

GRAU D'ANGLÈS  
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*Island* by Aldous Huxley: the Utopian  
Society and its Characteristics  
ESTEL TORELLÓ CATALÀ



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## Abstract

From the mid-1950s to the present day, utopias have been an important field to study for many experts. Even though the first utopia is said to be *The Republic* by Plato, which was produced many years ago, the characteristics that these productions need to have to be considered utopias are still blurred. This thesis has attempted to determine if there is a list of features that a novel should have in order to be considered utopian. This has been studied utilizing the novel *Island*, by Aldous Huxley. The book has been analysed and compared with other utopian and dystopian works to see what characteristics they share.

It is obvious that they have some features in common, but which of those are vital to construct a utopia? Is it possible to create a list? Does every utopia work differently when compared to others? This analysis has been carried out through a) reading closely the book in question b) picking out elements that differ from traditional societies and c) comparing them with other utopias and dystopias to see if they are similar or different. Contrary to what was assumed, it is not possible to create a definite list including all the features, as utopias are rich and varied; every single one has got a different understanding of reality, but they all share the same basis.

**Keywords:** utopia, dystopia, characteristics, *Island*, Aldous Huxley

## Acknowledgements

It is a pleasure to express my gratitude and to my tutor and mentor Renata Elzbieta Koba, Adjunct Professor of the University Rovira and Virgili. Her dedication and keen interest in the project and her positive attitude to help her students have been key to complete my work. Her trusted, practical and scholar advice has helped me, to a very extent, to accomplish this task. She has provided me with the necessary information to help me complete the project and I will always be thankful.

It is my privilege to thank my mother Marisa Català and my sister Mar Torelló for their encouragement throughout the project and their endless support. They suggested many ways to improve my work, and for that reason, I am deeply thankful for their help and assistance.

I am extremely thankful to my friends and classmates Iman Arkhouchen, Alba Buendía and Rachael Ross for providing suggestions and ideas to improve my work and for their kind help when I had questions or doubts regarding my investigation or the formatting of the project. Their enthusiasm, dynamism and kindness were deeply appreciated and needed throughout the project, and I will never have enough works to thank them for that.

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## 1. Introduction

*Island* (1962) is the last complete novel that the British author Aldous Huxley published before his death in 1963. Many experts, such as William Matter (1975), consider that the novel is the description of a utopia, as it attempts to portray an ideal society: “In many ways Huxley’s last novel is traditionally utopian. [...] [It] uncovers the attributes of the ideal society – occasionally with scepticism but usually with joy” (Matter, 1975, p. 149). However, it is important to highlight that the last chapter of the novel is the description of the destruction of utopia, as everything that has been discovered by our protagonist during the novel is destroyed in seconds by the opposers of this idea.

As mentioned before, a great number of experts claim that *Island* is a utopian society. However, what are the characteristics that a location needs to have to be considered a utopia? Many different elements can construct the base of a utopia. For example, Thomas More’s *Utopia* (2013) explains that the Utopians have eliminated money from their economies, and they have been teaching their citizens that money is not important. Due to this elimination, inhabitants loathe everything similar to money that is used in other surrounding countries. This happens to be a “common” characteristic of utopias, but, in the case of Pala, money is still relevant, and yet it is considered a utopia.

This example shows that not all utopias are described the same way and that not all of them gather the same characteristics. Why are they so different if, at the end of the day, they all belong to the same genre? Is there a list of essential characteristics that describe the perfect land? If so, does Pala have all of them? Or just some of them? Are some of these features compulsory? Does each utopia have its characteristics?

## **2. Objectives**

The main objective of this research is to determine the characteristics that make a particular land utopian. In this project, the society that is going to be described in depth is the one that appears in Aldous Huxley's novel called *Island*. The island in question is called Pala, and people that frequent the island in the novel, such as Mr Bahu, considers that Pala is "so perfectly designed to make every man, woman and child on this enchanting island as perfectly free and happy as it's possible to be" (Huxley, 2005, p. 58). The majority of the citizens of Pala consider that the island is perfect and do not it to change. However, why is this island considered perfect? What features make it different from other locations or other utopias?

This project aims to determine the specific characteristics that make Pala utopian, that is to say, ideal and idyllic for the people that live there. The other main objective of this thesis is to determine whether some features are strictly necessary to construct a utopia, and if some characteristics are just particular to Pala. In other words, if other utopias do not have the same specific features as Pala, and if they both are still considered utopias.

## **3. Methodology**

My thesis mainly consists of an in-depth analysis of a particular book, that is to say, the description of the characteristics that make the book part of a larger group. In order to obtain the information and the data needed to undergo this research, information will be gather by means of consulting different books and publications that describe utopia.. There will be a comparison of different theories to see which approach should be taken into consideration when analysing the book in depth.

Apart from the literary works, different publications that have been made for years in distinct literary journals will also be relevant, as they will include the theory needed to compare the similarities and contrasts among the approaches that experts in the field have taken in relation to the topic. It is vital that these are consulted because the majority of the utopian theory has been published in journals, that is to say, they gather a lot of relevant information for the project.

In addition to the journal publications, internet web pages will also be consulted in order to get updated and up-to-minute information about the topic. Among the web pages, the information is going to be retrieved from newspaper articles comparing, research reports and papers written by other students. Many other pages have proved to be useful to complete the research. These are also vital when it comes to consulting definitions, for example, as many pages are specialised in providing those.

Moreover, I will also use different audiovisual methods, such as YouTube documentaries or videos, as they have proved to be a useful tool to gather information about topics included in my research. For example, there is a documentary talking about moksha-medicine (one of the characteristics that might be relevant to construct utopia), and it might contain some valuable ideas that can help to understand why this drug can be considered utopian and why it was included in the novel.

