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Of vanished lands and disappearing isles...

When utopian islands are no longer sought after, and disappear from geographic maps, dystopia takes over

Forward

This paper aims to reconsider the reasons for which a considerable number of utopian projects, or at least the founding texts of the literary genre, were first conceived and set upon an island, a characteristic geographical aspect that clearly stems from the discovery of America and the enormous expansion of world wide journeys of exploration.

If at the time a few men and a handful of kings were actively seeking out new lands to further augment their power, others still fostered the dream of discovering an Earthly Paradise or a mythical Atlantis, those yearned for lands which nurtured so many utopian projects up to the end of the eighteenth century.

Successively, with the widespread awareness that the world had been thoroughly explored and that any possible Paradise now had to be pushed, for ever, beyond the horizon towards Heaven, together with a new consciousness that a better world could be conceived and built only by men, devoid of all religious beliefs and aware of their human limits, utopian hopes gave way to despair.

The awareness that men would never be able to achieve utopia couldn't but bring about dystopian realities which invaded the whole world causing the light to begin to fade, progressively replaced by the dark shadows of dystopia, a menace that still threatens to become reality.

Upon setting out to express a few considerations regarding the theme of utopia and that of the island, I can think of no better opening words than the supremely meaningful ones used by José Saramago, the outstanding Portuguese writer, in his *O Conto de Ilha Desconhecida*, which I will quote in English in order to allow every possible reader to appreciate their considerable image-provoking quality. We read of a king, grim ruler of his subjects' destiny, and of his astonishment, when a humble subordinate requests a boat in order to reach an island, his

island, he claims, long dreamt of, mythical, doubtless unknown, but which he will not forgo since this island represents life itself, hope, freedom and love.

The King enquires:

...may one know what you want this boat for
...to go in search of the unknown island, replied the man
What unknown island, asked the king...
The unknown island, the man said again
Nonsense, there are no more unknown islands
Who told you, sir, that there are no more unknown
Islands?
They're all on the maps
Only the known islands are on the maps

But, retorts the unfortunate citizen, today, just like throughout the Renaissance, one sets out on a journey:

.....to find the unknown island,
I want to find out who I am when
I'm there on that island, don't you
know, if you don't step outside
yourself, you'll never discover
who you are.¹

Thus, the coveted haven is neither an island nor utopia, that perfect yet inexistent place, but merely the truth about oneself, the real meaning at the roots of human existence, the key as to why, though nothing but minute specks adrift in the inexplicable chaos of creation, we are driven to embark upon an interminable quest for truth and justice. And it is only in happiness and love, alas both substantially denied, that we can catch a mere glimpse of this profound meaning.

¹ José Saramago, *The Tale of the Unknown Island* (London: The Harvill Press, 1999), pp. 25-26.

But what reality is harboured within our ragged flesh? What has been witnessed and impressed upon our arcane human memory? When and by whom was good ever revealed to us, bringing about such desire and yearning? Why do we continue to seek all this? Why are we seemingly condemned never to forgo our quest? Where and how did we first encounter and aspire to happiness?

I have no intention of launching into religious or philosophical considerations, far too complex for a mere literary critic whose task it is simply to give voice to the text, the literary text, and in my case, the utopian text². A text perennially bound to the theme of the island³ and to that of human happiness pursued within a just society.

We have already touched upon the reasons why one would set out upon a journey in search of an island, a place which presents considerable limits and restrictions. And this is doubtless a clear indication of that strange, eternal contradiction, peculiar to human nature, the never-ending struggle between the need for boundless space, eternity, indispensable to overcome any and every limit imposed upon

² “From a structural point of view, the utopian text is characterized by, firstly, a stereotype of both plot and form... the plot consists in the journey, which may be sub-divided into the *journey there*, the *sojourn*, and the *journey back*, the description of the utopian place being decisively privileged over that of the journey there and back ... A structural marker of the utopian text is its verbal inventiveness, the creation by these writers of extravagant place names that are not without symbolic, if at times ambiguous, meaning. It will suffice here to recall a few of the fancifully evocative names of islands marked on the map of Utopia – Oceania, Christianopolis, Jansenia, Gerania, Lewistania, Icaria – or some of those given to Calvino’s cities –Ipazia, Armilla, Eutropia and so on.” V. Fortunati, “Fictional Strategies and Political Message in Utopias”, in *Per una definizione dell’utopia. Metodologie e discipline a confronto* (Ravenna: Longo, 1992), pp. 23-24.

