

City of Cats & Anti-Utopia: A Generic Investigation

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A generic investigation along the line of utopia seems an impossible task. "The law of genre," according to Derrida, exemplifies "a principle of contamination, a law of impurity."¹ In the sphere of utopian literature especially, critics more often than not are content with the existence of terminological confusion. Not only is utopia equated with every exemplification of the ideal society, there is also scanty effort at distinguishing utopia from anti-utopia or dystopia.² Rabkin, for example, says that "the genre of utopias contains both utopias and dystopias. This is a slight terminological confusion, but one so well established in genre criticism that it is difficult to overcome it" (140). The matter is further complicated by the view, notably held by Robert Elliott, that "satire and utopia are not really separable" (24). Elliott's mere distinction of utopia and satire as varying in the proportion of positive and negative elements (22) may have been a factor behind uncritical equation of satire and anti-utopia. Yet anti-utopia, as a parodic genre, has its own generic traits and should be distinguished from satire in general. This paper means to tackle the parodic features of anti-utopia and highlights its participation in the realm of meta-fiction. A comparative study of Lao She's *City of Cats* (Mao Ch'eng Chi 貓城記) and classic anti-utopias like *We, 1984*, and *Brave New World* will be conducted as a test case. Throughout, it is the author's conviction that *City of Cats* is not entitled to being called an anti-utopia.

I

It is certainly not deniable that utopia and satire "are linked in a complex network of generic, historical, and formal relationship." (Elliott *The Shape of Utopia* 3) Both of them, to begin with, are the legitimate

offspring of the festival known as Saturnalia, a period of license in December commemorating the merry reign of the Roman God Saturn, a fabled Golden Age. Take, for example, the following account from Sir James Frazer about Saturnalia:

But no feature of the festival is more remarkable, nothing in it seems to have struck the ancients themselves more than the license granted to slaves at this time. The slaves might rail at his master, intoxicate himself like his betters, sit down at table with them, and not even a word of reproof would be administered to him. Nay, more, masters actually changed places with their slaves and waited on them at table. So far was this *inversion of ranks* carried, that each household became for a time *a mimic republic* in which the high offices of state were discharged by the slaves, who gave their orders and laid down the law as if they were indeed invested with all the dignity of the consulship, the praetorship, and the bench. Like the pale reflection of power thus accorded to bondsmen at the Saturnalia was the *mock kingship* for which freemen cast lots at the same season. The person on whom the lot fell enjoyed the title of king, and issued commands of a playful and ludicrous nature to his temporary subject. (642) (Emphasis added)

This is supposedly a representation of the socio-political structure in a Golden Age, in which one can detect, in a rudimentary way, the orientation toward socio-political issues in utopian writings. Frazer's account, nevertheless, also indicates the lineage of satire mainly through the distance between appearance and reality. For all the inversion of ranks carried to the extreme, the republic is, after all, only a "mimic" one, and the kingship assumed by freemen is simply a "mock kingship," hence a "pale reflection of power." Underneath the superficial merry-making, there can thus be detected a poignant awareness of the impossibility of any such reversal in the real world,³ and the element of ritual mockery eventually gives rise to satire.

It is, perhaps, based on this awareness of the generic ties between utopia and satire that Northrop Frye, in his theoretical discussion of genres, should regard utopia as a particular branch of Menippean satire, or what he prefers to call "anatomy," which, in order to distinguish it from other expressions of prose fiction, namely, novel, romance, and confession, is extrovert and intellectual (303-14). Frye distinguishes between satire as an attitude and

as a form:

As the name of an attitude, satire is, we have seen, a combination of fantasy and morality. But as the name of a form, the term satire, though confined to literature (for as a *Mythos* it may appear in any art, a cartoon, for example), is more flexible, and can be either entirely fantastic or entirely moral. The Menippean adventure story may thus be pure fantasy, as it is in the literary fairy tale. The Alice books are perfect Menippean satires, and so is *The Water-Babies*, which has been influenced by Rabelais. The purely moral type is a serious vision of society as a single intellectual pattern, in other words a Utopia. (310)

Utopia, then, according to Frye, is, formalistically, a purely moral type of satire. Frye is even of the opinion that the prevalence in utopia of dialogue form and the digressions are but "scholarly distillations of Menippean forms" (310-11). The genre of Menippean satire, then, is broad enough to include works such as *Gulliver's Travels*, *Candide*, *Erewhon*, and *Brave New World*, and utopia is envisioned as but one branch of it.