Finally, it is relevant to mention that no interview was included because, first of all, this is a thesis concerned with the analysis of a novel. It is not extremely necessary to include an interview, as the project mainly consists of listing the different characteristics that construct a utopia, and the opinion of one expert might be completely different from other theories that have been found. Surveys were not included either because statistical analysis has no place in this project because the thesis is, all in all, theoretical. The

recollection of data via interviews is an extremely useful tool for other types of thesis: the ones that need to measure data using quantitative methods. However, for a project with a great deal of theoretical background, it is unnecessary to use those tools, as they prove no practical use.

#### **4. Utopia: Origin and Controversy in Defining the Term**

The first time that the term *utopia* was mentioned was in the year 1516 by Sir Thomas More from Ancient Greece. The word first appeared in a novel whose title in Latin would be *Libellus vere aureus, nec minus salutaris quam festivus, de optimo reipublicae statu, deque nova insula Utopia*<sup>1</sup> (“A little true book, not less beneficial than enjoyable, about how things should be in a state and about the new island Utopia”). Cecilia Liu (n.d.) claims that the book recounts the story of an imaginary society, which consists of fifty-four cities. All these cities follow the same rules, have the same traditions and are located exactly at twenty-four miles apart from each other. This means that all these cities are considered equal, that is to say, there are no differences among them. However, there is one city that is more important than the others, the one located in the centre.

According to the Online Etymology Dictionary (2021), the word *utopia* comes from Modern Latin, and it literally means *nowhere* or *no place*. It comes from Greek prefix *ou-*, which means *not* + the word *topos*, which means *place*. A recurring minority of experts think that the word comes from the Greek prefix *eu-*, which means *good*, a mistake that has been reinforced when the word *dystopia* was introduced. John Carey (1999), in the introduction of *The Faber Book of Utopias*, explains this usual confusion:

Utopia means *nowhere* or *no-place*. It has often been taken to mean good place, through confusion of its first syllable with the Greek *eu* as in *euphemism*

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<sup>1</sup> 2013. Reprint from the Original from 1516. Publishing company: EOD Network. IberoLibro.com

or *eulogy*. As a result of this mix-up, another word, dystopia, has been invented, to mean bad place. But, strictly speaking, imaginary good places and imaginary bad places are all utopias, or nowhere (Carey, 1999, p. 11).

Margaret Atwood (2017) also made a really interesting suggestion regarding the etymology of the term. She considered the possibility that Thomas More, the person who coined the term *utopia*, might have been playing with the words, that is to say, giving a clever meaning to the words: “Sir Thomas More, in his own sixteenth-century utopia, may have been punning: utopia is the good place that does not exist” (Atwood, 2017).

*Utopia* is a concept that has been largely defined by many different experts, but they have not reached any agreement. According to Lyman Tower Sargent (2005), it has been around five hundred years since the term was coined, and there should already be a definition accepted by everyone. However, there still are ongoing disagreements among experts, and both new and old problems have arisen.

Sargent (2005) states that the first problem started when the word *utopia* was used to name a genre of literature. Authors started to “push the boundaries” of this term and broadened its core meaning. Sargent (2005) explains that lots of different authors, such as Samuel Butler, author of *Erewhon*, started to publish literary works that could be understood as utopias, but they differed in a lot of senses from the first utopia by More. As a result of these differences, experts classified those works as subgenres of utopian writing, and new terms such as *erewhonian* were born to describe utopias. This has led many experts and readers into confusion, as they read literary works that were similar but had different names.

The second problem that Sargent (2005) states in his work is that the word *utopia* was not only used to describe a literary genre, but also a particular way of understanding the world, a way of thinking. Most of the times both utopia and utopianism are the same

thing: one involves the other, they are conflated. This is really important because people sometimes think that novels that talk about alternative ways of thinking are utopias, which is not always the case. Many of these works might include different understandings that are not utopian.

Ruth Levitas (2010), in her book called *The Concept of Utopia*, attempts to provide possible definitions for the term *utopia* from the past two centuries. Apart from that, she also turns to the Contemporary authors to see their thoughts on the subject matter, which, in her opinion, it is relatively new even though it was coined many years ago. She tries to summarise the understanding of the concept taking into consideration all perspectives. One of the approaches that she describes in her book is that of Ernst Bloch (1885-1977) developed in *The Principle of Hope*, where he mentions utopia in direct relation with Marxism, as he considers that they are intertwined. Bloch refuses to consider that utopia is a literary genre, as quoted in Levitas' work:

[...] to limit the utopian to the Thomas More variety, or simply to orientate it in that direction, would be like trying to reduce electricity to the amber from which it gets its Greek name and in which it was first noticed. Indeed, the utopian coincides so little with the novel of an ideal state that the whole total of philosophy becomes necessary... to do justice to the content of that designed by utopia. (Levitas, 2010, p. 99).

Another definition for the term was given by Herbert Marcuse (1967) in a lecture delivered at the Free University of Berlin. He claimed that:

Utopia is a historical concept. It refers to projects for social change that are considered impossible. Impossible for what reasons? In the usual discussion of utopia the impossibility of realizing the project of a new society exists when the subjective and objective factors of a given social situation stand in the way of the

transformation – the so-called immaturity of the social situation. (Marcuse, 1967).

The definition that Herbert provided has nothing to do with the one that Bloch gave, as they are both talking about different perspectives of the same concept. Utopia is a term that be understood in many different ways, and experts believe that utopian studies are extremely broad. For this reason, experts such as Levitas have difficulties in agreeing with one particular definition, and that is why she was able to write a book with all the plausible definitions of the term. This reasoning explains why Bloch relates utopia with Marxism and Herbert considers that utopia is a historical concept.

## **5. Aldous Huxley**

According to Britannica (2021), Aldous Leonard Huxley was born in Godalming, Surrey, England on July 26, 1894, and died in Los Angeles, California on November 22, 1963. Everybody that surrounded him said that he was a great person and an astonishing writer. For example, Cristopher Isherwood<sup>2</sup>, a close friend of Huxley, said the following words to describe Huxley: “Fearless curiosity was one of Aldous’s noblest characteristics, a function of his greatness as a human being.” (Heitman, 2015). Huxley is considered to be an acute and intelligent writer whose books stand out due to his wit and pessimistic satire. His most acclaimed novel is *Brave New World*, and it was published in 1932. The plot revolves around a futuristic society, called World State, which is mainly focused on science and productivity. It belongs to the dystopian science fiction genre, and it is said to have paved the way for the majority of the dystopian fiction that came afterwards.