³ But the island at that time could also harbour a model of dystopic society: “The circumscription of space which makes of *Utopia* a rock-bound island, a place which its first sovereign chose to isolate from the rest of the world by severing the only strip of land which linked it thereto, is doubtless a metaphor of its exceptional nature and, indeed, of its very inexistence...a negative utopia, *Mundus alter et idem* by Joseph Hall, published in 1605, is in fact a dystopia...Bacon’s island is a new world, while also the safe keeper of ancient wisdom.” Adriana Corrado, in “Utopia and Dreams in the late XIX Century”, in *Per una definizione dell’utopia. Metodologie e discipline a confronto, op. cit.*, pp. 73-78.

us as mere mortal beings, and the incessant quest for an island, be it real or mythical, as though isolation within a circumscribed space were a necessary condition to attain happiness.

For indeed man is divided, torn, between his desire to belong and live as part of society, and the pressing need or dream to leave his fellow men behind, give up the context in which he chose or was forced to live, and seek an elsewhere where happiness is truly within reach.

And it is on an island that he believes happiness should be sought, though doubtless limited and restricting, it is there that utopian perfection is located.

Nonetheless, within that very same utopian perfection the seeds of dystopia have been sown. If the utopian design extols the virtues of the individual, that hapless traveller who lands or is shipwrecked upon an island and, driven by his dream and his individual capacity for success, is even able to make an island of a peninsula, that very same utopian perfection strives to integrate the individual into a community, making a 'We' of the original 'I'. That same 'We' embodies the fabric of any utopian society in which, for the benefit and in the name of a common good, the individual must be, or ends up being, annihilated. Almost as though from the island of felicity, thought of as a model of earthly Paradise, to the utopian island, and then on to the sealed, stifling world of dystopia, the only real difference were of a temporal nature.

But going back to the theme of the island, even if fabulous islands of rare beauty were already present in Attic and Alexandrian literature, it was Semitic and Greek culture which first posited the idea of an earthly Paradise to be situated in the East. And again it was in Greek culture, at a later date, that charmed islands first appeared, in this case located to the West, where the fabled isle of Atlantis was said to have disappeared. That charmed piece of land, mentioned by Plato himself in *Timaeus* and *Critias*, which sank beneath the sea, beyond the pillars of Hercules, mythical indeed, and frequently described with geographical precision as though clearly visible to those who told the story.

Swallowed by the sea only to become a source of constant peril for those who dared to cross those waters, Atlantis occasionally resurfaces, an island indeed but sufficiently extensive to be compared to that continent which Solonis had already hinted at, in a poem written

between 570 and 560 BC, and which later Seneca, along with other great writers, had described as vast, possible lands spread out between Europe and India, afloat upon the Atlantic.

The myths of antiquity reappear constantly, successively revived by Christianity, and imbue the whole of European culture to come, to mark the synthesis between happiness and perfection.

A considerable number of travellers started crossing the seas with the precise objective of finding the earthly Paradise, already mentioned in *Genesis*, once more an island, ideal place of dream and perfection, visible only to those who are sustained by a strong religious belief.

Hence more tales were told of far off lands, islands or even a fabled continent which may well have been none other than that which history later led Columbus to discover.

Columbus too had set out on a journey to India but thanks to his diligent studies of winds and oceans, which he undertook in the magnificent islands located in the Atlantic, outside Europe, he was able to bring about the seemingly impossible merging all at once myth and reality.