Yet all these assertions at homologies leave much to be desired, and some critics' attempts at distinguishing utopia from satire are equally deficient. Darko Suvin, for example, viewing utopia as dominated by positive elements and satire negative, designates utopia as a "possible impossible" and satire as an "impossible possible" (43). By extension this kind of definition would be in danger of equating satire with anti-utopia, and it is the aim of this paper to attempt a necessary distinction between the two.

II

A study of the etymology of "dystopia" would confirm our view with regard to the preposterousness in identifying anti-utopia or dystopia with satire. In the February 1983 issue of *Notes and Queries* there is an interesting entry about "dystopia":

The word *dystopia* is not entered in *OED* or in the *Supplement* of 1933; it emerges in the *Supplement* of 1972, with an entry showing the earliest usage in 1952, and John Stuart Mill's related term *dystopian* in 1868. *Dystopia* was however used, though

not printed as an English word, in 1782. Baptist Noel Turner (1739-1826) was staunch Tory and churchman, as well as writer, critic, and lover of word-play. Referring to Soame Jenyns's suggestion that irreligious men could be good citizens, or even valuable politicians, Turner comments:

This age has already produced a theoretic monster in the position, that a king may be a good king, though a bad man, and devoid of religious principles. Suppose then we were to accommodate such a *good* irreligious, unprincipled king, with a set of your equally *good* irreligious, unprincipled subjects, since, by supposition, there would be no real faith, honor, honesty, or public spirit on either side, this would doubtless give rise to a most enchanting *dus-topia*

Although Turner draws attention to the etymology of the word by printing the prefix in Greek letters, he uses *dystopia* with almost exactly the sense re coined in the twentieth century. (Köster 65-66)

The target of dystopia is then, from the start, utopia itself. If More in *Utopia* portrays a pagan world full of felicity of every kind, here Turner already highlights its infeasibility by pointing out the incongruity of a world not adhering to the teachings of the Christian church. By implication dystopia discredits the values upheld by utopia, and would superimpose its own value system upon that of utopia. Inherent in anti-utopian literature in general, in fact, is the simultaneous presence of two codes or voices, and it is the interplay of the two that specifically invites the interpretation of anti-utopia as a parodic genre, a feature belonging exclusively to anti-utopia and foreign to satire. As Margaret A Rose rightly comments in her study of parody: "The parody may be said to contain at least two (connected) models of communication — that between parodist and the author of the parodied text, and that between parodist and reader. In brief, the work to be parodied is decoded by the parodist and offered again (encoded) in a 'distorted' form to another decoder, the reader, who — knowing and having previously decoded the original — is in a position to compare it to this new form in the parody" (26).

Parody may well be one of the characteristics of modern fiction,⁴ and it is interesting to note that by now literary utopia is all but extinct,⁵

and that, according to Gary Saul Morson, "utopia is especially vulnerable to parody" (120). Morson suggests two reasons for this vulnerability of utopia:

First, utopia frequently incorporates other genres that are themselves vulnerable; for example, romance, pastoral, catechism, and sermon. . . . Second, and more important, utopia's basic presuppositions and explicit ideologies are radically anti-historical — which is, indeed, one reason that it does draw on other genres that are distant from history. Designed in accordance with what they represent as the unchanging essence of human nature, utopias claim to be, like their ideal of justice itself, timeless. (120)

It is thus far from being accidental that anti-utopia should be prevalent in the modern era. An examination of its generic features leads to the conclusion that, as a parodic genre, anti-utopia exemplifies the following three criteria posed by Morson for parody:

- (1) It must evoke or indicate another utterance . . . as its "target," "object," or the "original utterance";
- (2) it must be, in some respect, antithetical to its target; and
- (3) the fact that it is intended by its author to have higher semantic authority than the original must be clear. (110)

In citing utopia as its target genre, anti-utopia is drastically different from satire in general. This "folding-in" or incorporation of a target genre is completely absent in satire which, as a "single-voiced" entity, does not exemplify any parodic features but merely aims at the unravelling of social evils. Satire does not question the assumptions of utopia; rather, its highest expectation would be the achievement of a utopia.

