Paradoxical Paradises:

The Poetic and Lived Utopias of James K. Baxter

and Gu Cheng

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A thesis submitted for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
University of Otago, Dunedin
New Zealand

January 2020
This thesis develops a framework for understanding modern utopianism as both a literary and life practice. The thesis advances and tests this framework through readings of the writings and lives of the New Zealand poet James K. Baxter and the Chinese poet Gu Cheng. Both established their alternative utopian communities in New Zealand, and both also delineated their poetic utopias in writing. The thesis examines Baxter’s widely known yet still contentious Jerusalem community and Gu’s notorious and controversial life on Waiheke Island, as well as examining the poems that depict their respective lived utopias. I argue that the poetry and the lives of these two poets are two equally significant components of their utopianism and that their heterodox ways of living and writing illustrate a form of modern utopianism that is both transcultural and paradoxical.

Both Baxter and Gu attempted to anchor their dream worlds in New Zealand, but each looked to other cultures for a cure for their immediate reality. Baxter attacked an individualistic and capitalist New Zealand society by drawing on what he saw as the collective spirit of Māori and Indian communities. Gu sought to escape what he viewed as the collective communist nightmare of China and gazed hopefully at New Zealand as a symbolic site of personal freedom. Their poetic imaginations and real-life practices mixed multiple cultures and traditions, including Chinese philosophy and European utopian thought, white settler utopianism, the Māori tradition, Marxism, communism, Maoism, and the rise of Western intentional communities in the late 1960s and 1970s. Seen in this light, the utopias they established can be understood as spaces of cultural encounter and exchange.
This study also identifies a contradiction between asserting and renouncing authority common to Baxter’s and Gu’s utopian practices and poetries. Both argued that self-negation was the prerequisite for their utopias, but their utopias were designed in such a way that their authority and power were left unchallenged. Baxter’s disavowal of his Pākehā identity and his advocacy of racial and gender equality were undermined by his actions, as is evident in his rape of his Māori wife and his alleged sexual assault of one of the female members of the Jerusalem community. Similarly, Gu’s disavowal of his masculine identity in his writing contrasts sharply with his murder of his wife and his alleged rape of Li Ying, whom he viewed as his second wife. Both Baxter’s and Gu’s utopias are thus marked by a brutal return to the dystopian reality that they sought to escape.

Baxter and Gu have generally been read within their national literatures. The framework of utopianism mapped out here through my comparative reading of the two poets enables an alternative understanding of each writer beyond these conventionally conceived national canons. The proposed framework also offers a new analytical perspective on world literature—a window on a key cultural response to the larger global forces that shaped mid-to-late twentieth-century modernity.
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I could never have completed this research project without the assistance, goodwill, and encouragement I have received from many people who supported me in various ways in the past three years. Chief among them are my two wonderful supervisors, Associate Professor Jacob Edmond and Dr Lorraine Wong. Throughout my doctoral journey, they have always been encouraging, compassionate, and conscientious. It was such a blessing to work on this thesis under their guidance, and I have benefited tremendously from their insights, skills and enthusiasm. I have been particularly inspired by the countless dynamic conversations in our regular supervisory meetings, their exacting and meticulous suggestions, feedbacks and editorial notes for my chapter drafts, and their profound knowledge of literature.

I wish to recognise those who offered me assistance and advice when I collected research materials for this thesis. My gratitude goes to Juliet Palmer, who kindly gave me access to the digital copies of the Gu Cheng video footages stored at Special Collections of the University of Auckland. Heartfelt thanks also go to John Baxter, who permitted me to examine restricted archival material of James K. Baxter at the Hocken Library. I am obliged to John Newton for meeting with me in person in Wellington and offering precious and practical suggestions for my field trip to Jerusalem/Hiruhārama. I am equally indebted to the Waiheke-based artist Denis O’Connor for assisting me in my visit to Waiheke Island and sharing with me his personal recollection of the time Gu Cheng and Xie Ye spent on the Island. I particularly want to recognise the help given by...
Associate Professor Nick Admussen and Dr Sharon Matthews, who generously shared with me their research works on Gu and Baxter respectively.

I am also grateful for the financial support offered by the University of Otago, notably the University of Otago Doctoral Scholarship and the PhD Conference Funding. I thank all the support given to me by the staff of the Department of English and the Department of Languages and Cultures. My particular appreciation also goes to the then Head of Department, Associate Professor Paola Voci, for granting me the opportunity to integrate some analysis of this thesis into my teaching of the translation course for the Chinese Programme. Special thanks go to my fellow PhD student Robyn Maree Pickens, who kindly took time out of her busy schedule to assist me in proofreading one of my chapters. I also want to express my gratitude to Dr Megan Kitching and Dr Lisa Marr for their assistance in proofreading the rest of my thesis. I also thank all my office friends for their friendly and insightful chance discussions with me, which often challenged me to refine my ideas.

I give thanks to God for surrounding me with all the lovely friends at the DCPC church in Dunedin, who sustained me daily with their prayers and generous help. I am especially grateful for Pastor Peter Liu and his wife, Rosemary Su, for their unstinting love and their selfless care for me through thick and thin. My heart is filled with thankfulness beyond words when I think of my mother, for her unconditional love and unwavering support for me to pursue my doctoral study abroad. Last but not least, I am infinitely thankful for my soulmate and husband Li Tang, who always believes in me and reassures me when I doubt myself. Without him, this thesis would not have reached completion. Here I would like to dedicate this thesis to him.
NOTES

I have provided the original texts in Chinese, including both poetry and prose, alongside translations throughout the thesis. Given attention to the ease of reading, I have adopted different citation styles for such texts. For characters and phrases, I have included the Chinese original in the text with pinyin given before the characters or phrases; for sentences, I have put the original in the footnotes; for paragraphs, I have presented them as an indented block within the main text, accompanying the translations. Unless otherwise noted, all translations in this thesis are my own.

I have used macrons in te reo (Māori) as markers for long vowels in my analysis. However, for direct quotes that lack macrons, I have transcribed them as is without adding the macrons. A Māori word or phrase, when appearing for the first time in the text, is italicised unless it is a commonly received proper noun such as names of places or people. Again, the direct quotations in this regard are an exception.
INTRODUCTION

Must redefine utopia. It isn’t the perfect end-product of our wishes, define it so and it deserves the scorn of those who sneer when they hear the word. No. Utopia is the process of making a better world, the name for one path history can take, a dynamic, tumultuous, agonizing process, with no end.

—KIM STANLEY ROBINSON, Pacific Edge: Three Californias

Only thinking directed towards changing the world and informing the desire to change it does not confront the future (the unclosed space for new development in front of us) as embarrassment and the past as spell.

—ERNST BLOCH, The Principle of Hope

Consciousness is only possible through change; change is only possible through movement.

—ALDOUS HUXLEY, The Art of Seeing

My thesis is a comparative study of the poetic and lived utopias established by New Zealand poet James K. Baxter (1926–1972) and Chinese poet Gu Cheng (1956–1993) in New Zealand. Both writers presented utopian visions—in poetry, prose, correspondence and other writings—of a better form of existence in response to a haunting past and a disenchanting present. Literary utopias opened up a space of freedom for them to theoretically construct an alternative way of living that challenged the status quo. Baxter and Gu both chose to establish utopian communities in New Zealand. Disillusioned by capitalism and its materialistic promises, Baxter first established two urban intentional communities in major New Zealand cities, No. 7 Boyle Crescent in Auckland and 26 MacDonald Crescent in Wellington (W. H. Oliver 1994, 125–28, 142–44). These
communities were part of his mission to make “the emotional climate of the country one per cent [warmer]” (Baxter 2015c, 3:21). Although neither of these communities endured, Baxter drew on the experience to formulate the pièce de résistance of his countercultural utopian vision: his Jerusalem community, which combined the Roman Catholic faith with Māori communal and spiritual values (W. H. Oliver 1994, 130–32). In 1968, Baxter was purportedly led by a revelation dream to Jerusalem (Māori name: Hiruhārama) (2015d, 4:362–63), a small North Island Māori settlement on the Whanganui River that has a rich Roman Catholic history—the perfect test site for his bicultural community experiment. Twenty years later, in 1988, Gu Cheng’s pursuit of individuality and personal freedom led him to depart from his home city Beijing for Auckland (C. Gu 2005f). In less than a year, he left Auckland to pursue his utopian dream on Waiheke Island in the Hauraki Gulf where he practised a radical and experimental form of living (C. Gu and Li Zi 2005). Both writers engaged settler imaginings of New Zealand and drew on multiple cultures and different utopian traditions, including traditional Chinese and European literature and thought, white settler utopianism, the Māori tradition, Marxism, Communism, Maoism, and the rise of Western intentional communities in the late 1960s and 1970s. This convergence makes their utopias products of transculturation. Understanding their literary and lived utopias requires a correspondingly comparative and cross-cultural approach.

Employing both writing and living, Baxter and Gu are united by their common response to the spatial and temporal tensions of utopianism and their shared failure in exempting themselves and their utopias from the paradoxes of authorial sovereignty. Although both invited the readers of their literary utopias to build their own worlds of imagination, both insisted on authorial sovereignty—on the power to author poetic works through the act of writing—and they both crowned the poet as the creator of the literary universe. This contrast creates a specific problem for Baxter and Gu, who claimed to give up authority and yet ended up reasserting their power. Both adopted the principle of self-fashioning combined with self-denial. Baxter transformed himself into a barefooted, lice-infested hippie-prophet (see figure 1) who celebrated voluntary poverty (in both the financial and the philosophical sense) and attempted to abandon the English language, seeing it as an embodiment of the colonising ideology. Instead, he sought to embrace aroha (a Māori word often translated as “love”), through which he sought to transcend his limited sense of subjective, familial, and racial identity. Gu, on the other hand, embraced a peculiar look and became known as the mysterious hat-poet (see figure 2), because of his habit of wearing a strikingly idiosyncratic headpiece.
Presenting himself as the prophet of beauty and the poet of truth, he reviled his gender, praising the purity of so-called “maidenhood” (“女儿性”) (C. Gu and Gálik 2005, 86). The lives of Baxter and Gu, however, belie their utopian dreams. Infested by paradoxes and contradictions, their lived utopias became, for some participants, sites of nightmare and bloodshed. The horrific contradictions of their utopianism were especially pronounced in the two poets’ treatment of women, as is underscored by the recent revelations of Baxter’s marital rape of his Māori wife Jacqueline Cecilia Sturm (Baxter 2019a, 619–20), and his alleged sexual assault of a former female member of Jerusalem Ros Lewis (Lewis 2019), and by Gu’s murder of his wife Xie Ye (Department of Justice 1994), and the alleged rape of his lover and muse Li Ying during her stay on Waiheke Island (Mai Qi 1995, 152).

Figure 1. Baxter in Hamilton (1971).

My thesis argues that a true understanding of the dynamics and paradoxes of modern utopianism, of which Baxter and Gu offer two painfully vivid examples, can come only in a dynamic relational way. The comparative utopian framework I propose in this thesis involves cross-cultural comparison, a re-consideration of both writers’ poetic works and lived utopian practices and a recognition of the inherent tensions and contradictions within the utopian form. Such tensions and contradictions are particularly visible in New Zealand’s association with utopia and the dystopian realities and contradictions found in the two poets’ works and lives.

Figure 2. Gu in Germany (1992).