He too had been driven by the secret hope of reaching the earthly Paradise and he truly believed he had attained his objective when he landed upon the fabulous islands of Central America.⁴

⁴ In his many written accounts, Columbus tells of manifold lands and islands where he claims to have found the much coveted gold, to have met Amazons and mermaids, men with dogs' heads or tails and fountains of eternal youth. Remote islands, just like the one in the Mediterranean which had once sheltered Calypso, the bestower of eternity. And so Columbus instils new life into ancient myths merging them with the present only to then project them into an imminent, possible utopian future in which Jerusalem has been reconquered, the Temple rebuilt, and utopian values, rooted in Christian and just social models, are known and respected by all. Strangely enough, these values coincide with those of the inhabitants of the recently discovered lands who, far-removed from the corrupt Western world, have managed to avoid the political and social upheavals caused by injustice and the arbitrary use of power, typical of the so-called civilized societies.

The indigenous peoples he encounters there, beautiful, honest and not yet converted to Christianity, were, for their part, firmly convinced that Columbus and his travel companions had descended straight from the heavens which only goes to prove that the island dwellers carry forth the dream of perfection just like all other human beings, be they Christians or otherwise, since apparently they too cherish the idea of a possible Paradise!

Many others, prior to Columbus, in this endless and perpetual search, had already sought out, perhaps found or at least caught a glimpse of some fabulous islands, so beautiful as to seem the real earthly Paradise, once inhabited by men of flesh and blood, perhaps our forbearers Adam and Eve, placed by God himself in that blissful setting and given complete freedom, even the freedom to sin.

Saint Brendan, for example, “the Christian Ulysses”, the holy Irish monk who lived from 484 to 577, at the end of a seven-year long journey, truly believed he had glimpsed “that Paradise amidst the sea waves”, the mythical island of Paradise strenuously sought out while fulfilling his mission.

It was within the historical setting of the early 16th century in Europe, a time of marked social iniquity, that novel, very different worlds were glimpsed, worlds both just and possible, located elsewhere, usually in remote lands or unexplored islands, accessible only to those who wished to seek and find. So, far from being impossible, perfection becomes desirable and to be pursued, since the perfect, social models from which to draw inspiration, were reported as already existing elsewhere, upon those faraway isles which easily slip from sight, veiled by mist and sea-surge, but which seemed able to merge, upon their shores, the values of the Edenic myth, according to which human society had been fair and just only at the very beginning of the history of mankind, and the eschatological myth which speaks of justice only to be found at the end of human existence, in a faraway paradise.

These models of true or imagined isles proved also to be the ideal context in which to lodge utopia, ontologically required to be remote and unreachable. If distance contributes to making utopia a dreamt of haven, it also serves to keep any form of external contamination at bay to the extent that, by the sole means of complete isolation from the

outside world, a sort of utopian island could also be forged upon the mainland, an enclave indeed, though not surrounded by the sea and strenuously defended by its lucky inhabitants.

It was indeed with the culture of the Renaissance, and the first journeys around the world that man, the individual, was truly placed at the very centre of creation and granted supreme qualities such as that of being able to challenge the forces of nature thanks to the power of his knowledge. All the while a new desire for social justice instilled life-force into utopian thought which, while maintaining a strenuous defence of past cultures, and as a child of that era of synthesis, the Renaissance, proved to be the real convergence point between modernity and a projection into the future.

But Utopian lands are discovered at great cost, and only after a sort of baptismal immersion, which cleanses the traveller of individual and social sin to later admit him into the reign of true justice.

Throughout the course of the history of mankind there have been magical moments, which we call utopic in themselves, when the individual aspiration to happiness appears to become collective, and even turn into a possible reality, ages like the Renaissance, and successively the period of the French Revolution, epochs beyond which quite often human history, sadly, seems no longer able to gather sufficient energy to truly proceed forward, to progress in the real sense of the term.

