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“NO LEISURE FROM PLEASURE”: ECONOMY, SPIRITUALITY AND THE PSYCHE IN HUXLEY’S BRAVE NEW WORLD

Kulcsszavak: Huxley; Szép új világ; ökonómia; spiritualitás

The starting point of the analysis is that the political system of the World State in Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World* (1932) is predicated on conversions between the State’s “national” economy and what we might call the economy of the psyche, as the consumerist pleasures that keep the economy afloat also significantly impact what we might call the economy of the individual psyche. In this world, the individual and collective organisation of pleasure are both parts of the same economic system, where “economic”, in the broadest sense, refers to the flow and transformation of energies. I use the term “economy of pleasure” to highlight the significant role pleasure plays in subeconomies of various kinds within the World State: centralised consumer economy, the economy of the psyche and the economy of life events, all of which are connected to erotic and pseudo-spiritual experience. Drawing primarily upon the theories of two of Huxley’s contemporaries, Austrian psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud, and French philosopher and intellectual Georges Bataille, I shall argue that the fundamental absence of genuine spirituality in the World State is the inevitable corollary of the restricted nature of its economy of pleasure. Extended to the collective level, Freud’s theory of the economy of mental processes—which proposes that the ultimate purpose of all psychic activity is the maintenance of stability—can provide us with a new way of looking at the way the World State achieves social stability. Bataille’s theory, in turn, is relevant in exploring the absence of spirituality in the World State since it focuses on precisely those spiritual elements which are absent from the State’s perspective on life—spirituality both as a personally felt and social experience, as the working of the State is predicated on the exclusion of any sense of the transcendental, anything that is truly “beyond”, truly different, and unreachable. In economic terms, the rigidity of the World State’s system could not accommodate a broader, less traditional definition of economy without destabilising its equilibrium.