I will trace the birth and the death of their utopias by firstly examining their impulse to solve the spatial and temporal tensions in utopianism and then unravelling the intertwined contradictions revolving around the inherent paradox of espousing both readerly freedom and poetic authority. Baxter and Gu sought to diminish their sovereignty and to involve other participants in co-creating their utopias and realizing these utopias’ multiple possibilities. But the very existence and functioning of the utopias relied precisely on the sovereignty that they attacked: unless the co-builders of their dream worlds were willingly subsumed into the same utopian logic, the utopias collapsed with their poet-creators. I argue that, while utopia’s coalescence of historical, present, and future temporalities is enabled by willing self-denial or the voluntary eclipsing of subjectivity, tensions arise from the simultaneous desire of the individual to contest and seize control of the collective utopia. The result in the cases of Baxter and Gu was a self-serving transformation of utopian spaces of myriad possibility into executions or extensions of subjective imagination.

Comparative utopias: a method of reading
In this section, I propose a new method of reading that evaluates both the lived and the poetic utopias of the two poets. The utopias of Baxter and Gu straddled two worlds. This bilateral relationship calls for a comprehensive reading strategy that is different from existing approaches to reading literary utopias, whose visions generally stay on the page, or from existing understandings of intentional communities, whose impact is rarely considered from a literary perspective. By bringing together these two worlds, I aim to avoid two common methodological errors. The first kind is a methodological problem that subordinates one world to the other, either explicitly deeming one world a mere (if not perfect) extension of the other or implying a cause-and-effect relationship between them. It is a common scholarly tendency to argue that utopianists’ writings are extended into their lives and thus to treat their lives as a secondary, biographical footnote to a (mythically) more encompassing and systematic text. Scholars adopting this approach conveniently forget that once a utopian idea hits reality, to a certain extent it starts its own life with a different trajectory that is no longer under the total control of its initiator. After all, even if the utopian life is, in essence, a different kind of text, it deserves the same level of respect enjoyed by the writings. The common reader, on the contrary, seems more attracted to the easily decipherable examples of lived utopias, treating the writings as supplementary postscripts, at best, to an already completed
story. This second approach is also biased and selective in that it focuses on one world and comfortably downplays or dismisses the other. I do admit, though, that these erroneous reading strategies serve a purpose. It is no easy task to form a coherent vision of both sides. It is far easier to identify patterns and draw conclusions when critical attention is directed to only one aspect of the writers’ utopianism. Yet such conclusions tend to be oversimplified because they avoid dealing with all the baffling conflicts between the literary and lived utopianism of Baxter and Gu.

We can readily observe these two simplifying tendencies in the scholarly research on and popular readings of Gu, whose fame and notoriety are enhanced every time the media discovers a new anecdote to add to the already grotesquely sensationalist tale of his life. Gu’s life overseas with the two women he viewed as his two wives (C. Gu and Lei Mi 1995, i), Xie Ye and Li Ying, his tragic and horrific murder of his legal wife, and his subsequent suicide all made his Waiheke story a public spectacle. As David Der-Wei Wang notes: “A spectacle developed, as if the death of the poet had temporarily revitalized a literary public demoralized by the Tian’anmen Incident and the burgeoning market economy” (2004, 253). In theory, his life and work should have intertwined so much that the two became almost inseparable in a discussion of either. In fact, one group of readers continued to mythologise Gu’s stereotyped designation as the “fairy-tale poet” (H. Zhang 2013, 152) as if his life and death were irrelevant; while others dismissed Gu’s writings as the literary diary of a madman that yielded little value other than consolidating the image of a deranged poet through the disclosure of an often violent and eerie poetic persona.

Instead of the aforementioned dichotomized and partial approaches, I propose a new method of reading expressed by the term “comparative utopias.” This term refers in part to how the two utopias, literary and lived, in both Baxter’s and Gu’s cases, mutually inspired, shaped, and even competed against each other. A comparative method is needed to perceive, in a comprehensive way, the interdependency, rivalry and complicity of their literary worlds and experimental projects and to understand the dynamics and exchanges of the two utopias. The term “comparative utopias” also refers to my comparative reading of the parallels, connections, differences and cross-overs that intertwine in the utopias of Baxter and Gu. Layers of comparison are fundamental in this method: as utopia itself is a comparison (reality versus imagination), so are the literary utopias and the lived utopias of Baxter and Gu, and so too are their utopianisms, and the global utopian movements that inspired these two poets. The models they proposed featured multicultural influences from different utopian traditions. The utopias
they established were, therefore, sites of transculturation, of cultural convergences, parallels and cross-overs that leave traces of intersecting movement. It is therefore only through a similar act of comparison that we can fully recognize the dynamics of their utopianism. With this comparative spirit, this thesis brings into dialogue current scholarship and theories on literary utopias, utopian ideologies, cultural traditions in utopianism, counterculture and commune movements, and transnational modernism. I bring these theories into conversation with current research on Baxter and Gu by comparing the two poets’ utopian visions and practices, and critically reflecting on their engagement with New Zealand’s utopian tradition and with the various utopian ideologies that shaped the second half of the twentieth century.

My method of reading utopias comparatively helps this thesis achieve two purposes. Firstly, it yields insights into the new form of modern utopianism and its movements through cultural encounters. Secondly, it challenges previous readings and understandings of Baxter and Gu within each national literary canon. Much has been published which discusses Baxter’s New Zealandness but there has been little inquiry into the possibility of reading him within a global framework. Is it possible, then, to peruse New Zealand’s “best known and most significant poet” (Doyle 1976, 19), whose “colourful life and distinctive poetry had captured the imagination of New Zealanders as no literary figure before him” (Millar 2010, xiii), without treating New Zealandness as an impenetrable entity within very defined national borders? In addition, could a cross-cultural, comparative investigation of Gu’s work and life beyond national borders (while recognizing his self-acclaimed Chineseness) bring forth a new understanding of the multiple cultures, literary traditions, and geographies with which he engaged? I argue that a reading of Baxter and Gu through a comparative utopian framework, where life and writing, localness and globality are no longer treated as binary opposites but rather interwoven elements, is the best strategy for understanding these two controversial poets. My thesis hopes to offer an expanded sense of each national literature by analysing the two poets’ utopian visions and practices and by articulating the link between them in a transnational, rather than a national, modern utopian framework. Through the juxtaposition of Baxter and Gu, my argument connects the two writers’ utopian experiences to show the different faces of modern utopianism. In addition, my comparative reading of the two poets enables a new understanding of each writer beyond the previously conceived national canons.

I refer to modern utopias in the plural for two reasons. Firstly, it is pertinent in the case of Baxter and Gu, who established utopias not only on the page but also in life.
I regard their utopias in text and life as related and interacting utopian dreams with slightly different shapes. My use of the plural form thus problematises reducing the lived utopia to an extension of the textual ideal or deeming the established real-life utopia of greater importance than the textual utopia. Secondly, I believe that utopianism should not be viewed as a single embodiment of homogenous elements. It instead points towards multiple forms, directions, and versions. A reading of Baxter and Gu through my comparative utopian framework adds to our understanding of the many faces of modern utopianism.

**Utopias revisited: temporal and spatial tensions**

To understand the many faces of modern utopias, we first need to grasp the multiple cross-cultural meanings of the term within various traditions. As criticisms of present-day human reality, utopias direct their analytical power towards reality’s two fundamental components: the “here” (space) and the “now” (temporality). Blessed and cursed, according to More’s homophonic coinage, the spatial dimension of utopia has a playfully ironic and ambiguous nature: it is simultaneously a no-place (οὐτόπος) and a good-place (εὖτόπος). This spatial tension is a contested and fascinating characteristic of utopia. The popular understanding (or misunderstanding) of the concept dismisses utopia, precisely because of its desirable nature, as a synonym of impracticability, a mere symbol of abstract optimism, or a form of social dreaming that is necessarily unattainable. In line with this view is the most widely used Chinese translation of the term *Wu tuo bang* 乌托邦. *Wu* 乌 conjures up a pessimistic response as it suggests wuyou 乌有 (non-existent). *Tuo* 托 implies “entrust” (寄托) or “rely on” (依托). *Bang* 邦, in the Chinese language, could either mean “state” (a political concept that refers in ancient China to a unit of land measurement larger than a country, similar to a polis in the ancient Greek context) or “nation” (a cultural concept that joins a group of people of shared cultural beliefs, customs, or origins).\(^1\) By combining the three characters, we could say that the term means “a state/nation that does not exist” or “a state/nation that cannot be relied on,” suggesting either a forthright denial of its existence without any semantic connotation of being perfect, preferable, or pleasing, or an implied:

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\(^1\) For a cross-referential interpretation of this three-character compound noun, see “Translating and Transforming Utopia into the Mandarin Context: Case Studies from China and Taiwan” (Liu 2016, 333–45). Although I agree with Liu’s interpretation of the second character (2016, 335), I offer here a different analysis of “乌” and “邦” and problematise Liu’s argument about the duality in the term’s meaning.
disparagement of its value. This Chinese word forms a sharp contrast to the Morean coinage’s ambiguous double meaning. After all, More replaced the original name of his ideal island, Nusquama, with the term utopia, and the former is the Latin word for “nowhere” (Vieira 2010, 6). Had he insisted on the use of Nusquama, his book would become a plain mockery of perfection’s attainability. More’s lexical preference might be an expression of his ambition to create something new: a promise of, and at the same time, an attitude towards, a better future, advocating its achievability through human capacity while simultaneously leaving unsolved the problem that such goal may not be obtainable.

The spatial tension at the heart of More’s utopia, “the affirmation of a possibility and the negation of its fulfilment” (Vieira 2010, 6), is probably more closely echoed by the Chinese four-character idiom shiwai taoyuan 世外桃源, which derives from the canonical Chinese fable Taohuayuan ji 桃花源记 (The Peach Blossom Spring), a literary text with notable utopian features, which narrates the experience of a fisherman who accidentally discovers a hidden utopia of peace, harmony and equality through a cave under a mountain but fails to access it again once he has left it (Tao 2000, 124). Whereas taoyuan 桃源 refers to the kind of hidden land of peace and prosperity depicted in The Peach Blossom Spring, shiwai 世外, which means “outside the world,” implies an alterity that is both spatial and philosophical. It could point either to a geographical or spatial separation from the physical world which humans inhabit or to a philosophical transcendence of mortality. The Chinese view of the world, as rendered in the term shijie 世界 (which literally means the world and its boundaries) originates from Buddhism, whose cosmology suggests that the world formed around its centre Mount Meru (Duncan 2004, 43). It should be noted that the transcendence of the world in the Buddhist view is, in nature, not only spatial but also temporal, as one who rises above the world is also freed from the bondage of time. However, the affirmation of the dreamland present in the idiom shiwai taoyuan 世外桃源 is limited and challenged by the fact that it lies outside the reach of our realm, making human contact almost impossible. As a result, both utopia and shiwai taoyuan conform to a persistent tension in utopian studies: could the proposed ideal place be localisable in the real world within a specific spatial context? In other words, is it possible to anchor the unlocated free-floating dream in a particular locale without surrendering its universal appeal?

One way that utopianists have sought to answer this question is by moving the question from the spatial to the temporal, which is especially evident in the
development of the genre of science fiction. There was, Fredric Jameson argues, a
“well-known shift in Utopias from space to time, from the accounts of exotic travellers
to the experiences of visitors to the future” (2005, 1–2). In total, there are three common
types of temporalities in utopias: nostalgic, future-oriented, and a reconfigured
conflation of the past, the present and the future. Therefore, the concept of utopia
suggests “an ideal present, an ideal past and an ideal future, and the relation between the
three” (Claeys 2011, 7). Nostalgic utopias lament the passing of a perfect yet lost time,
be it mythical such as the Greek Golden Age or the Land of Cockaigne; religious, for
example the Biblical Eden or the Taoist dongtian fudi 洞天福地 (Nature Sanctuaries);
or political, as exemplified by Confucius’ reminiscences of the Zhou Dynasty, or the
celebration of the Elizabethan era in English literature. The prevalence of utopias that
look backward leads to the assertion by Löwy and Sayre that “[w]ithout nostalgia for
the past there can exist no authentic dream of the future. In this sense, utopia will be
romantic or it will not be at all” (1992, 303).²

By contrast, the utopian imagination in modern literature, especially in science
fiction, gazes hopefully at a new, exciting future enabled by the advancement of
technology or the introduction of extra-terrestrial intelligence. Such technological
progress and alien intelligence often cause a rupture between the past and the future, or
between the present and the future. Whereas nostalgic utopias are prone to romanticise
the past, repeating the cliché of the “good old days,” utopias of futurity, as featured in
Edward Bellamy’s Looking Backward, build themselves on the potential of modern
technology and are therefore often excused from an obligation to convince the readers
of their attainability.