Aldous Huxley was the grandson of the famous biologist Thomas Huxley and the third son of Leonard Huxley, a clever man of letters. His mother was Julia Arnold, the

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<sup>2</sup> Information retrieved from Heitman, D. (2015). The Talented Mr. Huxley. *Humanities*, 36, 6.

founder of Prior's Field School, a popular girls' boarding school in Sussex. Many members of his family were people that excelled in science, medicine, arts and literature: his siblings Andrew Huxley and Julian Huxley became outstanding and important biologists.

He was first educated in his father laboratory and then continued his studies at Eton College. However, during that period of his life, he contracted keratitis, an eye disease that "left [me] practically blind for two to three years" (Huxley, 1939, 243), he wrote. According to Huxley himself (1939), this illness also "ended his early dreams of becoming a doctor" (Huxley, 1939, 243). He preserved enough eyesight to read and he graduated from Balliol College (Oxford) in 1916, where he studied English literature.

Huxley published his first writings in 1916 while he was working on a literary magazine called *Athenaeum*. He also published short stories and poetry at the beginning of his literary career. His first two novels, *Crome Yellow* (1921) and *Antic Hay* (1923) are satires that criticise the English literary and intellectual world. Later, he devoted himself to writing full-time and spent many years in Italy with his wife Maria Nys and their son Matthew Huxley. He wrote his most famous and dehumanising novel during this period, that is to say, *Brave New World* (1932), and also one of his novels that includes pacifist themes, *Eyeless in Gaza* (1936). *Brave New World* was a turning point in his life, as it expressed his discomfort with society and the progress of 20<sup>th</sup> century technology. *Eyeless in Gaza* still showed discomfort and emptiness, but Huxley's interest in Hindu philosophy and morality is present in this book, something is relevant for *Island*.

In 1937, Huxley moved to Hollywood with his family. His friend Gerald Heard introduced him to Vedanta (a Hindu philosophy) and vegetarianism. During this period, he earned a large income working as a screenwriter and he wrote many scripts for

different Hollywood movies for some years. These theories and ideas about Hindu philosophy are extremely relevant regarding the last novel he published before dying: *Island* (1962). This last novel is a utopian society that is found in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, isolated from the rest of the world. According to Romesh Gunsekera (2012), *Island* is “an antidote to *Brave New World*”. He and many experts also consider that *Island* is the counterpart of *Brave New World*, because the one is said to be a utopia and the other is understood as a dystopia, respectively; one is the anthesis of the other.

In the spring of 1953, Huxley had his first experience with a drug called mescaline, a psychedelic drug. He narrated this experience in the book *The Door of Perception* (1954), but, a few years later, he claimed that he had a more profound experience on mescaline than the one detailed in the book. He wrote about the first experience: “The mystical experience is doubly valuable; it is valuable because it gives the experiencer a better understanding of himself and the world and because it may help him to lead a less self-centred and more creative life” (Huxley, 1999, p. 34).

Huxley was recognised for being one of the most important intellectual figures of his time. He was nominated for the Nobel Prize of Literature many times, but he never achieved the prize. Huxley died of laryngeal cancer in 1963 and media coverage of his death was minimal due to the assassination of John F. Kennedy, which took place the same day, just seven hours before he perished.

## **6. Features that Make Pala a Utopian Land**

As it has been mentioned before, Pala has got a great number of characteristics that contribute to the creation of a utopian society. However, it is important to clarify that it is impossible to list them all. For this reason, this project is going to include the following seven features: Sexuality, Yoga of Love and Love; Deep Freeze and Artificial

Insemination; Families and Mutual Adoption Club (MAC); Religion and Meditation; Moksha-Medicine Education and Death. All these features have been chosen according to their relevance to the creation of utopia, meaning that they seem to directly contribute to the happiness of the inhabitants of Pala. Nevertheless, the novel includes many more elements that could be considered utopian or relevant to the creation of a utopian land, and they could be included in the list as well.

### **6.1 Sexuality, Yoga of Love and Love**

Sexuality is a recurrent topic on *Island*. The first chapter of the novel already mentions it when Will, the protagonist, has got a flashback about his infidelity to Molly, his wife, with a woman called Babs. He chose this particular woman because “what he wanted was a different perfume, the warmth and resilience of a younger body” (Huxley, 2005, 9). When Molly realised what was happening, she decided to abandon Will, and she had an accident when she was leaving, which resulted in her death. Will tries to convince himself that it was an accident, but, in-depth, he blames himself for the death of his wife. For Will, sexuality and death are closely related, and this memory haunts Will for the rest of the novel. He unsuccessfully tries to convince himself that it was not its fault.

Will’s understanding of sex is completely different from what the majority of people believe in Pala. Will is from the West, and Pala is located in the East, so their ideas are polar opposites. However, the first time that Will gets an understanding of what sex means for Palanese people, it comes from Murugan, the future Raja of Pala. He does not share the Palanese views on the topic, and he claims: “*They* think that sort of thing is simply wonderful. In fact they all do. That’s one of the reasons why nobody wants to change” (Huxley, 2005, 47). According to Murugan, their understanding is disgusting, as they consider sex something pleasurable and wonderful. Mr Bahu, the Ambassador of

Rendang, which is the neighbour land, agrees with Murugan's ideas on sexuality and he describes it saying that it is "Just a distraction, that's all. Just a nagging, humiliating vexation. But an intelligent man can always cope with it." (Huxley, 2005, p. 66).