But reality, however tragic and wholly dystopic, is peopled by common citizens who most tragically, I would say, continue to harbour within themselves, always and for ever, to a certain extent within the collective DNA, the seeds of freedom of thought, together with the certainty of being entitled to earthly happiness. Such values are arrogantly and systematically denied by those who detain the power, while progress is too easily transformed into an instrument to exercise full control over individual freedom and history even sets out to generate the most aberrant forms of dictatorship and imperialism, irresponsible begetters for instance of last century's two world wars. As if utopia had been replaced by a dystopian reality.

But hope and dreams, although never fulfilled, still allow even the inhabitants of dystopia, so similar to our contemporaries, to glimpse an elsewhere which either emerges from their past, and heralds an aching nostalgia⁵, or is projected towards the future in that time out of time which is indeed that of utopia.

At the close of the 19th century, from a strictly geographical point of view, the world holds no more secrets, there is nothing further to be discovered while travel moves progressively into space and towards other planets and the only political and economic model seems to have become that of power for the sake of power, any form of utopian project becomes clearly unthinkable.

So while the islands of myths, dreams, or social justice, slowly sink below the horizon, together with the gardens of Eden and any idea of earthly Paradise, an increasingly lay society progressively forfeits any hypothesis or faith in an ultra mundane future, almost unconsciously condemning mankind to a nightmarish perpetual, unending present!

In a wholly secular society, such as that of the 19th century marked by positivism and the certitude that all can be ruled scientifically, there is no room left for any possible elsewhere. All that counts is the here and now, technologically controlled, where it is no longer possible to commit a sin.

The 19th century crisis, distinctive of the Western world, marked also by the decline of any possible revolutionary value and the subsequent spread of industrialization and capitalism as models of progress towards a viable future, mass culture, nationalism, even imperialism, all this led to the emergence and propagation of a dystopic approach to reality.

⁵ “The suffering which pervades these dystopias does not stem from desperation; indeed, it is the pain of nostalgia, of exile from the lost paradise of original integrity. Nostalgia, unlike melancholia or depression, is a vital symptomatic illness which manifests itself in the form of an acute suffering caused by separation, and an aching tension towards a possible reunion with the object in question”. Beatrice Battaglia, “Introduction” to *Nostalgia e mito nella distopia inglese* (Ravenna: Longo Editore, 1998), p. 9.

This approach was faithfully recounted or reproduced in the literary dystopias which blossom towards the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th, on a par with the end of the utopian design and the vanishing of the mythical quest for islands of felicity, doomed to extinction from the collective imagination.

The journey, as an essential premise to the seeking and finding of the beautiful isle, which harbours felicity and social justice, that journey of initiation is now and for ever denied to the citizens of dystopia, or better, of that threatening reality which dystopia merely describes.

Thus, the only space left to the eternal wayfarer is that within his own mind! The mind alone appears able to remain a repository of hope, nourished with memories and reinvigorated by the past, a past which becomes individual myth and fades from collective memory, while islands and boundless horizons forever disappear from sight as they serve no further purpose to mankind, made of poor forlorn individuals, reduced to mere numbers but still painfully striving to preserve certain traits of their negated individuality.

Still and yet, even as the 19th century was turning into the 20th, and realistic utopias sought refuge in dreams, as in the case of *News from Nowhere*, William Morris espied another island of desire, accessible only to those who wished to seek it out. An unredeemed utopist, Morris truly believed that a utopian society could still be build in Iceland, that “new land at last to be seen”, that distant isle which had housed the first Parliament in Europe and whose citizens, those “brave men”, often anonymous heroes, had carried out in the past only “great deeds”.

Despite such rare dreams, utopian projects were everywhere replaced by dystopian narrations since even the so-called proletarian revolutions had ended up becoming the medium for further oppression.

Dystopian literature voices the worst fears of men convinced that, even if all hope has vanished, an attempt at positive action can still be made by representing reality in its truly monstrous form. A monstrous reality to be vehemently rejected as it harbours the seeds of an unacceptable future, which suffocates and negates the value of individual freedom.

Man is denied the possibility of thinking, planning, even dreaming, a mere number drowned within a mass of undifferentiated individuals, as clearly narrated in Zamiatin's work to the point that the inhabitant of dystopia is even denied the opportunity to sin⁶!