The third kind of utopia, however, straddles the three components of temporality
and intertwines with the spatial tension. Fredric Jameson redefines the utopian
imagination as a rather fragmented conflation of historical time, existential experience,
and interrogations of the future (2005, 7). He also notes that the conflation of these three
temporalities necessarily involves a clash between individual time (subjective
experience) and collective time (history in its ontological sense). He argues that in
utopias, these two temporalities—experience and historical time—are seamlessly
reunited, and the “existential time is taken up into a historical time which is
paradoxically also the end of time, the end of history” (7). Jameson believes that the
conflation might lead to “ethical depersonalization” (7), which may well be desirable in

² I have quoted here the English translation by Michael Tyldesley (2003, 174).
both the religious and the philosophical sense. He suggests that in utopian literature all three categories of biographical time—extended life spans, reincarnation/time travel, and the very experience of everyday life—constantly move towards convergence with the historical time (history). In other words, Jameson believes that a utopia is constructed through the union of individual and collective experience, resulting in the depersonalisation or elimination of the individual qua individual. But in fact, in many utopian texts and practices, contrary to Jameson’s idea, the death of the collective coincides with, or even predates, the death of the individual. The collective and self-abnegating drive of utopias (such as Baxter’s and Gu’s) requires a form of individualism that undermines their collectivism and self-abnegation. I now turn to explore how this paradoxical negation of both individualism and collectivism in utopianism emerges, in the cases of Baxter and Gu, partly out of contradictions that are particular to the New Zealand utopian tradition.

The farthest promised land: imaginings and realities of New Zealand

New Zealand, when it first appeared on European colonial-era maps, was regarded as an isolated group of islands with a conveniently short history, and this view of the country has continued to be propagated internationally right up until the present day, for example, in Peter Jackson’s The Lord of the Rings and Hobbit movies. In choosing New Zealand as the site for their utopian dreams, both Baxter and Gu negotiated the temporal and spatial tensions of utopianism and engaged the double-sided history of its European settler versions in New Zealand. Baxter inherited from the British colonial settlers the idea of establishing an earthly paradise in New Zealand, an idea shared by Gu when he purchased land on Waiheke Island and decided to establish his autarkic utopia there. However, New Zealand’s capitalistic society and its history of colonial settlement, which Baxter so eagerly attacked, symbolised captivating personal freedom for Gu, who sought to escape what he saw as the collective communist nightmare of China. By contrast, collectivism proved to be very alluring for Baxter. Each looked to the other side for a cure for their immediate reality, and yet both chose New Zealand as the anchoring site for their very different utopian dreams.

Both poets in different ways drew on European settler-colonial imaginings of New Zealand and the South Pacific more generally as a paradise. Gu’s semi-autobiographical, semi-fictional novel Ying’er discusses how New Zealand attracts people as a mysterious and fanciful destination. The novel’s character G suggests that the latitude of Waiheke Island is similar to that of the Island of Robinson Crusoe (C. Gu
and Lei Mi 1993, 125). Such Crusonian imaginings were vivid and abundant in the early colonial settlement history of New Zealand. Purportedly the settler colony with the strongest utopian tradition, the country was symptomatic of what James Belich terms “the Pakeha paradise complex” (2001, 22). Belich argues that settler myths created an array of imaginative heavens on earth, all of which, in essence, described New Zealand as a haven of collective progress through individual prosperity with little in the way of a social hierarchy or class system (ibid). This romanticised idea of New Zealand as a classless society is probably one of the most widespread myths in the country’s national history (Janiewski and Morris 2005, 177). In the past, there were moments when European settlers believed that, given the country’s geographical and climatic advantages, creating a utopia in New Zealand was entirely feasible (Alessio 2008, 24). Out of this conviction, the settlers named New Zealand “The Middle-Class Paradise” (Fairburn 1989, 61), or “The Farthest Promised Land” (Arnold 1981, 354), peopled by “Better Britons” (Attewell 2014, 14). For most European migrants to New Zealand in the nineteenth century, the land was the chief attraction, driving their utopian urge to settle on these faraway islands. Paul Moon notes that “from the late 1830s onwards, the possibility of the nation as an earthly paradise was given a fresh airing by settlers eager to work the land” (2013, 319). The New Zealand Arcadian dream soon took centre-stage in the alluring propaganda aimed at attracting those affected by industrialisation in Europe, chiefly from Britain and Ireland, who sought to own land as a source of independence and power (McAlloon 2008). Such propaganda promoted the idea that there was land freely available for hard-working men in this distant “wild Eden of the Pacific” (Hursthouse 1857, 50). Celebrating the possibilities of obtaining a decent life through honest work, a settler in the Canterbury district wrote fervently about how the class strictures of his home culture were utterly overturned in this new colony of hope:

Nothing can be pleasanter than watching the steps by which the steady, sober working man thus mounts into the position of a proprietor. As soon as may be after his arrival he either engages himself as shepherd, or bullock-driver, or hut-keeper at a station; or, if he prefers remaining near the towns, hires an acre or so of land, on which he builds a hut of sod or wattle and dab, makes an arrangement with a neighbour for ploughing the land, encloses it with a substantial post and rail or ditch and bank-fence, gets in his first crop when and how he can, and makes up his mind to go on steadily working for hire until he is in a condition to farm entirely on his own account. (Paul 1857, 27)

The land, as shown by the account above, became a central element and a symbol of personal freedom in the early stages of New Zealand’s European settlers’ utopian
dream. However, this white settler utopianism hides the destabilising conflict between Pākehā and Māori. From a Māori perspective, the British colonisation of New Zealand is a brutal story with dystopian characteristics. The shadow of the violent history of colonisation follows at the heels of the development of the country. The imposition of a European economic and political system led to most of New Zealand’s land passing from Māori to Pākehā ownership (Coleman, Dixon, and Maré 2005, 12). The suppression of the public use of the Māori language (te reo) and of Māori culture severely undermined the cultural identity of Māori and Māori language was on the verge of annihilation (Moon 2016, 189–92). It should be noted that the attachment to land is not an exclusive feature of Māori culture, but rather a shared concern of many indigenous groups. For example, Chief George Manuel, the founder of the Centre for World Indigenous Studies, makes a powerful and succinct statement in his book The Fourth World: “The culture of Indian people is every inch of our land and every event of our history” (Manuel and Posluns 2019, 191). The significance of land to indigenous peoples, including Māori, is rightly observed by Chadwick Allen. He suggests that since indigenous cultures exist in and at the conjunction of specific geography and specific history, “the loss of either element threatens the survival of particular indigenous cultures” (2002, 200). Land naturally became a centre of contention between Pākehā and Māori. For Māori, the land exists not as a form of personal possession but rather as a common bond of spiritual and genealogical significance. As Annabel Mikaere points out, “Māori are born out of the land, conceived and given life by Papatūānuku … These spiritual and genealogical connections to her [Papatūānuku] are what make us tangata whenua [the local people or the indigenous people]” (2011, 110). In Māori cosmology, Papatūānuku refers to “Earth, Earth mother and wife of Ranginui” (Moorfield n.d.). It is believed that all living beings originate from the union of Ranginui and Papatūānuku. While Pākehā settlers believed that their claim on the land was legitimised via the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi (Te Tiriti o Waitangi) with Māori tribal representatives, they frequently breached the terms of the agreement (Tauroa 1989). The colonial process for the indigenous people in New Zealand is, in fact, a problematic history of conquest, violence, deceit, theft, and bloodshed.

Cognizant of at least some of this history, Baxter was critical of the cultural nationalists, the generation before him, arguing that they had a narrow Pākehā view of what art, culture and society should be like. Instead, Baxter highlighted the values of Māori. In doing so, he deliberately rejected the utopian views of New Zealand expressed in the settler literature of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, with
their blind optimism about the white coloniser’s shallow occupation. He also rejected the pessimistic critical nationalism of his immediate predecessors, such as Allen Curnow. Arguing that the modern poet should “remain as a cell of good living in a corrupt society” (1951, 18), he adopted the long-haired hippie look in his later life that made a powerful testimony to the authenticity of his utopia. Baxter fashioned himself as a prophet and guru to the disaffected and marginalised youth of the late 1960s and early 1970s. He saw himself as mediating between the conservative authorities and the rebellious youth, especially hippies and junkies, whom he believed were the most vulnerable, and therefore, the most victimised members in New Zealand’s capitalistic society. He further advocated unconditional, undifferentiated love (aroha) between the Jerusalem members (Newton 2009). The goal of his utopia was four-fold: blending God’s love and the people’s love together; offering the poor a place to rest, food to eat, and the equal respect they deserved; instructing Pākehā to live in peace with Māori; and learning from Māori culture, tradition and spirituality (McKay 1992, 262–66). He began with a question on the title page to the original publication of Jerusalem Sonnets:

If that Jerusalem which is unshakeable friendship with God has not been established first in the heart, how can the objective Jerusalem of communal charity be built so as not to fall? (1970)

Baxter’s literary utopia sought to present a bilingual and bicultural site of peaceful coexistence. Hoping to overcome New Zealand’s history of violence, Baxter adopted the principle of self-negation (abandonment of authorial sovereignty) and various forms of poetic estrangement. Introducing into his poetry Māori cultural, mythical and religious elements, Baxter intended to invert the power relationship between the two cultures: to present Māori as wise and empowered and Pākehā as spiritually weak. It should be noted that Baxter insisted that Jerusalem was not inspired by communist or socialist influences, stating that:

Communes are the work of Mao Tse Tung. … Communities are seeds planted by Te Wairua Tapu. In a community, I becomes Us. God became Us to share our destitution. When I becomes Us, we are joined to God in a hidden fashion, and persons are more themselves, not less themselves. Therefore I prefer to say community, not commune. (1971b, 7)

Yet Jerusalem’s undeniable similarity with those communes under a socialist or communist regime led to the widespread use of the label “commune” to describe Jerusalem in news reports (Dykes 1971; Hay-Campbell and Baxter 1971; Auckland Star
Baxter was vocal about how he founded his utopia on the inspirations he found in Māori tribal culture, but Jerusalem was, in fact, a locally-inflected version of a global phenomenon. Under the influence of the rise of communitarianism and hippy communes in the United States in the 1960s and the 1970s, the intentional community movement in New Zealand, “The Ohu Movement”, boomed from the mid–1960s through the 1970s (Sargisson and Sargent 2004, 41–46). The movement proposed a critical response to war, sexism, and perceived social injustices (S. L. Brown 2002, 163–64). This boom was also a result of expanded and intensified international links and signified the globalisation of the intentional community movement. In this period, the hippie movement came to prominence in the United States. Hippie utopianism promoted and celebrated “back-to-the-land” ventures. The resultant surge in the number of utopia-minded communes extended its influences beyond US geographical boundaries and later became an international phenomenon of which New Zealand was also a part. In these two decades, New Zealand witnessed the establishment of various kinds of intentional communities (Sargisson and Sargent 2004). A rebellious young generation heralded a new culture that celebrated freedom and social revolution, reacting against the old world order by embracing a new hippie ethos (Voss 2008, 173–88). Seen in this light, Baxter’s utopianism brought together at least three sources: Māori tradition, the commune movement, and New Zealand white settler utopianism.