Will receives an explanation about sexuality and love from a young Palanese couple, Radha Appu (Will's nurse) and Ranga Karakuran (her lover and best friend). They have an understanding of love that is pure and naïve. They consider that everyone is free to do whatever they want and that everyone is responsible for their actions. Apart from that, homosexuality and bisexuality are forms of valid love, as Palanese people think that all love is natural (Huxley, 2005). The young couple also mentions masturbation, which is what they think that young Murugan does to avoid desire.

Afterwards, the young couple talks about what they call *Maithuna*, that is to say, the yoga of love. According to the Online Encyclopaedia (2018), *Maithuna* is the Sanskrit term used to talk about sexual intercourse in Indian religions, particularly Tantrism. It is also a metaphor for liberation. It is not only having intercourse for pleasure but also the sacred union between energies. The young couple claims that the yoga of love can be compared to what the Romans used to call *coitus reservatus* (Huxley, 2005). Yoga of love is birth control without contraceptives, but that is just the beginning of it. It is not concentrated on the genitals of the individual, it is something that happens through all the body, as Freud used to say (Huxley, 2005). This means that Palanese people do not focus just on giving pleasure to the genitals, but the whole body; it is considered an experience, both physical and mental.

In addition to that, they tell Will that contraception is an option, it is free and distributed by the government itself for those couples who do not want offspring. Radha says that, for women, the yoga of love "means perfection, means being transformed and

taken out of themselves and completed” (Huxley, 2005, p. 85). This implies that women and men have got different understandings of the yoga of love, but the result is similar.

It is important to mention that this explanation about sex is the opposite of what some dystopias usually display. Sargent and Sargisson (2014) explain that, in *Brave New World*, for example, people are taught that promiscuity is the solution to relieve their sexual desire. They also claim that something similar happens in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, where sex is understood as something unpleasant that should be avoided at all costs.

It is also true, however, that the majority of utopias believe in free sexuality. An example could be Robert Rimmer’s utopia called *The Harrad Experiment* (1969). Sargent and Sargisson (2014) also talk about this novel, and they mention that the main objective of the work to highlight the importance of free sexual inhibitions, without repression and hate. The main characters aim is to understand how to enjoy sexual intercourse with different partners without worrying about any other inconveniences. Fidelity to one partner is not expected in Pala either. Nevertheless, homosexuality is not mentioned, which might one of the main differences from the Palanese perceptive, where free love is encouraged. Contraception is also relevant in *The Harrad Experiment*, as well as in Huxley’s last work. Its main objective is to make men, women and children happy and free of worries.

Another example of sex represented in utopia is also explained by Sargent and Sargisson (2014). They use the novel by Marge Piercy called *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976) to exemplify how sex is seen according to utopia and dystopia. Connie is the protagonist of this work. She has got the opportunity to view two different futures, one utopian and one dystopian. In the dystopian one, sex is treated as something dirty and dreadful. This society is heterosexual, patriarchal and imprisoning. Notwithstanding, the

utopian society has a liberal perspective: sexual relationships are not controlled by the law, and it reaches the extreme that she even encounters children having sexual intercourse. Nobody says anything to these children because they consider that sex is something ordinary and mundane. Homosexuality is accepted, and people can choose their sexual partners freely, just the same way as Palanese people.

## **6.2 Deep Freeze and Artificial Insemination**

Deep freeze (DF) and artificial insemination (AI) are also two really important elements in the novel, as the inhabitants of Pala have a completely different understanding of them from what is traditional. On the one hand, deep freeze is a practice that is usually used for food, but it can also be used to freeze other elements, such as spermatozoa. Hengel (n.d.), a company that works in the field of deep-freezing, defines the process as “an industrial technique which involves cooling rapidly and brutally [...] to temperatures from -30°C to -50 °C.” On the other hand, the Online Encyclopaedia (2018) describes artificial insemination in the following way: “the techniques of fertilization employed for reproductive purposes by means other than sexual intercourse.” In other words, it consists of the impregnation of women using scientific and artificial means.

Will is taught the Palanese way of understanding deep freeze and artificial insemination when he visits Vijaya (Doctor MacPhail’s helper) and his wife Shanta. When they arrive at the house, Shanta is breastfeeding the baby that they just had. Will asks whom they think the baby is going to resemble in the future, and Shanta says that he is not going to look like Vijaya because he is not the biological father. Will is clueless and asks for clarification. (Huxley, 2005). The couple explains that “they wanted to enrich the family with a different psyche and temperament” (Huxley, 2005, p. 187) and they decided to opt for artificial insemination and deep freeze, techniques that are usual in

Pala. The couple tells Will that their son might develop the qualities and gifts of the donor. In this case, the baby's father was a famous Palanese artist, and they think that the child has some possibilities of inheriting some of his talents (Huxley, 2005).

Furthermore, Palanese inhabitants are convinced that deep freeze and artificial insemination are useful when it comes to improving the human species. Vijaya tells Will that his family had had some diabetes antecedents, and that is the reason why his parents decided to have both his brother and him by means of AI. His parents wanted to avoid passing the illness to their children, which results in the improvement of the race. Vijaya also mentions that in more or less a century, nearly everyone on the island will have a higher intelligence quotient (IQ) than the majority; over one hundred and fifteen. It is less than thirty points than the one that Will predicts his part of the world has. (Huxley, 2005).

When the protagonist asks about the ethics and morality of these practices, Vijaya explains that, at the beginning of the process, there were many people who thought that DF and AI were immoral, as they were "choosing" the baby for the characteristics that the infant would have. However, in the present times, the majority of citizens agree that it is more moral to have your baby artificially to avoid possible faults and imperfection that the father's family might have. Apart from that, they also claim that the processes have been justified by "reincarnation and the theory of karma" (Huxley, 2005, p. 188). The father feels that he is contributing to the future well-being of the child when using these methods, so he does not feel left out of the whole process.