To further tackle the delicate relationship between utopia, satire, and anti-utopia, one may probe into some issues alike treated by the three, though in different ways, as a test case. The treatment of disease, the arch human evil, for example, is being cast in a positive vision in More's *Utopia*:

the sick are carefully tended, and nothing is neglected in the way of medicine or diet which might cure them. Everything is done to mitigate the pain of those who are suffering from

incurable diseases; and visitors do their best to console them by sitting and talking with them. (65)

Health, therefore, is regarded as having supreme value:

The second kind of bodily pleasure they describe as nothing but the calm and harmonious state of the body, its state of health when undisturbed by any disorder. Health itself, when undisturbed by pain, gives pleasure, without any external excitement at all. (59)

In Samuel Butler's *Erewhon*, though, we are faced with negative caricature with regard to the sick. In the chapter entitled "Some Erewhonian Trials," we have the public trial of a young man who was accused of pulmonary consumption! The judge announces his verdict in the following manner:

Prisoner at the bar, you have been accused of the great crime of labouring under pulmonary consumption, and you have been found guilty. . . . It pains me much to see one who is so young, and whose prospects in life were otherwise so excellent, brought to this distressing condition by a constitution which I can only regard as radically vicious; but yours is no case for compassion; this is not your first offence; you have led a career of crime, and have only profited by the leniency shown you upon past occasions, to offend yet more seriously against the laws and institutions of your country. (115)

This is nothing but ludicrousness at its most, and indeed the narrator is fully aware of this when, at the beginning of his account, he says, "but I shall perhaps best convey to the reader an idea of the entire *perversion of thought* which exists among this *extraordinary* people, by describing the public trial of a man who was accused of pulmonary consumption – an offence which was punished with death until quite recently" (113-14). Our perspective is justified by Frye: "Satire demands at least a token fantasy, a content which the reader recognizes as grotesque, and at best an implicit moral standard, the latter being essential in a militant attitude to experience" (224). Here we should be alert to the fact that, underneath the superficial sense of incongruity, the implicit moral standard in *Erewhon* is one with what is being explicitly portrayed in *Utopia*. In other words,

Erewhon does not question the assumptions of *Utopia* at all. It is man's lack of sympathy toward the sick that is the target of satire. To envision *Erewhon* as an anti-utopia would indeed be an impossibility.

In his portrayal of the issue of disease, though, Huxley in *Brave New World* underlines his fear of utopia. If the satire in *Erewhon* points to evils inherent in the contemporary society, in *Brave New World* the one that is the target of attack is nothing but the idea of utopia itself. It even seems that Huxley, in his horror at the advent of utopia, would rather embrace everything that is in the present "imperfect" society. The motto from the Russian philosopher Nicolas Berdiaeff at the very beginning of the book already indicates where Huxley's allegiance lies:

Les utopies apparaissent comme bien plus réalisables qu'on ne le croyait autrefois. Et nous nous trouvons actuellement devant une question bien autrement angoissante: Comment éviter leur réalisation définitive? . . . Les utopies sont réalisables. La vie marche vers les utopies. Et peut-être un siècle nouveau commence-t-il, un siècle où les intellectuels et la classe cultivée rêveront aux moyens d'éviter les utopies et de retrouver à une société non utopique, moins 'parfaite' et plus libre.

The confrontation between the Savage and Mustapha Mond, the Resident World Controller for Western Europe, dramatizes how the Savage, in rejecting the assumptions of *Utopia*, would rather embrace every human evil — including disease:

'But I like the inconveniences.'

'We don't,' said the Controller. 'We prefer to do things comfortably.'

'But I don't want comfort. I want God, I want poetry, I want real danger, I want freedom, I want goodness, I want sin.'

'In fact,' said Mustapha Mond, 'you're claiming the right to be unhappy.'

'Not to mention the right to grow old and ugly and impotent; the right to have syphilis and cancer; the right to have too little to eat; the right to be lousy; the right to live in constant apprehension of what may happen tomorrow; the right to catch typhoid; the right to be tortured by unspeakable pains of every kind.'

There was a silence.

'I claim them all,' said the Savage at last.