Like Baxter’s, Gu’s utopianism was also a coalescence of influences. He combined the traditional Chinese utopian model with the capitalist promises of New Zealand settler utopianism. His private utopia was obviously inspired by one of the most influential utopian works of traditional Chinese literature, The Peach Blossom Spring. His literary utopia sought to combine incompatible elements to form a third utopian space (an intermingling space of dream and reality) through estrangement, contradiction, and the engagement of readers as co-creators. In this way, Gu’s literary utopia distinguished itself from Chinese traditional and modern utopian discourse and attempted to present a more complicated modern utopia of transculturation. In reality, Gu’s eagerness to own a piece of land, away from mainland China, on which he could work as a farmer was reminiscent of the agrarian dream of New Zealand’s European colonial settlers. But Gu’s insistence on the importance of land was more than just a personal obsession and can, in fact, be read as reflecting a key issue in the history of
modern China. Traditional Chinese literary utopias focused their critical attention on corruption, war, and poverty (Dutton 2010, 223–58). Under the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), the land played a pivotal role in the utopian dream of the Chinese, so much so that “the history of land policy in the People’s Republic is in many ways also a chronicle of twentieth-century China” (Ho 2005, 5). Mao’s promise of land to the peasants established his power base, and private ownership was gradually abolished after the establishment of the Higher Agricultural Production Cooperatives in 1956 (Ho 2017, 127). Until the economic reforms in 1978, the land remained either state-owned (in urban cities) or collectively owned (in rural areas), and in the 1980s, the Household Contract Responsibility System was established, marking the beginning of lease-based land use (X. Guo and Zhang 2013, 220).

In this context, an expression of the desire to own private land in the Maoist regime might be attacked as “the tail of capitalism” (资本主义尾巴), a term used by the Communist Party zealots to denounce remnants of capitalist thinking. But the land was merely one of the most notable sites of the split between Chinese collective utopianism and the post-Cultural Revolution free thinking of modern Chinese artists such as Gu Cheng. When the People’s Republic of China was established in 1949, the country sought to build a utopian socio-political space with a classless structure, one that was founded on the principles of Marxism-Leninism (Y. Li 2018, 27). However, the new, totalitarian power structure made it possible to “implement cultural policy with unprecedented effectiveness” (Crevel 1996, 4). At the time of the Great Leap Forward (1958–1961), the government increased its insistence on the use of socialist realism and combined it with so-called revolutionary realism and revolutionary romanticism (Lan 1996, 91–92). Only works that conformed with the party-promoted socialist revolutionary realism were allowed, which resulted in a tremendous shrinkage in literary production (Crevel 1996). During the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), political persecution spread like wildfire under a reign of terror. The Party’s theory of the Dictatorship of the Black Line in Literature and Arts called for writers, artists and intellectuals who were perceived to be bourgeois, anti-socialist or anti-Mao to be comprehensively eradicated (Hong 2007, 213). Those writers that were considered “reactionary literati” were publicly humiliated, persecuted, imprisoned, or sent to the countryside to be reformed through hard labour (Hong 2007)(ibid). The decade was an era of darkness, disillusionment and trauma and was later labelled as “Ten Lost Years” (Fairbank 2006, 366). The literary production of this period was predominantly propaganda. The death of Mao Zedong, the arrest of the Gang of Four and the opening
to the West started the post-Mao era, which witnessed the loosening of the Party’s cultural policy (Hong 2007). Underground poetry started to circulate and some unofficial magazines such as Today (Jintian), offered a platform for young writers, such as Gu Cheng, to react against the restrictions on art during the Cultural Revolution (J. Edmond 2006, 114).

Gu’s utopian pursuit originated at least in part from the hopes among Chinese intellectuals for a new social and political order that arose from the death of Mao Zedong (1976) and the downfall of the Gang of Four, and from seeing liberalisation reach a peak between 1985 and 1989 (Li Xia 1999). Amidst the debris of the Maoist dystopia, Gu was motivated, like many of his contemporaries, to turn to the culture’s past for inspiration to imagine a better form of existence. Drawing on Taoist philosophical doctrines, he came to believe that the establishment of a private utopia in isolation was the best form of negating the traumatic collective utopianism advocated by the Chinese Communist Party (D. Wang 2004). After contemplating the Taoist concept wu wei 无为 (non-intervention), Gu argued that by withdrawing from involvement with government and society, one could achieve true freedom through wu bu wei 无不为 (“to do anything”, or “non-non intervention” if translated word-for-word to reproduce the double negative in the original). This is, of course, just one possible interpretation of the Taoist principle. Whereas Gu’s interpretation of wu bu wei 无不为 leans towards the meaning of wu suo bu wei 无所不为 (“do everything or anything”) or even wei suo yu wei 为所欲为 (“do whatever one pleases”), some critics suggest that wu wei can be better conveyed by the term “effortless action” (Slingerland 2003, 7) and wu bu wei actually points to a state of achieving capability rather than an affirmative action. In this sense, it refers to either a harmonious state of “not left undone” or what James Legge translates as “nothing which it [the Tao] does not do” (Lao-Tse 2008, 67).

Gu’s somewhat idiosyncratic interpretation of wu wei, however, rebelled against the idea of art’s subordination to the Communist Party’s political propaganda of his time. In a similar way, Gu defined utopianism as an unlimited embodiment of expression, and his utopian practice, both lived and poetic, as a personal and intimate form through which he expressed his desires, beliefs and visions in response to the traumatic collective experiences of the Cultural Revolution.

In Gu’s delineation of his yet-to-be-realised utopia in New Zealand and his record of living on Waiheke, he neglected the history of Chinese settlement in New Zealand: a part of the past that either he was ignorant of or that he conveniently forgot.
Had he had looked into this profoundly troubling history, he would at least have rid himself of an oversimplified vision of New Zealand as a peaceful destination that had eradicated institutional oppression, and he might have come to question his utopian project. Gu’s escape from modern China’s dystopian collective horror in many regards reminds us of the Cantonese miners’ departure from imperial China in the midst of the opium wars, riots and civil disorder to become pioneering sojourners or settlers in New Zealand from 1865 to 1901 (Ng 2003). Seeking opportunities overseas to provide for their families, a group of Cantonese rural farmers and artisans with no tradition of or background in mining arrived at the shores of Otago as gold-seekers and became the first significant group of non-European migrants to New Zealand in the nineteenth century (Ng 2003, 20). The prejudice against them started even before their arrival in the form of protests against potential Chinese immigration, based on false claims supported by Western pseudo-scientific theories about Chinese inferiority, and was followed by the opposition of European miners, who emphasised the Chinese miners’ “different racial origin, competition, sojournism, ‘heathen practices’ and alleged dirtiness, villainy and immorality” (Ng 2003, 20). The prejudice reached its peak when Chinese settlers were refused the rights to naturalisation in 1892, along with the raising of the poll tax to £100 in 1896, and the exclusion of Chinese people from the Old Age Pensions Act in 1898. (Spoonley 2011) The Chinese miners desired a better life in New Zealand, but their actual living was linguistically, and also culturally, isolated. Such experiences echo Gu’s utopian practice on Waiheke, even though Gu failed to recognise such precedents in his literary works.

There are parallels and cross-overs in how Baxter and Gu engaged with settler imaginings of New Zealand and formed their own visions or versions of the country as a possible utopian site. Their utopian imaginations and practices were informed by their knowledge (or lack of knowledge) of the colonial and settler imaginings of New Zealand and the often-dystopian realities of that country, and their proposed utopian models featured influences from multiple utopian traditions, including New Zealand, Chinese, and Māori. Their utopias, thus, are nodes of conflation and connection, not only in the temporal sense of past, present, and future, but also in the spatial sense of cultures, traditions, and geographies. The very act of conflation and connection gives their utopianism a dynamic force, to which I now turn. In the next section, I look at how modern utopianism can be best understood as a form defined by contradiction, paradox, and dynamic movement.
Unravelling modern utopianism: dynamics, contradictions, and paradoxes

Reading Baxter’s and Gu’s utopias comparatively reveals three features of their utopianism: dynamism, contradiction, and paradox. As Baxter’s and Gu’s examples illustrate, modern utopianism negotiates utopia’s innate spatial and temporal tensions through dynamic inter- and intra-cultural exchanges. Aiming to trace such dynamic movements, my thesis explores how each writer draws on various national and transnational utopian traditions. By bringing together multiple traditions and cultures, modern utopianism, as exemplified by Baxter and Gu, forms a dynamic network. To recognize the network-like structure of modern utopianism is to question the Eurocentric framework to which utopian studies is conventionally wedded and to go beyond the framework of national literatures. In this way, my thesis problematises the view that utopianism is a Western invention, as suggested by scholars such as Krishan Kumar: “[U]topia is not universal. It appears only in societies with the classical and Christian heritage, that is, only in the West. Other societies have, in relative abundance, paradieses, primitivist myths of a Golden Age of justice and equality, Cockaigne-type fantasies, even messianic beliefs; they do not have utopia” (1987, 19). Extending beyond the Western horizon, my study builds on previous work that recognises that utopianism (as an imaginary quest for a better, ideal or even perfect society) exists in every cultural tradition and social formation (Levitas 1991; Sargent 2010, 85; Dutton 2010; Segal 2012), and that utopianism as a perennially powerful idea has existed throughout history (Claeys 2011; Gordin, Tilley, and Prakash 2010; Goodwin and Taylor 2009; Waddell 2012). Utopianism, be it mythical, religious, institutional or political, exists in a vast variety of cultures around the globe, and examples abound in cultures beyond the influences of the Greek or Judeo-Christian tradition. As Dutton argues, utopianism as “the desire for a better way of being in the world is indeed a universal concept” (Dutton 2010, 250). Dutton summarises in the form of a poem that:

Utopia is a place.
Though it bears a Western name
It is not a Western space.
But a sign that social dreaming
Can have a different face.
(2010, 223)

Baxter and Gu, when read together, illustrate a modern utopianism that is not only fundamentally cross-cultural but also inherently contradictory and paradoxical. My argument is partly in line with Jameson’s analysis of the inherent paradoxes and
contradictions of the utopian form. Jameson notes that utopianism paradoxically depends on historical circumstance yet simultaneously makes itself ahistorical; it is contradictorily shaped and disabled by personal ambitions and individual agency (2005, 37). Following Jameson, I argue that reading utopian texts and practices means paying attention to the contradictions and the aporia of modern utopianism. While we cannot resolve the resulting tensions, we must be aware of them from the very beginning. Doing so gives our reading, at least, the complexity that the genre deserves. As Holly White suggests, in bringing together self and society, and text and context, “[t]he challenge becomes to sustain attention in the midst of the contradiction or at least to manage interpretation that does not seek easy resolution” (2015, 73). In the case of Baxter and Gu, my primary endeavour is to reveal the central paradox that dominates their utopian structures: the problematic authorial sovereignty that both initiated and ended their utopian dreams. As my analysis will show, the multiple contradictions surrounding their utopian texts and practices are propelled by competing forces—by a constant struggle between self-abnegation and self-aggrandisement. Setting out to negotiate the inherently temporal and spatial tensions of utopia (that utopias are, but also should not be, separated from the contagion of the past; and that utopias can be achieved in reality and yet are always critically distant from it) by bringing together incompatible elements to build their dream worlds, Baxter and Gu, nonetheless, created new tensions and contradictions, and their utopias became pain-inflicting sites of power struggle. However, it is not my intention to add yet another story of dream overcome by reality to a long enough history of such narratives. Instead, I hope to reconsider utopian form and its multifaceted texts and practices by tracing the power and authority dynamics in such utopian spaces and to highlight how the transcultural aspect of their utopianism is often part of the assertion of their authority.