The use of technological advances to improve the species is very common in dystopian and utopian fiction. In dystopias, these methods are usually used to control, indoctrinate and manipulate the masses, but that is not the case in *Island*. For example, according to Julia Chan (2019) in *Brave New World*, mechanical reproduction is taken to

an extreme, as natural human reproduction is replaced by technology and people are created in assembly lines. In *The Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood (1985), Luis Alfredo Ortiz (2011) claims that birth is something natural, not technologically controlled, but people are forced to have babies and to give them to the elite of the society. The role of young women is to have offspring and to give them to others to continue the species. This is another way of understanding and controlling birth, extremely different from the one used in Pala.

Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516) also has a particular understanding of birth and family construction. He says the following:

No family may have less than ten and more than sixteen persons in it; but there can be no determined number for the children under age. This rule is easily observed, by removing some of the children of a more fruitful couple to any other family that does not abound so much in them (More, 2013, p. 15).

In other words, he also considers that birth needs to be controlled somehow, and the solution that he provides is to give children to other families that have been less fruitful than others. Thomas More does not mention technological developments to enhance the species, but he establishes a limit that families should not overpass, so, in a way, he ends up establishing a way to control overpopulation without using technology, which is something that differs from what Palanese people do with DF and AI.

### **6.3 Families and Mutual Adoption Club (MAC)**

Families are really important units in all cultures and societies, and Huxley's *Island* is no different. Nevertheless, Palanese people have got a quite different understanding of families, as they do not believe in conventional familiar relationships. Traditionally, a family consists of one or two parents and their children (normally one or two) that live together under the same roof and share their lives with the other members of the house.

Will's understanding of what is a family assimilates to the ordinary one, as he comes from the West, and his society follows tradition. Will learns about the Palanese family when talking to Susila, Doctor's MacPhail's daughter-in-law. They are talking about Will's parents, and he decides to question her about her own family. Will claims that his father was insufferable, and Susila tells him her parents were bearable when they were separated, but unbearable when they were together. Will comments that he imagined that Pala would try to avoid these situations, and Susila explains that they are taught in school that people with different psyches do not get along, but her parents had fallen in love and when they started living together, they stopped communicating with one another (Huxley, 2005).

Susila tells Will that she is convinced that, if she had not been born in Pala, she would have been part of a really unhappy family, as they were a highly dysfunctional unit. Will asks about families in Pala, and she says that the word 'mother' is just a label. The 'mother' does her function until is needed, and when the child is old enough, the roles and relationship between parents and their offspring completely change. Susila explains that a little girl in such an unhealthy environment would have been a rebel in a Western society; Palanese leaders thought that they needed to change the system to avoid the rebellion. (Huxley, 2005).

She explains that when children are in a situation of discomfort in their own houses, they are highly encouraged to go to one of the other houses that they have. A Palanese child has around twenty houses that they can go to when they feel overwhelmed on their own. This system is what they call Mutual Adoption Club (MAC). Apart from that, she explains that everyone in Pala is eligible to be part of this club, no matter if they are an old couple that did not have children, newlyweds, single parents or middle age couples;

everyone can be a family on the island (Huxley, 2005). When Will asks her about the result of all these families together, she summarises everything the following way:

[The result is] an entirely different kind of family. Not exclusive, like your families, and not predestined, not compulsory. An inclusive, predestined and voluntary family. Twenty pairs of fathers and mothers, eight or nine ex-fathers and ex-mothers, and forty or fifty assorted children of all ages (Huxley, 2005, p. 90).

In other words, the Old Raja of Pala decided to create this organisation to make children feel happy and wanted within their familial relationships. If they have a problem in their own houses, they can move out for a while and return when they think they are ready. Parents know that their children are safe (with another family) and they can all relax and spend time far from each other. Apart from that, it is not compulsory to be part of the club and citizens can leave whenever they want. In this way, family relationships are strengthened, and misunderstandings are avoided.

Families are an irrelevant unit if we compare Pala's system to *Brave New World's* understanding. In this dystopia, there are no mothers, fathers, siblings or any kind of familiar relationship because these bonds that unite families are considered to weaken inhabitants and to make them worthless for society. They are made to believe that they belong to everybody else, that is to say, to the government and other people. Mustapha Mond, one of the characters of the novel, ridicules the concept of family, as for them, it is useless: "The world was full of fathers – was therefore full of misery; full of mothers – therefore of every kind of perversion from sadism to chastity; full of brothers, sisters, uncles, aunts-full of madness and suicide" (Huxley, 2004, p. 39).

According to Magda Rodríguez (2008), it is the lack of familiar bonds that keep citizens of World State in their different classes. They are conditioned to think that they

are just a piece of an enormous puzzle, and individuality is not important, as one individual piece does not directly contribute to the growth of the community. If parents had to look after children and work to cover their necessities, they would be less productive because they would work for someone specific, not for the improvement of society. All these drawbacks have been erased in *Brave New World*, together with the traditional understanding of families.

Another dystopia that talks about families and that changes its structure is Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Mitchell Kalpakgian (2001) claims that Winston, the protagonist of this novel, has almost zero recollection of his family and childhood years. He remembers the person whom he married, but she disappeared all of a sudden and he had no more news. This means that Winston's family is not relevant, as nobody can remember what they did for the society in which they are living, they have been erased from history. Winston himself works for the Minister of Truth, which is the organisation that alters and deletes historical events in order to fit with the government's propaganda. In addition to that, Big Brother does not allow people that belong to the party to marry and to form a family, meaning that the government is controlling what people do in their private lives. This results in the lack of freedom and the elimination of human rights.

However, dystopias are not the only genre that change the traditional understanding of familiar units. Some utopias, such as Plato's *Republic* (375), also present a different interpretation of families. Plato's main objective is to describe the perfect city, and he considers that lots of elements need to be modified in order to change a society. Plato includes a chapter that talks about the abolition of nuclear families, that is to say, families consisting of a mother, father and offspring and all their bonds. He wants to replace them for guardians. Guardians are the elite of society, and even though the idea might sound

undesirable for some people, Plato claims that society should be formed by philosopher-kings, the thinkers, and that is why traditional families need to be abolished (Plato, 1970).