Mustapha Mond shrugged his shoulders. 'You're welcome,' he said. (187)

For the Savage, then, the aversion to physical disease on the part of the men in the new world is horrible beyond description, and physical disease to him is but a welcome phenomenon. To be morally healthful, it seems, one cannot but shun that utopia. The elements here, in directing their attack upon the assumptions of utopia itself, clearly take on "the self-destructive tone of parody" (Ketterer 80), and "the discontinuance of the semantic and metaphoric logic of the original context" (Rose 45) guarantees *Brave New World* as an anti-utopia.

It is at this point that Lao She's *City of Cats* invites suspicion whether it is entitled to being called a Chinese anti-utopia. *City of Cats*, to begin with, exemplifies acute aversion to physical sickness. The standard it upholds is not unlike that of, say, *Erewhon*. It is the Chinese inability to cope with social evils in their contemporary society that is the target of attack. In a suggestive passage indicative of the cataclysmic possibilities inherent in the society, the narrator portrays the City of Cats as deteriorating through the prevalence of disease:

Many questions inevitably occur to me: Why after their boisterous activities of every sort in the daytime, they should all hide themselves in the evening? Is this an indication of social disorder? They all bury themselves in these houses, in which there are no ventilation and light but only flies, dirt, filth. Is this life? A house with its doors and windows shut? Ah, the fear of robbery! To sacrifice sanitary considerations for the sake of safety, diseases will steal away their life from inside! Again I see the enormous finger of destruction, and suddenly I feel I am quivering a little. If there are epidemics like cholera and scarlet fever, this city will be bereft of all its inhabitants in a week!

In face of the impending disaster through both interior deterioration and foreign invasion, the narrator eventually can only aspire to a beatific vision of a future new City of Cats:

I could sleep no more, and deep in my mind there arose many colorful pictures: the City of Cats were reconstructed and became garden-like. There were music, sculpture, studying, flowers, birds, order, cleanness, beauty. . . . (72)

Although this bright vision turns out to be a mere dream, the author's endorsement of the assumptions of utopia is not suspect at all. The vision is indeed what is being realized by works like *Utopia* and Bellamy's *Looking Backward*. The City of Cats is portrayed with the mere intention of exposing contemporary social evils in young China and the ensuing disaster. Faced with the tumoils in contemporary socio-political situations, the author still bravely sticks to a beautiful dream of a future utopian society. The holocaust at the end of the book is but inadequate in aligning the work to anti-utopia.

The issue of the "garden" is also eloquent in distinguishing anti-utopia from satire in general. "Every garden image," as Gail Finney suggests, "can be seen as existing along a continuum between nature and art or culture and as tending toward one or the other of these extremes" (21). This distinction, incidentally, is also what applies to garden images in anti-utopia and satire. Anti-utopia tends to repudiate man-made gardens and, instead, embraces the wilderness as a natural garden, as rather something desirable. Anti-utopia, therefore, parodies utopian gardens and indeed, through deroulement of the "orthodox" laws inherent in utopian gardens, subverts the assumptions of utopia and lays bare the shocking deficiency of utopia. If Lao She, in his utopian aspirations, envisions a garden-like city in the future, Yevgeny Zamyatin questions the validity of this assumption in *We* and offers a radical redefinition of the "garden." To him and other anti-utopian writers, the most cherished garden is not something artificial but can only be found in the "green" world beyond "the thick, cloudy glass of the Wall." (Zamyatin 154) The following passages from *We* are typical of anti-utopia in general with regard to the ideal image of the garden:

The sun . . . this was not our sun, evenly diffused over the mirror smooth surface of our pavements. There were living fragments, continually shifting spots, which dazed the eyes and made the head reel. And the trees, like candles – rising up into the sky itself, like spiders crouching on the earth with gnarled paws; like mute green fountains. . . . And everything

was crawling, stirring, rustling. . . . Some shaggy little ball dashed out from underfoot. And I was frozen to the spot, I could not make a step, because under my feet was not a level surface — you understand — not a firm, level surface, but something revoltingly soft, yielding, springy, green, alive. (154-55)

“But you did not know — few knew — that a small remnant still survived, remained there, outside the Wall. Naked, they withdrew into the woods. They learned how to live from trees, from animals and birds, from flowers and the sun. They have grown a coat of fur, but under the fur they have preserved their hot, red blood. With you it’s worse: you’re overgrown with figures; figures crawl all over you like lice. You should be stripped of everything and driven naked into the woods. To learn to tremble with fear, with joy, with wild rage, with cold, to pray to fire. (164)