**Thesis structure and chapter outlines**

In the following chapters, I address in turn the literary and lived utopias of James K. Baxter and Gu Cheng. Each of the five chapters contributes to my overall thesis argument that modern utopianism is an inherently dynamic, transcultural, and paradoxical phenomenon. In the first chapter, I examine Baxter’s everyday utopian practice through his intentional communities, focusing especially on his Jerusalem project. I evaluate the paradoxical tensions at the heart of the Jerusalem community and its founding principles: aroha and poverty. I show how Baxter’s utopia functioned as a site for cross-cultural encounters that brought together local and global elements to offer
an alternative to the colonial history of New Zealand. I include in this chapter an
analysis of the recent revelations about Baxter’s sexual violence against women,
vioence that contrasts sharply with his advocacy of egalitarianism among the Jerusalem
members and his criticism of the racist and patriarchal aspects of New Zealand society.

Chapter 2 examines the literary utopia constructed in Baxter’s writings through
his use of various forms of poetic estrangement. This chapter traces the development of
Baxter’s literary utopian vision and analyses how Baxter’s literary utopia challenged yet
also conformed to the New Zealand white settler utopian tradition. The chapter analyses
the continuities and dissonance between Baxter’s utopian vision and his utopian
practices. Through close readings of Baxter’s poems “The Moon and The Chestnut
Tree” and “Zion,” I investigate, in particular, Baxter’s paradoxes in his struggle against,
and at the same time, obsession with, authorial sovereignty.

The third chapter focuses on Gu Cheng’s construction of his unorthodox private
utopia of only three people on Waiheke Island. His utopia functioned as an interface
between dream and reality. Nonetheless, his utopianism produced contradictory
emphases on freedom and authoritarian control in both his writing and his life. His
vision of Waiheke as an escape from the city, Chinese reality or the violence of recent
Chinese history, his claimed disavowal of his masculine identity, and his writings’
claim to find somewhere beyond reality (especially in Ying’er) all seem to fail and
instead seem to be marked by a brutal return to the reality of masculine authoritarian
violence. I argue that his failure was not a repetition of the cliché in utopian history: that
the dream was overcome by reality. Instead, I argue that Gu’s claim to be able to change
the world was, in essence, an assertion of the very authoritarian reality that his utopian
dream was supposed to escape.

Chapter 4 reviews Gu Cheng’s poetic utopia and its paradoxical complexities by
situating it in a network of past and present utopian forces. The incompatible elements
in Gu’s poetic utopianism were united by Gu’s claim to be constructing an ever-
expanding poetic dream world that incorporated the dreams of his poetry’s readers. By
focusing on his utopian poems, I dissect how Gu’s utopia became an interface between
dream and reality and how, in a similar way to Baxter’s literary utopias, Gu’s imagined
ideal spaces were also deeply troubled at heart, haunted by an underside of violence,
oppression, and problematic authorial sovereignty.

The final chapter examines the dynamic intersections between modern utopian
traditions. In redefining modern utopias as inherently dynamic and cross-cultural, I
challenge the existing scholarship on utopianism that either reiterates the East/West
divide through a Eurocentric account of utopian visions or stresses isolated national utopian traditions. I argue that recognising their modern cross-cultural utopianism leads to a new reading of the two writers beyond the national paradigm. More importantly, I call for attention to the kind of paradoxical utopianism that Baxter and Gu exemplify: their proposed utopian spaces of freedom and equality as products of transculturation nonetheless became specific occasions of oppression and suffering.
PARADISE OF CONTRADICTIONS: THE JERUSALEM COMMUNITY

When Maori and Pakeha do these things together the double rainbow begins to shine.

—JAMES K. BAXTER, *James K. Baxter: A Portrait*

In contradiction … I was born.

—JAMES K. BAXTER, “Home Thoughts”

More than four decades have passed since Baxter’s death in 1972, but in many regards, he seems “alive,” or maybe to put it more appropriately, “resurrected.” He is still celebrated as a populist and social activist by the general public and fondly remembered by his ngā mōkai (Baxter translated this term rather idiosyncratically as “the fatherless ones”. But it is a non-standard translation as “mōkai” usually refers to “pet,” “servant,” “captive,” or “slave.”). His already mythologised Jerusalem story continues to multiply. Vivid versions and personal interpretations of the story are woven into a multi-layered grand narrative in John Newton’s comprehensive book *The Double Rainbows: James K Baxter, Ngāti Hau and the Jerusalem Commune* (2009). Although Newton aims at de-centring the role played by Baxter in the well-known and well-mythologised Jerusalem story to explore the perspectives of a multitude of former ngā mōkai, Ngāti Hau (the local tribe at Hiruhārama), and the many whose paths crossed with that of the community, his book recognises Baxter’s contribution to New Zealand society’s quest for betterment and justice. In the past decade, there has been a revived interest among publishers in reproducing Baxter’s works or publishing commentaries (see appendix 4).
This continued posthumous republication seems to fulfil the self-referential prophecy Baxter made in his “Jerusalem Sonnet 11”: “and from my grave at length / A muddy spring of poems will gush out” (Baxter 1995, 460).

But the rekindled readership of his life and poetry did not seriously confront a rupture noted by Newton and C. K. Stead. Stead, commenting on the disproportionate praise and adoration attached to Baxter’s social experiment and contribution in the 1970s, sarcastically said: “To the young . . . he has become a culture hero, and if his poems were much less remarkable than they are I suspect his youthful disciples would not know it and would admire them quite as much” (1973, 9). On the contrary, suggesting that the social commitment of Baxter received a cold shoulder in literary circles, Newton stated that “the activism itself has gone largely unanalysed, sidelined in deference to what his biographer Frank McKay calls the more ‘lasting fruit’ of his poetry and prose” (2005, 11). Both Newton and Stead perceived a dichotomy between readers of Baxter’s work and of his life, resulting in a fragmented and partial understanding of Baxter.

This problem of separating the life and work of Baxter is highlighted vividly by the recent revelations of Baxter’s sexual scandals. Earlier this year, his previously private communications and letters were organised and published in a two-volume work, *James K. Baxter: Letters of a Poet* (2019a, 2019b), among which exists a letter confessing to the marital rape of his Māori wife (2019a, 619–20). The publication of Baxter’s letters was then followed by the revelation by a former female ngā mōkai, Ros Lewis, that when she had just turned 18 she narrowly escaped being raped by Baxter in Jerusalem, only because of his failure to get an erection (Lewis 2019). These revelations are central to the story of Baxter, so a reading of him that only concentrates on his poetry with no consideration of the dark side of his life is no longer justified. Both need to be deemed a part of his contrary giving up and asserting of authority in sometimes violent ways. In the next chapter, Baxter’s mistreatment of women in life is read in further detail, alongside the textual analysis of Baxter’s writings on gender, where the gender problem is discussed as one of the many flawed aspects of Baxter’s utopianism.

In this light, chapters 1 and 2 propose an alternative strategy for reading Baxter’s life and poetry by employing the analytical framework of modern utopianism. Baxter’s pursuit of an exemplary utopian community and his quest for a poetic utopia are cross-referential and inseparable. The two exhibit his quest to reinvent the colonial history of New Zealand with an alternative image of peaceful bicultural coexistence. Both, however, are infested by the main paradox of his utopianism: authoritarian self-
assertion achieved through proposed self-abnegation. The paradox generates multiple contradictions and problems that permeate every aspect of his utopian practice (of which his Jerusalem community offers the best example for analysis) and utopian writing (especially poetry composed in the Jerusalem years that carefully delineated his proposed poetic utopia). For clarity of argument, this cross-referential analysis on Baxter is divided into two chapters. This chapter primarily focuses on his utopian communities while chapter 2 looks mainly at his utopian poetics. Nonetheless, there are many cross-references between Baxter’s life and poetry in each chapter as I hope to build a holistic view of his utopianism. These two chapters problematize the rupture of Baxter’s social activism and poetry by using the framework of modern utopianism to analyse what Newton terms “the Baxter effect.” (2005, 11) Newton’s term couples the text (the textual criticism of Baxter’s poetry) with the paratext (the celebrity and publicity of Baxter’s social activism). Building on this, I explore further how the two were bound together in service of Baxter’s utopianism. A re-reading of Baxter’s poetry and the (at least to a New Zealand audience) familiar story of Jerusalem through the framework of utopianism sheds new light on Baxter’s life and work in totality and reveals their shared innate problems, contradictions, and paradoxes.

In May 1951, Baxter delivered a memorable lecture to the New Zealand Writers’ Conference in Christchurch (1951, 5–20). Diagnosing New Zealand as unjust and unhappy, Baxter argued that poetry (writing) and action (example) worked in partnership in supporting the modern poet’s mission to improve society. He proposed in this lecture a third option for the modern poet’s engagement with society, which rejected the repetitious oscillation between total isolation and an undifferentiated brotherhood with society at large. In retrospect, this speech foreshadowed the major paradox that haunted his later utopian communities. Baxter declared:

The typical dilemma of the modern poet is one of divided aims. A man who is working as a schoolteacher, a tradesman, or a government official in a society which he knows to be unjust, cannot dare to think clearly on moral issues; for the society is part of his physical and even psychological security. If he breaks with the society and departs into the Wilderness in customary Romantic style, then he loses brotherhood with all but similar outcasts. What Justice demands is something more difficult—that he should remain as a cell of good living in a corrupt society, and in this situation by writing and example attempt to change it. He will thus and only thus escape the isolation of the Romantic. (2015a, 1:75)
Hoping to solve the typical dilemma of the modern poet by uniting the power of words (writing) with the personal testimony of life (example), Baxter himself strained to strike a balance between isolation and connectedness. He suggested that being part of the unjust establishment would deprive a poet of the ability to reflect critically on the shortcomings of the system. Therefore, to preserve one’s integrity as “a cell of good living,” a certain degree of isolation was needed. But departing into total isolation and cutting all ties with society was equally undesirable, as it would consequently lead to an undesirable waning of the poet’s influence on society. Alternatively, Baxter proposed to become “a cell of good living” which remained both safely detached yet ingeniously connected. Nonetheless, it takes more than one healthy cell to save the whole sick body from doom. To cope with this challenge, Baxter sought to align himself with the chosen few, the victimised outcasts of society whom he believed would share his vision, to form utopian communities that would provide him with the collective power and influence he needed to change and challenge the society that he attacked. This negotiated mingling of private ambition and collective aspiration clashed in Jerusalem, causing the most problematic paradox of Baxter’s utopianism. Baxter’s self-negating denial of his power and status in favour of egalitarian communal living turned out to be a brutal assertion of his authority.

The body of this chapter starts with an exploration of the theoretical contradictions shared by Baxter’s utopian communities and the global 1960s counterculture movement. These contradictions suggest that Baxter’s utopian communities are, in essence, a locally inflected example of a global phenomenon. As the second section shows, Jerusalem had been haunted, since its inception, by such contradictions and the ensuing tensions. The third section looks at how Baxter’s two utopian principles, poverty and aroha, are inherently problematic. The last section analyses how the challenges that Jerusalem encountered, both intrinsic and external, were results of the overarching paradox of Baxter’s utopianism. Baxter’s utopian dream to build Jerusalem as an alternative model for cross-cultural encounters, which would amalgamate both local and global elements, failed not because it was overcome by reality, but because of its own inherent tensions and contradictions.

Making it new: Jerusalem and the 1960s counterculture movement
There are obvious connections between Baxter’s utopian communities and the various geographical and cultural intentional communes and social projects inspired by the 1960s counterculture movement. Both are anti-establishment, anti-materialistic and self-
critical. My argument is that Baxter drew inspirations from the counterculture movement and yet situated the Jerusalem community in the specific New Zealand context. In this regard, Jerusalem drew on global and local elements and worked as an amalgamation of both.