The author of the person who coined the term utopia has also an opinion about families. For the citizens of Utopia, families are extremely important. Thomas More (2013) describes a “family” as a group of forty male and female workers, two slaves, a leader (a mister or a mistress) and a magistrate. These families change every year, as twenty people move back to the cities every year, and families vary. In this way, people are never ignorant of agriculture, and they are also aware of the functioning of cities because they have lived in both places.

In big cities, people who belong to the same family eat together in the same place, so around forty people gather in an enormous room eating lunch and supper together every day. This means that families behave like traditional ones, even though the number of people exceeds traditional families. Apart from that, they do not have blood bonds, but they are put together for convenience and to improve society (More, 2013). This understanding shares similarities with the Palanese perspective, but the main objectives differ: Pala’s expansion of families aims to improve children’s and parents’ well-being within the familiar environment, whereas Utopia’s expansion is to enhance teamwork among citizens.

#### **6.4 Religion and Meditation**

Religion and mediation are also crucial topics in *Island*. These are also quite interesting in Huxley’s personal life. According to the writers of *Scraps from the Loft* (2019), Huxley’s ideas about religion have always been subjected to criticism due to their philosophical implications. Literary critics have always thought that his ideas were somehow revolutionary. These authors talk about what D. Marshall said in 1930s about

the topic. He claimed that, despite all criticism that Huxley's thoughts had undergone, it is also true that his perspective cannot be easily ignored because he saw the importance of arts, education, government, science as a way to improve people's lives. In order to find answers to his existential questions, Huxley started to search into religion. He mentions his opinion about different religions in his productions. Huxley claimed that was agonistic, but Marshall considers that he was simply sceptical. (Marshall, 1930).

However, in *Island*, we can see that Huxley offers a solution to all these problems that confused him presenting the Tantric Buddhism as the main religion in Pala. The Confucian Weekly Bulletin (2000) defines Tantric Buddhism as a "complex and understudied part of the Buddhist tradition [...], a type of Buddhist practice where Tantra plays a dominant role." This branch of the Buddhist religion is very limited, as there are not many platforms to expand the knowledge and if they exist, they are not translated to modern languages.

This understanding of religion is significant for Pala, as people are faithful believers, but they do not have a specific day to pray to their deities. This means that they can show faith every day and from everywhere. They have a temple in case some people want to go there, but it is not something compulsory (Huxley, 2005).

When Will asks Vijaya about religion and their understanding of it, Vijaya talks about the meditation room and its symbolism. Vijaya tells Will that they decided to put landscapes on the walls of the room to create an environment of self-awareness for the person meditating. He claims that using statues of Gods or other types of decoration might distract believers from the process. The main objective of the meditation is finding oneself and their position in the universe, what they are for other individuals and how to understand oneself. It is the revelation of the truth (Huxley, 2005).

As it has been mentioned before, religions are really important because they shape the understanding of people about certain topics. In *Utopia* by Thomas More, religion is also a crucial part of society. However, *Island* and *Utopia* differ in the fact that Utopians have got several religions; towns have different beliefs. Even though all of them are monotheists and have a similar god, what differs is the nature of the god. Some people worship the sun, others the moon and one of the planets. These religions all meet in churches and they share the services, where the similarities are mentioned. If one religion needs a ritual and this ritual bothers others, it should be done in private, not in the church. (More, 2013). More's representation of religion is quite different from Huxley's, and he does not mention the term "meditation" in his production. This leads to believe that this type of religion resembles the traditional one.

Notwithstanding, it is remarkable that, in a dystopia like *Brave New World*, religion has not been eradicated, which is a striking difference if it is compared to what happened to sex or family units. Religion has just been modified. It is true that the inhabitants of World State do not know the past of religion and how it was before, but they still have something similar to it: God and the Ten Commandments have been replaced by Ford and all the iconography and statues are now modified to worship Lord Ford, a scientist. Apart from that, they do not attend services in churches but group orgies. The objective of these gatherings is to have an appearance of God using the help of drugs. (Huxley, 2004).

In *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Orwell shares another perspective of religion. They do not support it, the same way they loathe romantic love, sex, affection... If the population has feelings that are not related to Big Brother or The Party, they are not accepted. People are forced to love and admire Big Brother and hate everyone else. Love to a God would

surely interfere in this totalitarian perspective, that is why religion is avoided and treated as an offence (Orwell, 2001). It could be said that the aims to believe are different in both productions, as Huxley's characters seek personal understanding, while the others are forced to "idolatrize" one individual to be considered part of society.

### **6.5 Moksha-medicine**

Another important element that makes Pala an idyllic land is what they call *moksha*-medicine. According to Gorman Beauchamp (1990), the word *moksha* is a Sanskrit word that means *liberation*. The first individual to mention this element is Murugan, the character that opposes Palanese views about the world, and he describes the product as "dope that makes them happy" (Huxley, 2005, p. 135). The protagonist is shocked by these words, as Susila told him before that there are no drug addicts in Pala. Will asks where this dope comes from, and young Murugan claims that they get it from yellow toadstools. He also adds that, in the beginning, they grew and collected in the wild, but that nowadays they scientifically create the drug in the High Altitude Experimental Station (Huxley, 2005).

Will is utterly surprised to hear that Palanese people consume "dope", as Murugan calls it. When Doctor MacPhail arrives, he asks about this medication, and the way in which the doctor describes this product is quite different from Murugan's vision: "We give the stuff good names – *moksha*-medicine, the reality revealer, the truth-and-beauty pill" (Huxley, 2005, p. 136). After this, they start an argument about the uses of the medicine. While Doctor MacPhail and Vijaya claim that it helps to create illusions to get to know oneself better, Murugan, who has never tried it, rejects its use as he believes that there is no point in getting false illusions and false ideas (Huxley, 2005).

