and Self-Discovery in *Island*

The climax of *Island* comes with Farnaby's own experience with the moksha-medicine, an event towards which the argument of the novel inevitably leads. We are continually encouraged to wonder what will transpire when the man, who cannot take 'yes' for an answer, decides to take the 'truth and beauty' pill - a choice he is bound to make. Yet, the outcomes are far from surprising: the formidable wonder of creation had been undone. He transitioned from a distinctly miserable and wayward self to an unformed state of pure consciousness — consciousness in its essential form, boundless, homogeneous, radiantly joyous, and possessing an understanding without knowledge. But to assert this miraculous transformation is one thing, to dramatize it persuasively is another. The problem with the

depiction inheres, in large part, in the nature of the mystical experience itself, the distinctive hallmark of which, notes William James, is its ineffability. The logical consequence would seem to be silence on the mystic's part: about the ineffable, Wittgenstein advised, say nothing. Of those mystics (if any) who adhere to this advice and remain silent, we know, of course, nothing. Those we know did not, of course, remain silent, but rehearsed their experiences repeatedly, even compulsively. The mystic is not one to hide his enlightenment under a bushel.

Huxley acknowledges this paradox without escaping its contradictions. Consider the opening paragraph in which he describes the effects of the vision-inducing drug on Farnaby:

'Luminous bliss.' From the shallows of his mind the words rose like bubbles, came to the surface, and vanished into the infinite spaces of living light that now pulsed and breathed behind his closed eyelids. 'Luminous bliss.' That was as near as one could come to it. But it - this timeless and yet ever-changing Event - was something that words could only caricature and diminish, never convey. It was not only bliss, it also understood. Understanding of everything, but without knowledge of anything. ... There was only this experienced fact of being blissfully one with Oneness. (Huxley308-09)

The essence of the experience, which is only belittled and distorted by verbal description, must nonetheless, be communicated through language if it is to be shared. Huxley dedicates roughly twenty pages to an elaborate attempt at describing the indescribable with an abundance of words.

In addition to the inherent paradox of attempting to describe an experience posited as indescribable, there's a further challenge posed by the specific artistic treatment of it in any given work. Farnaby's revelation, as portrayed, is artistically problematic: it's excessively drawn out, overly schematic, excessively intellectualized, and somewhat pretentious. He delves into an analysis of a Brandenburg Concerto, random judgments on art and philosophy, along with references to lesser-known mystics like Ninon de Lanclos and Catherine of Genoa, figures unexpectedly familiar to an agnostic journalist who isn't the author of *The Perennial Philosophy*. Much of the issue with the credibility of this scene stems from the evident authorial voice of Huxley overpowering Farnaby's character, which never fully materializes, thereby almost dissolving the aesthetic illusion of a separate character.

The conventions of the utopian genre further dilute any real tension in Farnaby's experience: it's a given that the outsider will be swayed by utopia's superiority, much like all Gulliver aspire to become Houyhnhnms. Hence, it's hardly a surprise that the doubting Thomas will be graced with the requisite beatific vision leading to enlightenment. Nonetheless, Huxley adds a complication to Farnaby's revelation that briefly questions the effectiveness of the moksha-medicine in harmonizing the individual with the Universal Mind. At a certain point, Farnaby's gaze falls upon a lizard nearby, triggering a radical shift in the emotional tone of the psychedelic experience, "A glow of sheer evil radiated from every gray-green scale of the creature's back, from its obsidian eyes and the pulsing of its crimson throat, from the armoured edges of its nostrils and its slit like mouth. He turned away. In vain. The Essential Horror glared out of everything he looked at" (318). The term "Essential Horror" (319) refers to Farnaby's perception of a malevolent randomness governing the world, akin to a negative providence dispensing suffering, degradation, and death. The

sudden appearance of the lizard transforms Farnaby's heavenly vision into the hellish realm of the Essential Horror.

Unnecessarily, but effectively, Huxley intensifies the image of horror by also allowing Farnaby to witness the coupling of a pair of praying mantises, "two little working models of a nightmare" (320):

"And now one of the nightmare machines, the female, had turned the small flat head, all mouth and bulging eyes, at the end of its long neck—had turned it and (dear God!) had begun to devour the head of the male machine... What was left of the head fell to the ground. The female machine snapped at the oozing stump, caught it and, while the headless male uninterruptedly kept up his parody of Ares in the arms of Aphrodite, methodically chewed." (Huxley 320)

This gruesome image of reptiles and insects devouring each other—the lizard pounces on the surviving mantis and eats it—merges in Farnaby's mind with memories of Nazi atrocities, the carnage of war that he had covered in Korea, "the five flyblown bodies he had seen only a few months ago, faces upward and their throats gashed, in the courtyard of an Algerian farm" (32). As these images of humanity's ugliest aspects impinge on Farnaby's consciousness, his psychedelic trip threatens to become a bummer.