The counterculture movement of the 1960s questioned fundamental components of the social, cultural and ideological fabric of the dominant culture, or questioned societal conformity, through forms of expression such as strikes, protests or public demonstrations. The year 1968 was representative of this era of global unrest, mutiny, and rebellion against the status quo. In France, nationwide barricades, demonstrations, and occupations erupted to oppose the state power, involving a large number of student protesters and workers, that later came to be termed The May 1968 Events (Reader 1993, 1–19). The Prague Spring took place in the then-Communist state Czechoslovakia, followed by the invasion of the country by the Soviet Union and other members of the Warsaw Pact to end the protests (McDermott and Stibbe 2018, 1–22). In the same year in the United States, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) drafted a report warning President Lyndon B. Johnson of a counterculture phenomenon which seemed to be sweeping the world (Suri 2013). The report, entitled “Restless Youth,” concluded that the young, both West and East, were “deeply engrossed in the search for some newer means of arriving at moral values.” To sum up by quoting Chaplin and Mooney, “the sixties were epitomized by the power of the people to push back against government, against prejudice, and against military might in ways that appeared unstoppable” (Chaplin and Mooney 2018, 2). The rebellious spirit of the movement showed its influence especially among the young generation, who were often in the vanguard to protest against the Vietnam War, fight for civil and racial equality, and celebrate sexual freedom and drug use (Kosc et al. 2013, 7).

An anti-capitalism spirit also emerged, if in a rudimentary way, out of the 1960s counterculture movement. In the political and social upheavals of the 1960s, progressives and radicals, particularly the students and the bourgeois avant-garde, targeted capitalistic values and culture and dreamed of a libertarian model of egalitarian communism (Fletcher 2018, 1–25). The counterculture movement also showed a genuine interest in finding meaning in everyday life beyond material prosperity. Counterculture icons, such as Allen Ginsberg, refused the materialistic promises of

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3 The report is archived at Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Library, Austin, Texas. The quoted statement is taken from Jeremi Suri’s analysis in his book chapter “The Rise and Fall of a Counterculture, 1960–1975” (Suri 2013, 97).
capitalism, applauded living basic lives without attachment to property or possessions, and drew on the Eastern religions, such as Hinduism, for spiritual nourishment (P. Oliver 2014, 11–13). Mainstream conformism and materialistic aspirations were considered the ideological madness which, in the words of Ginsberg in 1956, was destroying “the best minds of my generation” (2006, 3). The counterculture movement’s indisputable anti-establishment and anti-capitalism propensities problematized the social background of the active minds behind the radical changes of the 1960s. Counterculture’s passionate proponents included “thousands of self-defined participants from the most visible and privileged parts of society” (Suri 2013, 95). Occupying a central position in the system, these people rejected not only the policies of that system but also the very assumptions upon which authority had been built and through which their central place had been granted. In nature, it was a radically self-critical and self-emancipatory stance. Therefore, the counterculture movement was “the empowered questioning their own power” rather than “the dispossessed demanding more access to resources, or the cultural fringe searching for freedom” (Suri 2013, 95).

Deeming Baxter one of the most influential counterculture movement leaders in New Zealand, historian Michael King suggests the strong connection between the global counterculture movement and New Zealand’s many intentional communities, including Baxter’s utopian communities. He argues that while the civil rights movements and anti-war campaigns had given rise to the Yippies in the United States, similar campaigns and movements inspired New Zealand to find its own path to an alternative counterculture model (2012, 459-460). A ready market for this wave of countercultural ideas was found “among the New Zealand baby-boomers, many of whom were disenchanted with the very things that their parents had sought to establish after World War II—the security of the nuclear family, suburban mores, lifetime jobs, conformity, predictability” (2012, 459). The year 1968 also happened to be significant to Baxter’s personal utopian practice. He claimed, in line with his always mythological narrative of self-awareness, that in 1968 he received a “minor revelation” dream, in which God asked him to go to Jerusalem on the Whanganui River and to build there “the nucleus of a community where the people, both Maori and pakeha, would try to live without money or books, worship God and work on the land” (Baxter 2015d, 4:362). Hoping that a reconciliation could be made by blending Roman Catholicism and Māori cultural beliefs, Baxter desired to return to the land and establish a community that honoured simple living as a counter-example to dominant social perceptions, racial inequality, and the capitalist regime.
Baxter’s pursuit of an earthly paradise in New Zealand strongly echoed the 1960s counterculture movement. The core of the Jerusalem spirit was against middle-class social conformity and the dominant capitalist system, fighting for racial equality and egalitarianism and hoping to restore cultural rigour by learning from Māori spirituality. It was also distinctly self-critical. Baxter disavowed his literary fame and wrote introspectively about the principle of poverty, in both materialistic and mental senses. King rightly recognised how Baxter and his counterculture communities drew on the 1960s counterculture as a source of inspiration yet gave it a New Zealand spin, suggesting that “While Baxter was influenced by all the ingredients of the counterculture … he sought to develop a New Zealand life way that embraced Maori spirituality and social concepts” (2012, 460). Newton also argued that Baxter’s identification with the counterculture movement and the hippie communal experiments was rather idiosyncratic, suggesting that Baxter’s utopian agenda was “always more programmatic and moralistic” (2009, 37). I would like to point out that the 1960s counterculture movement was innately contradictory, as was Baxter’s Jerusalem. The movement, in general, had a radical and even destructive spirit and an unprecedented geographical scope of influence. But its method of rebellion was surprisingly traditional and very limited changes were achieved compared to what the self-emancipatory 1960s counterculture rebels proposed. As Suri summed up, “not a single major government was overthrown by protesters in 1968” (2013, 99). The self-critical quality of the counterculture movement rejected bourgeois ideology yet failed to fundamentally transform the underlying socio-economic dynamics that shaped the very system they sought to challenge (Fletcher 2018, 1–25). Similarly, Baxter’s Jerusalem was haunted from the beginning by the perennial tension between self-negation and his insistence on authorial sovereignty. Many contradictions ensued. The next section looks at how the tensions and contradictions that haunted Jerusalem were formed long before the community was established.

From Auckland to Jerusalem
The previous section shows how Baxter’s utopianism drew on the global counterculture movement of dissent while incorporating local specificities. This section traces the three phases of the Jerusalem community: preparation, operation and closure. Loosely chronological, my discussion reveals that Jerusalem was a site of tensions between the many groups involved. Some of the tensions appeared at an early stage when Baxter first experimented with communal living in Auckland, and grew more evident in
Jerusalem. Others were caused by the conflict of interests between Baxter, ngā mōkai and Ngāti Hau. I argue that Baxter’s utopian practice in Jerusalem was not terminated by his death in 1972, but rather by the combined force of the tensions that accompanied every stage of its development.

Auckland played a central role in Baxter’s preparation for the Jerusalem community yet it also worked as an antithesis to it in Baxter’s textual fantasy. Newton (2009) noted that the idea of establishing a community in an unfamiliar place such as Jerusalem put Baxter under great pressure. Feeling utterly unprepared, he chose Auckland, where he had friends and connections, as a final stop to plan and prepare (2009, 40). Auckland is a city that Baxter often used as a figure for New Zealand middle-class complacency and bureaucracy, which he attacked in his “Ode to Auckland” as “Auckland, you great arsehole” (1995, 597). He diagnosed the city as symptomatic of the capitalism-based urban lifestyle by suggesting that “communities are everywhere ceasing to exist, and only a desacralised, depersonalised, centralised Goliath remains to demand our collective obedience” (2015c, 3:337). But it was in Auckland that Baxter’s model of communal living started to take shape and the clashing tension between community members began to surface. Baxter’s first experiment with communal living commenced in Easter 1969 (W. H. Oliver 1994, 125). His first formed quasi-community was No. 7 Boyle Crescent, also known as the Mother House, which was a boarding house located in the suburb of Grafton, near Auckland’s CBD and known by the local police as “a resort for drug users” (McKay 1992, 241). It was not strictly a community since Baxter practised an open-door policy which allowed people to randomly drop in and stay for however long they liked (1992, 241–42). As a result, most of the time, the residents came and then drifted away without necessarily growing a sense of commitment. But the Mother House helped Baxter establish his style of running a place of communal living. It functioned as a drop-in drug-hospice and Baxter assumed a guardian/counsellor role among the young addicts, attempting to help them by drawing on his earlier experience of battling his alcoholism with the help of Alcoholics Anonymous (W. H. Oliver 1994, 125–28).

In this Auckland “crashpad” (Newton 2009, 41) Baxter established two utopian, yet seemingly contradictory, features of his to-be-established Jerusalem: an emphasis on individual freedom and non-conformity, and a simultaneous insistence on modelling Christian suffering and empathy. On the one hand, Baxter was vocally supportive of rebellion against the establishment in New Zealand and the traditional values that it stood for, such as respect for authority and other Protestant-based social values. On the
other hand, his own rebellion turned out to be more of a negotiation. While fiercely condemning parents (especially middle-class Pākehā) for damaging the younger generation, he was the de facto protector/leader to what he considered the spiritually fatherless ngā mōkai. Straining to provide for those under his care, he worked hard to extract money, food and support from all groups and individuals that recognised his literary influence or the worth of his social activism. His attack was on the churches in New Zealand rather on Christianity itself, and he remained deeply religious and critical of his fellow believers only for their inability to faithfully live out the Christian faith. This discrepancy is symptomatic of the tension between the two contradictory features of his utopianism: a utopia that fully commits itself to individuality and the ensuing variety cannot simultaneously and genuinely place one specific set of cultural or religious rules above others.

Besides providing hands-on experience of communal living, the Mother House also saw Baxter’s disavowal of his Pākehā identity through metamorphotic self-fashioning. The typical residents of Boyle Crescent were, in Baxter’s own words, “junkies”: homeless and disillusioned youth who might be committing one or more of the four crimes that, in Baxter’s words, “the cops … dislike most in Auckland” (1995, 597–98): not having a job, wearing old clothes, having long hair, and being Māori. Baxter recognised that to serve the marginalised who live on society’s fringes, he himself must effectively become one of them, at least in his appearance. He abandoned the suit and the tie until he visually resembled those under his care. He also started to go by the name Hemi, the Māori transliteration of his given name James, and carried this new designation till his death (see figure 3).
The Mother House was short-lived and the Boyle Crescent complex was demolished in late September or early October 1969 (Newton 2009, 41). The place, however, differed surprisingly in the memory of Baxter and of at least some of the former residents. Baxter was certainly nostalgic and wearing rose-coloured glasses when he bemoaned in “Elegy of Boyle Crescent”: “The young refugees from middle class homes used to pour into Boyle Crescent. … How can I interpret the beauty of that house to a culture that has burnt-out eyes and broken ear-drums? … The facts are simple enough. The junkies loved one another. When I saw the bulldozers crash through the walls of the house, for the first time in years I began to weep” (2015c, 3:537). But some former residents recalled a former criminal who was accused of physical intimidation and rape on the site (Newton 2009, 41). And a former resident, Barry Southam, revealed a dark and alarming side of living at Boyle Crescent:

I personally intervened and stopped two suicides and two fights in one night. … Another night Jim [Baxter] almost got his stomach slashed by a
young med student who’d gone off the rails on booze and pills and went absolutely nuts. … everybody in Jim’s bedroom … [went] fleeing while this med student was going berserk and slashing around with his knife … (Newton 2009, 40)

Baxter was not vocal about such conflict between his exhorted individual freedom and the certain type of conformity demanded by communal living. Since he did not respond in his writing to the contrasting memories of the participants of the Boyle Crescent project, it was unknown whether he was aware of the differences between their experiences.