Doctor MacPhail and Vijaya tell Will that they do not know for sure how the drug works. They add that they are currently investigating its functioning inside the brain when one takes a dose of the medication. However, they claim that they have discovered some interesting facts about the drug: one of them is that that drug is not effective on everyone, and that they need to look for other ways of liberation for about fifteen per cent of the population, as the *moksha*-medicine seems to not work for them. Apart from that, Vijaya explains that they know that the response of the drug is a “full-blown mystical experience – one in all and all in one” (Huxley, 2005, p. 137). This means that when they take the drug, they feel inexplicable joy, happiness, and they see themselves and who they truly are: one is going through a mystical experience with oneself, nature and the world (Huxley, 2005).

Dennis McKenna (2016), from the Heffter Research Institute, agrees with the fact that some substances can be used for recreation. He claims that “Mystical experience was always thought as a gift [...] and many people strive for it all their lives, and they do not get it. Now, with some milligrams of a particular substance, we can reliably induce mystical experiences” (Powell, 2016, 24’42”- 25’06).

The climax of the novel is reached when Will himself is allowed to try *moksha*-medicine. When this happens, Susila is next to him, guiding and helping him to understand the experience. The use of this drug is understood as Will’s redemption from all the weight that he has on his shoulders about Western society, and it provides the way that he needs to follow to find his true self. The first words that Huxley uses to describe Will’s experience are “Luminous bliss” (Huxley, 2005 p. 263). Huxley attempts to describe the whole experience in twenty pages, even though that it is indescribable according to Beauchamp (1990). All the images that Will sees in his hallucination can be

somehow related to his personal life, and every single one teaches him a lesson, and, in this way, he discovers his true nature.

The description of Will's experience is extremely detailed. The reason why it might be so accurate is because Huxley has had his own experience with psychedelic drugs. Danny Heitman (2015) explains that, in 1953, Huxley took a dose of mescaline, a hallucinogenic drug. He explained his experience in *The Doors of Perception*, and the description he provides is quite similar to Will's use of *moksha*-medicine. Huxley says that the drug changed his sense of colour, and that life became disfigured. He also explains that he is aware that the overuse of the substance can be prejudicial for one's health and can result in an addiction (Huxley, 1970).

It is also important to mention that drugs are not only relevant in *Island*, but in other Huxley's works, as well as in other dystopias and utopias. One example is *Brave New World*. According to M. H. N. Schermer (2007), soma stands for "alienation, dehumanization, and superficial mind-numbing pleasure" (Schermer, 2007, p. 119). These are negative connotations if we compare it to *moksha*-medicine, which is used for "revelation, authentic self-experience and true flourishing" (Schermer, 2007, p. 119). Palanese people use the drug positively, to find themselves, while in *Brave New World*, it is another technique that the government uses to control the population.

In other dystopias, such as *This Perfect Day* (1970) by Ira Levin, which is also a technological dystopia, drugs are used in a similar way to *Island*. Citizens are drugged every month to be satisfied and not rebel against the central computer that controls the world called UniComp. They receive injections every month, and in this way, they are not able to discover their potential. They are told what to do, they cannot decide themselves (Levin, 2010).

## **6.6 Education**

Education is always extremely important because it represents the values and beliefs that a society possesses. This knowledge is what they are willing to pass to future generations and the methods used to achieve this difficult task are varied and distinct around the world. For example, Spain's methodology to teach is not the same as the one used in Sweden, as the two countries have different understandings of what should be taught. In addition to that, the content also varies depending on the location. Therefore, lessons are adapted according to what teachers believe is going to prove more useful for the future of the individuals.

Huxley describes in detail how the educational system works in Pala; in fact, he dedicates a whole chapter to education. Two new characters help Will to understand the Palanese's views on education: Mrs Narayan, the principal of the school and Chandra Menon, the Under-Secretary of Education. Mr Menon tells Will that Palanese children are not educated to follow mass consumption as the American children or to be puppets of the government, like the Russian ones. They are educated to become fully functional adults. In addition to that, Pala pays attention to individuality, because they are concerned that every child is different and that they are going to need different types of education according to their temperament, gifts and deficiencies. After that, he also explains that children that are "somnambulists", meaning that they can be easily convinced, need to be spotted to make them less easy to convince, as they do not want to fall into a dictatorship of any kind. (Huxley, 2005).

Also, some people in Pala can go into a deep trance and experience something in two hours, when it lasted just four minutes in the real world, but this is not something that everyone can do, just a small part of the population: the geniuses.

The distribution of children in different groups is also different in Pala. Mr Menon explains their method this way:

We sort out all the shiest, tensest, more over-responsible and introverted children, and assemble them in a single group. Then, little by little, the group is enlarged. First a few children with tendencies towards indiscriminate sociability are introduced. Then one or two children with tendencies towards aggressiveness and love of power. It's the best method we have found, for getting little boys and girls at three polar opposites to understand and tolerate each other (Huxley, 2005, p. 206).

After the lengthy explanation, Will is taken to visit the classrooms, where he sees how they work. For example, he witnesses a mathematics' class, and he sees that children are divided into two groups: the visualisers and the non-visualisers; the teacher is adapting the lessons according to the personality of the students, which will help to develop their talents and gifts (Huxley, 2005).

In addition to that, in chapter 6, there is mention of how university works in Pala: students start when they are 16 years old and they combine their studies with their jobs until they are 24 years old, which is the age that they stop studying to completely dedicate to their job (Huxley, 2005).

As mentioned above, Palanese education differs from the traditional understanding. As Tyson Lewis (2006) mentions in his article, David Halpin said something interesting in 2003: "educational reform is inherently linked with utopianism through the faculty of 'ultimate hope'" (Lewis, 2006, p. 6). Lewis says that this hope makes people believe that society is going to improve through the implementation of "good" education.