In *Heaven and Hell*, Huxley acknowledges that "visionary experience is not always blissful. It is sometimes terrible. There is hell as well as heaven" (Huxley 49). The experience of an individual using a psychedelic substance can result in either state, contingent upon the pre-existing state of their psyche. "Fear and anger bar the way to the heavenly Other World and plunge the mescaline taker into hell... Negative emotions—the fear which is the absence of confidence, the hatred, anger, and malice which exclude love—are the guarantee that visionary experience, if and when it comes, shall be appalling" (Huxley 51, 55-56). Considering Farnaby's pessimistic nature and his past experiences, it is expected that his encounter with psychedelic substances would take on the qualities of a nightmare. But this phase—like the destructive stage of an apocalypse, preparatory of the ultimate re-creation—is transcended, with the help of Susila McPhail, the doctor's widowed daughter-in-law and one of the strong, calm, capable women in which Pala abounds. She guides him through his hellish vision, offering words of solace and reassurance until he emerges into the Clear Light of the Void, that state of complete mystical enlightenment which, according to Huxley, is inherently positive. "Visionary experience is not the same as mystical experience. Mystical experience is beyond the realm of opposites. Visionary experience is still in that realm"—that is, positive or negative, heavenly or hellish. (Huxley 56) True mystical experience obviates such distinctions, and to that beatific state, with Susila's help, Farnaby arrives: "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" (39). The Buddha had promised, "I will show you suffering, and I will show you the end of suffering": the moksha-medicine reveals both to Farnaby.

It remains uncertain whether the usage of the substance guarantees every Palanese individual passage from visionary states to mystical enlightenment. Nevertheless, considering the sanity of Palanese society and its capacity to foster well-rounded personalities and mentally sound individuals, it's likely that none of the Palanese would encounter the nightmarish visions that Farnaby, burdened by his troubled psyche, endures. In Pala, the utopian societal structure and the cultivation of personal enlightenment mutually amplify one

another's effectiveness. However, for an outsider like Farnaby, marked by emotional scars and cynicism, it appears that the moksha-medicine—possibly coupled with Susila's comforting presence—is enough to facilitate his transformation and disclose to him the universally affirming Reality as perceived by the mystic.

Conclusion

Even as Farnaby receives enlightenment, a twist unfolds in *Island's* plot, distinctive in the utopian genre: Pala falls. Rich in oil, it succumbs to an invasion led by the militaristic Colonel Dipa, a puppet for a cabal of Western capitalists eyeing the island's resources. The peaceful Palanese stand no chance against the superior military force, with their philosophy offering no inclination to resist. The swift execution of Dr. McPhail signals a grim fate for Pala, now poised for the throes of Western colonial exploitation. This grim finale poses a question: why would Huxley, laden with hope for Pala, orchestrate such a downfall? The motive, likely, was to underscore the supremacy of eupsychia (inner peace) over eutopia (ideal society). In the novel's last paragraph, as Farnaby and Susila stand helpless while troop convoys traverse Pala's roads, they muse: "Disregarded in the darkness, the fact of enlightenment remained" (301). External adversities cannot eclipse this truth. Utopia, as Sir Thomas More reflected in his own narrative, remains a delicate hope, more wished for than expected. Huxley, well aware of this, shared in a letter to the Maharaja of Kashmir: "Island is a pragmatic dream...but remains a dream, distant from our present reality" (Letters 944). The prospect of social evolution towards the Pala model is slim, but individuals can still seek their own salvation, regardless of societal backdrop. For Huxley, utopia was a state of mind, a portable haven for the enlightened, akin to Satan's self-made Hell in Milton's narrative. Hence, despite the gloom shrouding Pala, enlightenment's ember continues to glow. This resilience, Woodcock notes, renders *Island* as Huxley's "happiest and most compassionate" work (Woodcock284).

Huxley's faith in personal enlightenment, potentially achievable through psychedelic substances, was echoed by his long-time friend Gerald Heard, who posthumously lauded Huxley's venture into consciousness-altering substances as possibly his most significant contribution. Although the unfolding history of psychedelics doesn't wholly vindicate Heard's and Huxley's hopeful outlook, the essence of Huxley's enlightenment endures, manifesting in his unwavering perception of the world's intrinsic 'All Rightness' and Love as a cosmic axiom. To skeptics dismissing this as mere subjective vision, Huxley, through Dr. McPhail, retorts, "Who cares?" He asserts, "The fact remains that the experience can open one's eyes and make one blessed and transform one's whole life." (167) This is a testament to Huxley's own transformed outlook.

Corresponding author: On behalf of all authors, the corresponding author states that there is no conflict of interest.

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