In August 1969, Baxter felt ready to head for Jerusalem, whose geographical isolation and religious and historical complexity made it the best site for Baxter’s utopia. Jerusalem, or in Māori, Hiruhārama, was “Maori, Catholic and rural” (W. H. Oliver 1994, 132). It was one of the biggest settlements on the Whanganui River in the 1840s, with several hundred Ngāti Hau inhabitants, and is not desperately far from Whanganui city, civilisation, or modern comfort, although difficult to get to. As confessed by Baxter himself, the location of Jerusalem sometimes prevented him from easy communication with the outside world. When he received an invitation from the Committee on Drug Dependency and Drug Abuse in 1969, he could not make a personal appearance before the committee and wrote to propose a meeting in Palmerston North. He insisted, however, that “you would have to send a car forty miles up the river to Jerusalem to get me, and take me back there after the meeting, since I do not myself possess transport nor the funds for it” (2015c, 3:74). But the difficulty in commuting provides a sense of protective boundary between the community—which, to borrow Baxter’s analogy again, is the good cell—and the corrupt body (the society outside).

Baxter perceived this Māori pā (village) to be a site where his objections to materialistic capitalism and colonising ideology would culminate in the establishment of a new tribe of youth that demonstrated peaceful cohabitation and biculturalism uniting Māori culture and Roman Catholicism. The idea of combating racial inequality in peaceful terms incorporated the inspirational non-violent resistance philosophy of the pacifist community of Parihaka (Hohaia et al. 2001). Jack McDonald, Baxter’s great-grandson, commented that the seminal work The Parihaka Story (Scott 1954) influenced both Baxter’s writing and political activism (McDonald 2017). Baxter urged his tribe to give up Pākehā pride, recognise the bloody side of colonialism, and re-establish their value system based on that of the Māori:
It is the salutation of the poor man at the gate of the pa, the one who has no credentials. This is the pa of the dead, and I think they do receive me. I kneel on the wet grass, beside the concrete tomb of the kaumatua, the Maori elder who lived in the house before us, and say prayers, both in Maori and in English, praying that the souls of the Maori dead may have light and peace, and asking them to bear with our stupidity and put the coat of their aroha over us. (1971b, 13–14)

Contrary to Baxter’s unreserved trust of and openness towards the Māori culture, his use of Catholicism was not at all plain and forthright and his acceptance of Jerusalem’s Catholic legacy was rather reluctant. In 1892, The Daughters of Our Lady of Compassion, also known as The Sisters of Compassion, was founded there by Sister Suzanne Aubert (Munro 2009, 235), along with St Joseph’s Church (Simmons 1978, 83), whose architecture still dominates the place today. Considering the fact that Aubert took in orphans and the infant children of unmarried mothers during the 1890s (Newton 2009, 45) and Baxter attempted to use Jerusalem as a spiritual orphanage for the adult Pākehā ngā mōkai (“the fatherless” in Baxter’s translation), it is not hard to recognise how much Baxter’s mission echoed hers. As Newton suggests, Baxter’s suspicion of Aubert’s missionary colonialism prevented him from seeing more subtly how Aubert’s committed love of Māori and her proposed integration of the Pākehā orphans into the everyday life of the local Māori community preceded his own efforts (2009, 45).

Despite their own difficulties, the Catholic sisters were initially supportive of Baxter’s mission. They provided him with the Nun’s Cottage, the first shelter that opened its door to Baxter for his use when he arrived, and also took part in taking care of ngā mōkai (2009, 43; 46–50). In retrospect, the tension between these two parties was clear from the outset. The solemn, hard-working ethos upheld by the Sisters could not be more different from the Sixties hippies’ lifestyle of the Jerusalem members.

A typical day for one of ngā mōkai went like this: wake up whenever you feel like it (Newton 2009, 69); go swimming naked in the Whanganui River when the weather permitted (W. H. Oliver 1994, 261); play music on a guitar (see figure 4); engage in agricultural activities such as growing kumara (Māori sweet potato), catching eels from the River, hunting wild goats or stealing sheep (it happened at least once) from local farmers (McKay 1992, 261); cook if you are in the right mood, or wait to be fed by the kind-hearted Māori locals, or eat food brought in by visitors on trucks from Whanganui (ibid); watch Father Te Awhiti working on the house or digging out the cottage’s septic tank (Newton 2009, 51); then play poetry games in the evenings and identify each other’s quotations (W. H. Oliver 1994, 137), and settle down to sleep
again at night. Michele Blumsky (publishing under the name Mike Minehan), a former Jerusalem member and also the mother of Baxter’s extramarital child, wrote in her memoir of everyday life at Jerusalem:

there is chaos and there are people coming and going always, and food arrives like manna to feed the tribe on the back of some hiker or by the Transport truck, which comes hurtling up the road from Wanganui with its sack of spuds, Marmite, bread and someone has to do it, cook, tidy up maybe but more often than not there is sitting around with guitars and books and talking and singing and laughing and wandering through the long dry grasses that hiss as you pass and the river always there for swimming or sitting and the sun is hot and the hills buzz with insects, and the song of birds … You’ll get high and fly down the hills and valleys like a dream, which you are of course, up here dressed in your rainbow clothes and hair like glistening waves trailing behind you. This is never never land and you are all children and you pray never to grow up. (2002, 26)
The media of Baxter’s time was captivated by the sharp contrast between the lifestyle at Jerusalem and the expected way of life outside the community. The many young long-haired hippies (or junkies or hobos) in a remote Māori pā, plus a touch of unfaithful imagination or misunderstanding, seemed a magic formula for eye-catching headlines. The everyday life of ngā mōkai soon became a spectacle, and Jerusalem a stage for a performance. The community was a living sample of the countercultural lifestyle that represented a deeply mysterious and philosophically profound way of living. It was no surprise that Jerusalem soon became a buzzword among young people, and many pilgrims paid at least one visit to this new spiritual mecca up the Whanganui River (Newton 2009, 78). Baxter adhered to his open-door policy and welcomed them. Upon arrival, these visitors would receive a ritual embrace (the Jerusalem hug, see figure 5) and be offered food and drink and a place to rest (McKay 1992, 264). The media attention exposed the downside of Baxter’s open-door policy by creating an unexpected flow of visitors that overwhelmed the place’s very limited capacity. Although it is hard to locate precise statistics, the community attracted what Newton describes as “a deluge of visitors” (2009, 67). A modest estimate of the casual visitors and sight-seers might well be somewhere north of many hundreds, which was obviously far beyond the capacity of this formerly remote area with only twenty to thirty semi-permanent ngā mōkai (2009, 78). The number was not the only problem. These visitors came to Jerusalem with varying levels of understanding of Jerusalem and Baxter’s utopian dream. Most wanted to be associated with Baxter or the Jerusalem miracle but did not necessarily want to participate in the community. A member of ngā mōkai recalled a bizarre scene: a huge group of people from Wellington lining up for about a hundred meters waiting to get the Jerusalem hug from Baxter (2009, 78).
The avid media attention created a storm of publicity and an overflow of visitors that created much disturbance to the quiet life of the locals. Some local Pākehā farmers in the neighbourhood had opposed the idea of having the community in their midst from the beginning and were made more agitated as the explosion of visitor numbers had a negative impact on their livestock (W. H. Oliver 1994, 141). What was more, the influx of visitors took a great toll on the already impoverished local Māori community. It is possible that most visitors were unaware of how much burden their visits placed on Ngāti Hau, who felt a strong sense of responsibility to feed them because of manaakitanga. Loosely translated as kindness, generosity, support, welcome or sharing, manaakitanga is a Māori custom of hospitality that asks the host to care for the guests...
and share food with them. The commune depended greatly on the resources of Ngāti Hau (Newton 2009, 65). Now Ngāti Hau had to cater for the visitors, too.

There was certainly more to worry about than food. Baxter’s anti-drug use proclamation seemed to be taken in exactly the opposite way among the general public. Baxter conjectured in Jerusalem Daybook that readers assumed that the community was gathered precisely for getting high together (1971a, 24). It is undeniable that drugs were used at Jerusalem (Newton 2009, 74–76), though Baxter’s intention in setting up the community was to help get rid of drug-use since possession of drugs was against his poverty principle. The same applied to sexual ethics at Jerusalem. Baxter wrote how the majority perceived it to be a site of “free love orgy” (1971a, 24). He insisted that the sex at Jerusalem was a union of love rather than a pursuit of physical pleasure. Nonetheless, the public perception of Jerusalem as a drug and sex haven greatly concerned a number of local Māori, who believed that Jerusalem was damaging the village’s reputation (W. H. Oliver 1994, 141). The Catholic sisters shared their worries. As the sisters lived at a distance from the Top House, they were not greatly disturbed by the visitors (Newton 2009, 55). But they became very anxious about the lifestyle of Baxter’s tribe (especially about sex among ngā mōkai) and the connections that outsiders might make between the tribe’s acts and the sisters’ faith (2009, 48–49). As 1971 approached, Baxter was grappling with the multiple tensions woven into his community (McKay 1992, 260–70). These problems were compounded because he was often away from Jerusalem (Newton 2009, 84). The community’s loathsome standard of cleanliness led to a conflict with the Whanganui County Council and a survey carried out by the Wanganui Chronicle in March suggested that “almost all of the river residents” (McKay 1992, 269) opposed the idea of continuing to have the community amongst them.

As a result, the Jerusalem community only survived through two short phases (1969–71; 1972) (McKay 1992, 294) although it continued to function under different leadership until its final closure in 1975 (Newton 2009, 131–52). Between the first closure and the re-opening of Jerusalem, Baxter joined another short-lived urban commune in Wellington (it is referred to as “the Firetrap Castle” in his poems): 26 MacDonald Crescent (2009, 153). In February 1972, the landowners of Jerusalem permitted Baxter to return with a smaller and more cohesive group (2009, 84). But the problems persisted and Baxter eventually left Jerusalem to travel north. In October, he died suddenly in Auckland of a heart attack.

Praised as “a public figure widely loved and respected for a constructive approach to human problems” (Doyle 1976, 170), Baxter was one of few Pākehā who
had the honour of receiving a *tangi* (a Māori funeral, which typically lasts several days) and was buried on his adopted tribal land at Jerusalem. His tangi was the perfect embodiment of his utopian ideal, which was to bring Pākehā and Māori together in peace (see figure 6). As Newton quoted from Godfrey Wilson’s sermon on the death of Baxter:

I find it hard to think what other death in this country of ours could bring together such an extraordinary variety of New Zealanders. What other death could merge Maori and Pakeha, young and old, the eminent and the “outsider,” into a single people sharing a common grief. (1972, 60)

Figure 6. Coffin of James K Baxter being carried to the cemetery at Jerusalem.

Photograph taken on 26 October 1972 by a staff photographer of *The Evening Post*. Original caption reads: “The body is carried up the steep hill to a final resting place, the pallbearers being original members of the Jerusalem commune founded by the Wellington poet.” Ref: EP/1972/5158/15a-F. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand.

Baxter’s biographer McKay believed that Jerusalem failed “not because the vision was defective, but because Baxter was unable to realize it” (1992, 270). Although the tensions and conflicts above seem to justify the inability of Baxter to realize his utopian dream, his design of the utopia was intrinsically flawed. The next section and the
Nothingness and enrichment: poverty and aroha as utopian principles

This section focuses on the two principles of Baxter’s utopia: poverty and aroha. These two principles preconditioned, internalised, and incorporated the other doctrines and they also led to a contradiction. His utopia was not only challenged by external factors but was also inherently problematic and paradoxical. As both poverty and aroha are complex and profound concepts in Baxter’s utopia, a closer look at their definition (primarily based on Baxter’s explanation), their implications and their historical contexts will support the analysis of the internal problems, contradictions and paradoxes that follows in the next section.