Lewis (2006) also argues that, in his opinion, Halpin's statement is true, but it can also word in the opposite way. In other words, he considers that utopianism relies on education in order to exist and function. He claims that "all education practices have a utopian kernel animating them, and so that is why all attempts to theorise utopia are located in an inherently educational problematic of 're-education'" (Lewis, 2006, p. 6). He concludes by saying that utopia and education need one another to exist and that they are dependent; one shapes the other depending on the context and situation. (Lewis, 2006). This means that, according to some experts such as Lewis, education could be one essential characteristic these productions need to have to be considered utopias.

One utopia that also mentions education as a vital characteristic is *The Republic* by Plato. In Plato's opinion, society needs to be divided into different groups, and the only one of these that can reign are the philosophers or kings, in other words, the educated members of society (Plato, 1970). However, according to Ariel Dillon (2004), Plato also mentions another type of education, which is the education of the guardians. The role of these people is to protect people from internal and external threats. These are also educated members of society, and if they prove to be brilliant and outstanding, they are pulled out from the rest and trained to be philosopher-kings.

If education is important for utopias, it is surely not so relevant for dystopias. One example of lack of education is *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, by George Orwell, where citizens of Oceania receive zero education and live in poverty. The government considers that the less they know, the fewer possibilities they have to start a revolution. That is why they modify the past and erase history from everywhere: to prevent people from knowing and complaining about the current situation. Knowledge is said to mean power; if they restrict education, they steal people's power to think for themselves (Orwell, 2001).

## **6.7 Death**

Death is a topic which is extremely relevant to understand the mentality of Palanese people. As it has been mentioned before, death is understood from a Tantric perspective, meaning that they believe in reincarnation of the body and in the reborn of the individual. Will has narrated his own experience with death when talking about Molly's passing. Apart from that, Will also remembers how one puppy that he had passed away in his arms, and he claims it was a terrible experience for him. Later, he also experienced Aunt Mary's death, who is one of the only people that Will truly loved (Huxley, 2005). All these experiences are described from the Western perspective, and all of them differ from what Palanese people beliefs of death.

Will gets to experience death from the Palanese perspective when he is told to go to the hospital to pay his respects to Lakshmi, Susila's mother-in-law, who is slowly consummating due to an illness. Will remembers cancer also killed his beloved aunt, and he draws a parallel between the two women, and all the memories from her death become alive when he sees Lakshmi. Susila is there, together with Radha, the little nurse. Susila is taking to the woman, telling her that it is not time to go yet, as her husband has not arrived to say goodbye. The old woman resists, because she knows that Susila is right: she cannot go without saying goodbye to his husband. (Huxley, 2005).

All of a sudden, he arrives. Instead of crying and being depressed, he starts explaining what is happening outside the of hospital: people dancing with light music, laughing, chatting. They now encourage her to go and leave her old body to be at peace. Lakshmi is weak, and she says that she finally sees the "light". Susila knows it is time to leave Dr Robert with his wife to allow them the final farewell (Huxley, 2005).

Lakshmi's death seems ideal: quiet, peaceful and not alone: she is always accompanied by her relatives. This idea of dying without pain is quite utopian: people are born, they spend time with their loved ones, and they perish painlessly. After that, they continue living, because reincarnation is possible according to their religion. However, Robert Kastenbaum (2005) claims that seeing death as utopian is absurd, and that many experts agree with him. According to him, death is not something positive, it is not an ideal situation; utopia should be the description of something perfect, idyllic, and death does not agree with that idea. Nevertheless, death cannot be avoided, so the more utopian it is, the better for the person who experiences it and the people surrounding that person.

The book *Utopia* does mention its own perspective on the topic of death. Utopians believe in Christianity. Therefore, they consider that their souls are immortal, as they are going to live forever in Heaven, next to God. However, the novel does not mention a ritual or steps to follow to make death different from what is usual. (More, 2013). In Thomas More's novel, then, it can be said that death is not part of the utopia; it does not construct the perfect and idyllic land.

However, dystopian novels do make reference to death, but not natural death. For example, in Orwell's masterpiece *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, death is understood as punishment; if the protagonist deviates from the rules, he will be condemned to death by the government. Winston is afraid of dying when he starts writing, because he is aware that if they discover him, he will be assassinated. (Orwell, 2001). Orwell does not mention natural death either, but this process has not got positive connotations in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, because when people die, it has usually been due to murder. When people are killed, the government demonstrates that if someone breaks the rules of the totalitarian society, the same is going to happen to them; it is a threat.

## 7. Conclusions

The main aim of this project was to determine if a list of characteristics could be done. Some of the features that construct utopia in *Island* have been listed, analysed, and described. These are Sexuality, Yoga of Love and Love; Deep Freeze and Artificial Insemination; Families and Mutual Adoption Club (MAC); Religion and Meditation, Education and Death. All these elements have proved to be utopian because when compared with dystopias, these productions portrayed the same element with a different understanding, usually helping society achieve happiness. Notwithstanding, the dystopias showed the same elements, but with different functions: usually repression the population. This means that these six elements are indeed utopian, and they do help to construct the utopia that Pala represents.

However, taking everything into consideration, it is important to remember that all the characteristics listed above have been chosen according to their importance to construct utopia. It is an almost impossible task to describe and list all the features that these productions should have to be considered utopias because, in some cases, the list is going to be extremely lengthy. In the case *Island*, it is possible, as the novel is not very long. However, due to the restrictions on the length of the project, it is not possible to list them all here.

Apart from that, it is vital to mention that all utopias are similar because all of them try to achieve perfection through laws, the government, and social conditions. They are characterized by people's happiness and the inhabitants feel part of the society. Perfection is the basis that all utopias try to achieve. But, as Levitas (2013) and many other experts mention, utopia is just a method; it is the imaginary reconstruction of society. This means that utopia is just an illusion, so everyone can imagine one utopia the

way they wish. That is why all utopias are different. Therefore, all of them will have distinct features. For this reason, it is impossible to list them all in a huge list. Even though all utopias are non-identical, the characteristics that construct such a utopia need to share some similarities, or, at least, some of them need to be the same.

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