Islands such as that of Utopia:

...broadest in the middle which: "You can picture... as a sort of crescent" while:
...the whole interior of the island serves as a harbour

beautiful and joyful with its half-moon shape, or like that other isle described by Bacon⁷:

...a land flat...but full of boscage,

are gradually replaced, in dystopian literature, by blocks and buildings, gloomy courtyards that take the place of the sea, the beaches or the beautiful Renaissance-style cities. Those:

...fifty-four splendid towns

ideal cities, all capitals of Utopia⁸ have now become cold, windswept dormitory towns, endless rows of buildings devoid of any cultural identity:

⁶ "...only in the twentieth century has the possibility arisen that men could be made *incapable* of falling from some programmed paradise... Adam's erotic rebellion could be rendered impossible. Man would be obedient to the State because he could not be otherwise." G. Beauchamp, "Of Man's Last Disobedience: Zamiatin's *We* and Orwell's *1984*", in *Comparative Literature Studies*, 1973, p. 297.

⁷ "...it was a land flat to our sight and full of boscage, which made it shew the more dark...we entered into a good haven being the port of a fair city; not great indeed but well built, and that gave a pleasant view from the sea". F. Bacon, *New Atlantis in The Works of Francis Bacon* (London: George G. Harrap, 1922), p. 324.

⁸ "There are fifty-four splendid towns on the island...They're all built on the same plan... Aircastle is built on a gently sloping hill-side. It stretches from just below the top of the hill to the river Nowater, two miles away, and extends for two miles and a bit along the river-bank." T. More, *Utopia* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973), pp. 70-72.

A squat grey building of only thirty-four stories...The enormous room on the ground floor faced towards the north. Cold for all the summer beyond the panes ... Wintriness responded to wintriness...The light was frozen dead, a ghost.

or even turned into squalid laboratories given over to genetic experiments, closed, anonymous spaces where every smell is unpleasant:

The hallway smelled of boiled cabbage and old rag mats...Everything had a battered, trampled-on look, as though the place had just been visited by some violent animal...There was the usual boiled cabbage smell...An overpowering smell of sweat⁹

And, while all is extremely ugly, the individual is left to his solitude, living even in fear of his fellow-men transformed by the system into potential enemies or informers. Spaces where, in spite of it being:

...a bright cold day in April.

individuals like Orwell's hero move like ghosts:

...Winston Smith, his chin nuzzled into his breast in an effort to escape the vile wind, slipped quickly through the glass doors of Victory mansions, though not quickly enough to prevent a whirl of gritty dust from entering along with him.¹⁰

Nature too seems to have vanished from such nightmarish places or to have been reduced to a mere threat for a reality ruled by a culture

⁹ In *Nineteen Eighty-Four* we read: "It was a bright cold day in April...Winston Smith, his chin nuzzled into his breast in an effort to escape the vile wind, slipped quickly through the glass doors of Victory mansions, though not quickly enough to prevent a whirl of gritty dust from entering along with him...The hallway smelled of boiled cabbage and old rag mats...Everything had a battered, trampled-on look, as though the place had just been visited by some violent animal...There was the usual boiled cabbage smell... An overpowering smell of sweat, a sort of unconscious testimony to the strenuousness of his life, followed him wherever he went." G. Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (Harmondworth: Penguin, 1979), pp. 5-21.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 5.

which in the modern, and to an even greater extent post-modern age, by means of science and technology, seems to have proudly found a way to exercise total control over man, crushing his individuality and rationality. Poor citizen of a dystopic reality!

In spite of all this, dystopian reality still seems to leave space for fragments of individual memory or, most likely, mere glimmers of myth.

As for the theme of travel or escape, proper to utopian literature, in the dystopian nightmare any journey can only lead to inner realms, down into the darkness of the soul which, yet again, as always, reaches out in search of light. Escape indeed is now possible only within the closed sphere of one's inner being, searching there for some form of meaning while the world appears to have forsaken any meaning at all, save that of total control and the undisputed wielding of power.