Drawing on traditional hierarchical oppositions like smoothness/roughness, stillness/vivacity, clothing/nudity, human/animal, reason/emotion, etc. in the depiction of the garden, Zamyatin obviously feels that the attribution of a higher semantic value to the first item of each pair is inadequate. In a spirit endorsing the deconstructionist practice, Zamyatin, and anti-utopian writers in general, attempts to reverse the hierarchy and induce a displacement of the utopian system. To reach this goal, though, they have to work from within the system; the target genre is what cannot be dispensed with. Just as Jonathan Culler says, “The practitioner of deconstruction works within the terms of the system but in order to breach it” (86). To breach the ideal of the utopian garden means the triumph of anti-utopia. Satire, on the other hand, does not try to displace the utopian garden at all. It is, rather, the ineptitude of the contemporary society to live up to the standard of the utopian garden that is the core of the grudge. Lao She, for example, never questions the validity of his garden-like city. He would be very happy if the City of Cats indeed turns out to be a man-made garden full of modern felicity of every kind.

The subversion of the culture/nature hierarchy on the part of anti-utopian writers can be further detected in a symbolic code (Barthes 18-20), the antithesis Happiness vs. Freedom, which may well be an obsession of every anti-utopia. Indeed what is paradise? Should man prize happiness over freedom and as a result sacrifice his own individuality? Every utopian scheme, it seems, is totalitarian and hierarchical, and it never questions

the validity of the happiness thus won. The following passage from *City of Cats* reveals Lao She's allegiance to the utopian ideology:

"Tell me, what is *Everyvsky*?" It seems that I am enchanted.

"It means everybody lives for everybody else," Scorpion junior says while chewing the enchanting leaves. "Under this political principle, everybody works, everybody is happy, and everybody is safe. The society is a grand machine, everybody is part of this machine, and everybody works happily and safely like a tiny nail or small gear. It's not bad indeed!" (136)

The retort on the part of anti-utopia against this ideology can best be seen in an ironic passage from *We*:

"... that ancient legend about paradise... Why, it's about us, about today. Yes! Just think. Those two, in paradise, were given a choice: happiness without freedom, or freedom without happiness. There was no third alternative. Those idiots chose freedom, and what came of it? Of course, for ages afterward they longed for the chains. The chains — you understand? That's what world sorrow was about. For ages! And only we have found the way of restoring happiness... Yes! We have helped God ultimately to conquer the devil — for it was he who had tempted men to break the ban and got a taste of ruinous freedom, he, the evil serpent... Now everything is fine — we have paradise again. Again we are as innocent and simple-hearted as Adam and Eve. No more of that confusion about good and evil. Everything is simple — heavenly, childishly simple. The Benefactor, the Machine, the Cube, the Gas Bell, the Guardians — all this is good, all this is sublime, magnificent, noble, elevated, crystallly pure. Because it protects our unfreedom — that is, our happiness. (62)

Here a perception of the incongruity of the assertions would help us "recognize the existence of two text-worlds" (Rose 27) at work which is at the very core of parody. And he is indeed a naive reader who cannot see that this whole passage is a distortion of the orthodox assumptions of utopia. In this intra-generic dialogue, the drive to achieve harmony and conformity is counterbalanced and eventually outweighed by the counterdrive to assert individuality. The poetic father is slayed. The anxiety of

influence,⁷ though, remains forever there and signals the parodic quality of anti-utopia.

III

The most conspicuous attribute of some anti-utopia, in contrast to satire, lies in the meta-fictional quality. As Rose comments in her study of meta-fictional parody: "In the mimicry of his own style the author provides a commentary to the essential features of his writing as well as to the nature of fiction as a creation — or 'product' — of the writer . . . the parodist shows himself to be concerned with limits of the fictional world and the related problem of the reception of texts by the reader" (101). Anti-utopia is an extremely self-conscious artwork. Its emphasis on design is, first of all, what distinguishes it from satire. In designating certain modern writers who lean toward meta-fiction in their use of fantasy as "fabulators," Robert Scholes in his *Fabulation and Metafiction* is illuminating in pinpointing the self-conscious feature of meta-fictions:

Delight in design, and its concurrent emphasis on the art of the designer, will serve in part to distinguish the art of the fabulator from the work of the novelist or the satirist. Of all narrative forms, fabulation puts the highest premium on art and joy. (3)

Without "self-consciousness," then, satire still endorses the theory of mimesis or the concept that art may truthfully mirror other worlds. Anti-utopia, in accord with the distrust of deconstructionists in the transparency of language,⁸ foregrounds the status of writing. It therefore, through various means, asserts its own self-referential nature, which indeed pinpoints its own metafictional quality and designating its participation in the realm of modern literature.