With the passing of time, spaces have become cramped and restricted, if not dark and gloomy, and April is only a cold and windy month akin to that described by T. S. Eliot, the month of death in life, a cruel month, indeed the cruellest of all, just like the vile wind which sweeps away Winston Smith's hope in the future.

It is a sort of paradox indeed that the present, true heir of a long Western utopian tradition, assumes the guise of a tyrant in its very attempt to follow the path towards social perfection namely in trying to make of utopia a possible, feasible model. As though the many islands of light, and the innumerable possible earthly paradises, could only lead to darkness and the complete control of the individual. An individual who, over time and throughout endless centuries, has progressively had to lose his deeper, more proper human qualities only to become a model citizen, steeped in pure rationality.

If this sort of progress has, on the one hand, marked the triumph of the utterly utopic rationalism of the Enlightenment, it has, on the other, signalled its utter failure, progressively cancelling any difference which might distinguish utopia from dystopia¹¹ to the point that the man of our

¹¹ As indeed Mumford clearly asserts: "In the end, utopia merges into the dystopia of the twentieth century; and one realizes that the distance between the positive ideal

times, transformed into a model of utopian citizen, is evermore denied the possibility to dream and left only with the dramatic task of narrating dystopia, nothing more than the reality in which he is forced to live.

It takes little effort on our part, people of the early twenty-first century, to recognize the worlds described by Orwell, Huxley or Zamiatin, for we are substantially immersed therein. These authors deserve the merit of having alerted our attention to their and our possible future, although we should have realized that not even dystopia was fully able to imagine the true horrors of reality.¹²

Locked in the dystopia of the present, man seems doomed to converse with himself alone, isolated in an unacceptable world: he is an island within himself¹³ and, as such, subject to total control as the evolution of the utopian design towards real dystopia has inevitably demonstrated¹⁴.

In this perspective a degree of confusion would be wholly legitimate as to the origin of some short yet symptomatic quotes, we may well wonder whether they were extrapolated from More's utopian work or from Orwell's dystopia? Indeed, we read:

Everybody has his eye on you¹⁵

and again:

Big Brother is watching you¹⁶

and the negative one was never so great as the advocates or admirers of utopia had professed." L. Mumford, "Utopia, the City and the Machine", in *Daedalus*, 4 (1965), p. 277.

¹² Indeed no dystopia could have imagined the horrific magnitude of the holocaust, an evil fruit born of our history and our recent past.

¹³ As Aldous Huxley had already written: "From family to nation, every human group is a society of island universes." A. Huxley, *The Doors of Perception and Heaven and Hell* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973), p.13.

¹⁴ "...even the most benevolently intended utopias are, by the very nature of their claims, totalitarian, demanding the ultimate concern of their subjects and asserting ultimate control of their destinies." G. Beauchamp, "Of Man's Last Disobedience: Zamiatin's *We* and Orwell's *1984*", *op. cit.*, p. 286.

¹⁵ T. More, *op.cit.*, p. 84.

¹⁶ G. Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty Four* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979), p.5

right up to the words of Zamiatin's character D-503 who says:

It is pleasant to feel that somebody's penetrative eye is watching you from behind your shoulder.¹⁷

Be it utopia or dystopia, the meaning in all cases, as is clear, remains tragically the same and serves to provide yet further proof of the fact that utopia and dystopia are nothing but different expressions of the same, undoubtedly ambitious project which stems from the intent of Western society in the modern era to defeat social evil and eradicate individual sin.

There is no further room for transgression: if indeed utopia fought against social evil and individual sin, dystopia has wiped out every form of transgression, to the point that the system, the state, be it Big Brother or otherwise, can no longer be betrayed. Dictatorship now concurs with the supreme good while the idea of utopian perfection finds no house room in reality, it can only live on in our wholly individual dreams.

The design pursued by utopia seems to have come full circle, proof of the fact that Western society, Christian yet progressively secularized, could only ultimately lead to dystopia¹⁸, both the begetter and progeny of utopia.

The utopian design, which firmly believed in the perfectibility of man on earth, necessarily also had to reject the Christian principle of the freedom to sin: but when and if man has become a perfect citizen, immune from sin, then fundamentally he is no longer free.

One might still nowadays, in spite of everything, try to imagine other beginnings or fresh starts in the long history of utopian hope, innovative departures born of the new and harmonious merging of

¹⁷ E. Zamiatin, *We*, transl. Gregory Ziboorg (New York: 1959), p. 63.

¹⁸ Dystopic as is our reality which throughout the centuries has embraced the logic of the optimization of scientific progress, rooted in a capitalist economy able to generate not merely imperialism but indeed also world wars, holocaust and the atomic conflagrations of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

diverse religions and cultures, striving towards tolerance and the constant search for peace. As though man in society could truly not survive without the utopian dream!

Once again, while attempting to resume a possible utopian dream viable and valid for the twenty-first century, we find ourselves in the presence of another island, Huxley's last utopian work, repository of hope, is in fact entitled simply *Island*¹⁹. Huxley who, of all the authors of our times, was the most drawn to, yet terrified by, scientific and technical progress, once again locates a possible solution to the many problems of his, but much more evidently our own contemporary world society, upon an island. A dystopic solution in many ways, seeing as complete and constant control over the citizen is ensured by resorting to a sort of state drug, known as *soma*, yet Huxley also offers us a glimmer of hope²⁰ by looking to Eastern religions and cultures in the search for a new mysticism, able to lead Western man back to a former lifestyle, away from the dead end he has been caught up in.

Indeed, on the island of Pala²¹:

...the forbidden island, the place no journalist had ever visited

life, though industrious, has not been taken over by the logic of consumerism, modern yet not blindly progressive. Man's distinctive values, both physical and spiritual, are awarded equal consideration, studied from both a physiological and psychological perspective, and rigorously channelled towards the individual and collective good.

¹⁹ *Island* was published in 1962.

²⁰ "What *Island* represents is Huxley's heroic attempt to reconcile science, sex, and religion, three items that have always been at odds in all of his fiction... His method of integrating these three elements is to make both science and sex somewhat religious." J. Meckier, "Poetry in the Future, the Future of Poetry: Huxley and Orwell on *Zamiatin*" in *Renaissance and Modern Studies*, 28, 1984, p. 197.

²¹ "Here was Pala, the forbidden island, the place no journalist had ever visited...he had managed by some sheer miracle, to take his sinking boat through the breakers and run aground on the only sandy beach in all those miles of Pala's rock-bound coast." A. Huxley, *Island* (London: Triad Grafton, 1986), pp.12-13.

In such a way man seems able once more to regain the correct equilibrium between mind and body. The body is of no lesser importance but stands on a par with the spirit and can be reunited to the essence, to the light, in accordance with mystic Buddhism of a tantric mould, further enriched and enlightened by Western philosophy.

Whereas Western utopian tradition had basically aimed at turning man into a model citizen, on the island of Pala the objective is also to enhance individual qualities while bringing out and strengthening spirituality, resorting, however, to the use of drugs to sharpen perception and facilitate man's reunion with the divine. Thus, daily life becomes a source of joy and even dying can be blissful.

As for the future and historicized reality, in order to take up our unbiased journey towards social justice and try once more to revive utopianism, we should perhaps pay more heed to some of Huxley's words and to that last island of his, where he invited us to combine Western culture with Eastern religions and to pave a new way towards a peaceful future.

As for us, men of good Will, intellectuals or otherwise, our sole hope nowadays lies in the ability to start believing once more that we can contribute to the creation of the only truly desirable utopia, a global utopia born of the past yet moulded for the future, steeped in tolerance, peaceful cohabitation and full intercultural and inter-religious integration.

Thus the whole wide world, with its weighty load of humanity, could become the new utopian isle! Indeed, could this be the true meaning of globalization?