One may find some illuminating examples in *We*. The inclination to reflect upon its own medium may well be paramount in anti-utopia as a parodic genre. In *We*, for example, the narrator keeps referring to his own pen and work to the extent that his act of writing has become an obsession, or even a *raison d'être* for the narrator himself. In the very first entry of *We*, referring to the excitement and agony of writing, the narrator resorts to the images of pregnancy and child-birth:

I write this, and my cheeks are burning. This must be similar to what a woman feels when she first senses within herself the pulse of a new, still tiny, still blind little human being. It is I, and at the same time, not I. And for many months it will be necessary to nourish it with my own life, my own blood, then tear it painfully from myself and lay it at the feet of the One State. (2)

The very process of writing, furthermore, is "laid bare." The reader seems to be invited to envision the production of the work itself:

I wanted to cross out all this, because it is outside the outlined topic for this entry. Then I decided I would leave it. (22)

"You see, I'm still writing. Already 170 pages. . . . It's turning into something so unexpected. . . ." (111)

Quick, to the table. I opened my notes, picked up a pen. (166)

And the narrator is very much concerned with the outcome of his writing — that is, the book itself:

But then, if this world is mine alone, why does it go into these notes? Why record all these absurd "dreams," closets, endless corridors? I am saddened to see that, instead of a harmonious and strict mathematical poem in honor of the One State, I am producing some sort of a fantastic adventure novel. (102-03)

One interesting consequence of this self-reflexivity may well be, as Rose says, "the problem of ever completing the task of 'imitating' or 'catching up' (as Tristram Shandy says) with the 'self.'" (66) In the twenty-first entry of *We*, for example, the narrator can at best read to his friend "a fragment from my Twentieth Entry." (122) The illusion of utopia in encompassing a finished project within itself is therefore in direct contrast with dystopia in terms of the spirit exemplified. This adherence to the principle of indeterminacy on the part of anti-utopia, a direct comment on the "dogmatism" of utopia, may best be underscored by Culler's comment that "self-referentiality is the source of undecidability." (202)

An extension of the exaltation of the medium itself is the commitment

of the narrator to his own duty as a writer and his responsibility to the reader. "I repeat," the narrator of *We* says, "I have made it my duty to write without concealing anything." (24) One of the topics of the twenty-first entry is even termed "An Author's Duty." To the reader, as a result, he devoted himself with all his heart:

I am leaving — into the unknown. These are my last lines,
Good-by, beloved readers, with whom I've lived through so
many pages, to whom, having contracted the soul sickness,
I have exposed all of myself, to the last crushed little screw,
the last broken spring. . . . (195)

This commitment, though, is not in conflict with the emphasis on the "fictionality" of the work itself, which is another important feature of meta-fictions. As a rebuttal to the utopian "high seriousness" which often tends to be naive, anti-utopia often foregrounds its own fictionality, in which the element of "play" is paramount:

What if all of them are only my shadows? Was it not I who
populated with them all these pages — just recently no more
than white rectangular deserts? Without me, would they ever
be seen by those whom I shall lead behind me along the narrow
paths of lines? (*We* 119-20)

This "self-conscious" emphasis on its own "novelness," which Morson rightly indicates as "an important theme of some anti-utopian novels," (117) is so much articulated in *We* that the image of the novel keeps surging up. Here is a very typical example: "A human being is like a novel; until the last page you don't know how it will end. Or it wouldn't be worth reading. . . ." (162)

The articulation of the image of the novel further indicates another important feature of anti-utopia; namely, the assertion of the importance of literature. In an enlightening essay entitled "Literature and the Good Life: A Dilemma," Robert C. Elliott attributes the fear of utopia on the part of modern anti-utopian writers to "the alleged threat to art — particularly literature — posed by the good life." (24) And it is Morson's assertion, considering the divergence between utopia and anti-utopia, that "for many utopias . . . traditional literature is something to be overcome. For dystopias,

it is something to be regained." (141) Examples are numerous. In *We*, irony pervades passages like the following:

"Fortunately, the antediluvian ages of all those Shakespeares and Dostoevskys, or whatever you call them, are gone." (43)

We have tamed and harnessed the once wild element of poetry. Today, poetry is no longer the idle, impudent whistling of a nightingale; poetry is civic service, poetry is useful. (68)

In 1984, the portrayal of the Rewrite Squad and the Pornosec is indeed an aptest footnote to the comment by the Controller in *Brave New World*:

The Savage was silent for a while. 'All the same,' he insisted obstinately, 'Othello's good, Othello's better than those feelies.'

'Of course it is,' the Controller agreed. 'But that's the price we have to pay for stability. You've got to choose between happiness and what people used to call high art. We've sacrificed the high art. We have the feelies and the scent organ instead.' (173)

Here, again, the assertions that utopia is the target genre of anti-utopia and that anti-utopia is utopia parodied cannot be denied. The meta-fictional quality helps distinguish anti-utopia from satire, and it is in this aspect that once more *City of Cats* fails to meet the generic requirements of anti-utopia.

If, as has been shown, anti-utopia is both satirical and self-reflexive which highlights the element of "design," *City of Cats* is quite deficient in this aspect in that it is far from being self-conscious. The formula for "fabulation": fantasy + design, which characterizes anti-utopia, is only partially realized in *City of Cats*, whose use of mere fantasy pertains rather to the domain of satire, as both Frye and Scholes have already implied. C. T. Hsia in his appendix to *Modern Chinese Novels* has designated both *City of Cats* and *We* as works of fantasy (459-70); yet from our perspective it is the heterogeneity between the two that alerts us. The element of meta-fiction at once separates *City of Cats* from *We*. Throughout *City of Cats* does not reflect on its own medium at all. There is no reference to the act of writing, nor is there any obsession with the production of the fiction itself. Furthermore, endorsing the assumption of utopia and devoid of

the element of "play," *City of Cats* does not exemplify any belief in the "fictionality" of the work itself. There is, as may be inferred, no dilemma between literature and good life. It would seem that, in the quest for a utopia based on beliefs in democracy, science, progress, etc., the importance of literature is but relegated to the background.

This firm belief in the values of modern Western civilization, fully endorsing the spirit of utopian scheme, may account for the absence of anti-utopia in modern Chinese literature. Citing Lionel Trilling's view in "On the Modern Element in Modern Literature," that what characterizes modern writers is their antagonism toward Western civilization, C. T. Hsia is able to pinpoint the essential difference between modern Chinese writers and their Western counterparts (460-62). From this angle, perhaps one may conclude by saying that anti-utopia is the best representative of modern literature in the West?

Notes

1. Jacques Derrida, "The Law of Genre," *Glyph*, 7 (1980), p. 206. Cited by Jonathan Culler in *On Deconstruction*, p. 196.
2. Gary Saul Morson is of the opinion that dystopia is "a type of anti-utopia that discredits utopias by portraying the likely effect of their realization," while other anti-utopias simply "discredit the possibility of their realization or expose the folly and inadequacy of their proponents' assumptions or logic." (*Boundaries of Genre*, pp. 115-16.)
3. Eric Segal indicates that such festivals really reinforce the status quo by providing a temporary outlet for frustration (*Roman Laughter*, pp. 8-14).
4. Rose is of the opinion that "parody has . . . come itself to control norms of literary criticism, and to canonize concepts such as intertextuality, and discontinuity as characteristic of modern fiction." (185)
5. Elliott's comment in this regard is of interest: "To the degree that a literary artist helps bring about the condition of utopia, he contributes to the diminution of his art. For artists and lovers of art, it is a genuine dilemma — one that may account in part for the fact that although the search for utopia, for the good life, continues, literary utopia is all but dead." ("Literature and the Good Life: A Dilemma," p. 37).
6. Lao Shê, *Mao Ch'eng Chi* 貓城記 (*City of Cats*), p. 66. Translations of this text are all mine.
7. For detail see Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence*.
8. For detail see Culler, *On Deconstruction*, pp. 91-92.

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