Baxter proposed two central pillars of his utopianism in a prose piece entitled “A Letter to the Catholic Bishops of New Zealand” (1968): “Two central ideas were linked —poverty (somewhat of the Franciscan kind) and aroha, which then seemed to me to be the Humanity of Our Lord” (2015c, 4:362–63). Based on these two central ideas, Baxter later made two drawings to visually explain these ideas and how they should be implemented in daily living in Jerusalem. They were found in a 1970 copy of Jerusalem Sonnets owned by Kendrick Smithyman (W. H. Oliver 1994, 131). His first drawing (see figure 7) had the shape of a left hand. The inscription on the fingers reads:

To share one’s goods
To speak the truth, not hiding one’s heart from others
To love one another and show it by the embrace
To take no job where one has to lick the boss’s arse
[on the thumb, which indicates its prime importance in Baxter’s utopia]
To learn from the Maori side of the fence
[on the palm] When these things are done, the soul rises to the surface of the friend’s face, like a fish to the surface of the water, and the soul is always beautiful.
When Maori and pakeha do these things together, the double rainbow begins to shine.
(W. H. Oliver 1994, 130)
Seemingly to elaborate on what should be learnt from the Māori side, on the second picture (similar to the outline of a fern frond), Baxter wrote: aroha (“love”), korero
("talking together"), *mahi* ("work"), *kotahitanga* ("unity"), *tangi* ("communal lamenting"), and *matewa* ("the night life of the soul"). At the bottom, he wrote in Māori: "Ka whakaiti taku mana, ka whakanui te aroha" which means: "When I begin to see how little I matter, then I begin to learn about love." (W. H. Oliver 1994, 131) Later he offered an abridged version of the five spiritual aspects of Māori communal life in *Jerusalem Daybook*. Baxter explained that these five aspects were supposed to be guiding principles for ngā mōkai and the community should live by:

- arohanui: the Love of the Many;
- manuhiritanga: hospitality to the guest and the stranger;
- korero: speech that begets peace and understanding;
- matewa: the night life of the soul;
- *mahi* (work undertaken from communal love) (1971a, 54).

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4 The Māori translations of these terms were taken from W. H. Oliver’s biographical account of Baxter (1994, 130–31). It is worth noticing that matewa is not a common term in Māori and it is not clear where Baxter learnt this word from. In *Jerusalem Daybook*, Baxter translated matewa as "the night life of the soul" (1971a, 54). The list of Māori words in the same book, however, defined matewa as "what comes towards us" (1971a, 58). According to Baxter, the term refers to "the area of Maori thought and feeling that lies at the edge of reason" (2015d, 264).
The first drawing primarily concerns itself with a willing spirit of sharing, which, in Baxter’s own words, is equal to “a spirit of poverty, that is, a spirit of detachment” (1971b, 1). Baxter time and again emphasised the importance of this spirit: “Poverty is the actual answer” (1971b, 16); and, “Communities cannot be founded without a spirit of poverty, that is, a spirit of detachment that expresses itself in the sharing of material and mental possessions” (1971b, 1). It is clear that Baxterian poverty is applicable at two levels: material and mental. Materially, it means to “to do without everything you can do without—shoes, a barber, a house of your own, a fire to sit at, a desk to write at, some varieties of food and occasionally all food, the approval of your neighbours, your own certainty of being in the right” (1971b, 16). Mental poverty refers to a voluntary detachment from possessions and an availability or openness to sharing anything: pain, anxiety, fear, joy or peace. By making oneself poor, Baxter argues that one will reconnect to one’s neighbours (in Jerusalem’s case, the Māori) and to Te Wairua Tapu (the Holy Spirit). He declared: “Poverty. Poverty. Poverty is the door broken in the wall between man and man and man and God. … Our offence is to fail to be poor—that is, to be what we are” (2015b, 3:447). This poverty principle, therefore, comprises two restorative dimensions, which resemble that of a crucifix: a horizontal interpersonal relationship and a vertical religious affinity between Creator and creature. Baxter believed that, by adhering to the spirit of poverty, all conflicts and competitions regarding possession and property could be avoided.

There are three kinds of people whom Baxter considers qualified disciples to practice this poverty principle in life: ngā pōhara: the poor; ngā mōkai: the fatherless, and ngā raukore: those who are like trees that have had their leaves and branches stripped away (1971a, 21). The third group is the most ambiguously defined yet clearly Baxter’s most treasured group. He believes that ngā raukore are “the blessing of God” (22) and “the fountain of the community” (ibid), and believed that they were the people “to whom God opens the Kingdom of Heaven” (21). Taking this into consideration, whereas Newton primarily interprets the third group as the mentally damaged or disturbed (2009, 57), I believe that it is far more encompassing. It includes all people who are stripped by their society of vitality and vigour. In Baxter’s case, it would include all the marginalised, the oppressed, the victimised, the forgotten, and most importantly, the youth whose hopes Baxter believed were dashed by society. He had particular concerns about the devastating effects of barren suburban life on the youth, who opted for drug-taking to fill the emotional and spiritual void. Motivated by a desire
to help dysfunctional young people, Baxter proposed the idea of “selfless collectives,” an alternative version of the famous strength-through-unity slogan. He contended that ultimate individuality can only be achieved with a communal spirit moving from (firstly) “Us” to (finally) “God”: “In a community, I becomes Us. God became Us to share our destitution. When I becomes Us, we are joined to God in a hidden fashion, and persons are more themselves, not less themselves.” (1971a, 7) The significance of the selfless collectives appeared to be deeply moral, as Baxter concluded that they led to an absolute yet fruitful void, Wāhi Ngaro (a hidden realm or heavens inhabited by gods and spirits), out of which all things, including “the right response” (2015b, 3:515), would flow.

Achieving morality through poverty is hardly a new idea. What distinguishes Baxter’s poverty principle is its amalgam of various religious, cultural and ideological sources. Baxter’s wife Jacqueline Sturm, a Māori herself, had long been a medium for him to learn about the injustices Māori people faced in a Pākehā-dominated society (Millar 2005). She pointed out, however, that Baxter’s visiting Asia, especially India, in 1958 gave him the first-hand experience of being a minority in society and had a huge impact on his social activism. The physical scarcity and the mental richness of the Indians helped him shape in his imagination a similar community to challenge and contrast with the affluent and spiritually-dead Pākehā. When he proposed poverty and aroha as the central ideas, the Franciscans within the Catholic Church were one inspirational source. But there was a smidgen of Māori religion/spirituality, Hinduism, Buddhism, and even Marxist communism (which he denied) in his utopian mix. In his pilgrimage along the road of poverty, Baxter modelled himself on Christ. But this Christ was Māori, who, as shown in his poem “The Māori Jesus” (1995, 347–48), walks on Wellington Harbour, wearing blue dungarees, with a long beard and long hair. Baxter’s visit to India as a UNESCO fellow also introduced the idea of communal love into his utopia, as Baxter witnessed how spiritual communality was capable of flowering even in extremely impoverished living conditions (W. H. Oliver 1994, 81–82). In a draft of Autumn Testament, he questioned: “Is a culture less self-destructive if it drives people mad than another poorer culture that lets them die of hunger in the streets?” (2015b, 3:417) This Indian experience led him to reflect on the true meaning of poverty and the potential of shifting attention from material prosperity to mental or spiritual exuberance.

In his writings, while insisting that Christ on the cross offered the perfect example of poverty, Baxter expressed his belief that Buddhism, Hinduism, and even Taoism were capable of guiding their followers to achieve detachment from material
goods (2015b, 3:242). However, when Baxter observed how his Buddhist drum-player friend Trix opened his door to whoever needed a place to crash (2015b, 3:550), he confessed that Trix taught him the joy of poverty and that “From him I learnt nearly anything I know about the meaning of poverty” (2015b, 3:550). Inventing a cross-religious trinity, Baxter hoped this would empower his utopia to break free from an oppressive society:

Buddha Krishna Christ in one, making their own scene, smashing the wall of the dungeon …
(“Ballad of the Junkies and the Fuzz (for Hoani) 7,” 1969; 1995, 445)

Baxter insisted that Jerusalem’s communal spirit was different from that of Marxism but his distinction was vague. In a half-mocking, half-relieved tone, he wrote: “Under the cold high stars here at Jerusalem it is not easy to recall the mood of rage and rock-bottom frustration that led me, in the town, to think for several months that I was becoming Marxist” (1972, 5). But when he was honest, he admitted to the power of Marxism to solve the problems the world was dealing with:

The answer to the problem of world destitution lies probably in the hands of the Marxists, because only the Marxists have exhibited the sacrificial perseverance necessary to solve it. In whose hands do the solution of our own problems lie? At times even in this country a Marxist approach has seemed to me the only one that possesses the necessary cutting edge.
(2015b, 3:417)

Of course, Baxter’s interpretation of Marxism was rather idiosyncratic. But what he hoped to find in “a Marxist approach” was its analytical and critical power in dissecting the disparity between classes and the indifference to that disparity among the complacent middle-class. In Baxter’s eyes, New Zealand society in the 1960s and the 1970s was terminally ill: “money, adulation, health, ease, unrestricted sexual satisfaction, good clothes, good lodging” (2015b, 3:18) replaced God and produced money-thirsty and power-hungry citizens who were no longer capable of compassion and love. The disparity between the haves and the have-nots cut the society in half, and the government were complicit in exploiting the powerless. When Baxter turned to religion, the disillusionment was even greater. He found that church leaders preferred to focus on a self-imposed duty to maintain a high standard of living in order to attract the affluent bourgeoisie to their churches (2015e, 2:557–58). So much importance was attached to material possessions that the pursuit of wealth and influence made the cities
“cold as iron” (1980, 555). In advocating poverty, Baxter hoped to revolt against the society’s capitalistic and materialistic acquisitiveness and to establish an egalitarian, undifferentiated community that honoured each and every one of its members.

Baxter insisted that the implementation of his utopian principle of poverty must be both visible and voluntary. His drastic self-fashioning in the Jerusalem years became his most vivid public image: a modern version of John the Baptist. I should point out that this visibility of poverty served a special function in Jerusalem. Poverty was the tribal uniform of ngā mōkai: the worn-out clothes, the bare feet, the untidy look, and the celebration of the minimalistic aesthetics of doing without whatever one can do without. It was how the outsiders recognised a potential ngā mōkai, how ngā mōkai and Baxter formed a visual bond of community, and how a form of writing of the body turned into a form of example, or more precisely a counter-example to and mockery of the elite urban dress code. This visible poverty was thus a visual sign sent to like-minded comrades, a provocation to a hostile society, and also a Judith Butlerian bodily inscription of performative subversion, though from a cultural and class rather than a gendered perspective (Butler 2006, 175–93).

Voluntariness, on the other hand, was about giving up possessions and being willing to share all wealth with the tribe. For one to be voluntarily poor, aroha, the second utopian principle, is called for. Baxter further explained that mere possession is not a sin, but to possess and not to share is. Baxter struggled to be consistent when he used the term aroha as the word is so inclusive in meaning: “to show affection to one another, to be tolerant, to help people out of their hang-ups” (2015b, 3:397). But this inconsistency serves Baxter’s argument well. In fact, the Māori words that Baxter uses in relation to communality have a more profound meaning. Aroha, though usually translated as “love,” is inclusive of compassion, empathy, and affection. Baxter believed that it could heal the underlying wounds caused by the country’s traumatic colonial past, which led to the exploitation of the marginalised poor, the corruption of the political system, the hypocrisy of the churches, and above all, the deprivation of Māori culture.

Poverty and aroha, therefore, were mutually dependent. Only those who understood the true meaning of aroha were able to share their possessions without prejudice, and the blessed impoverished ones were more capable of embracing and practising aroha. Therefore, the implication of the poverty principle had a specific racial dimension. Māori people are, in Baxter’s eyes, the example to follow: “the Maori people, having suffered poverty and humiliation themselves, are commonly merciful to
the wounds of the poor, whether the poverty is material or psychological” (2015b, 3:434). Baxter suggested that the Pākehā is te teina, the younger brother or sister, blinded by his or her culture’s material dominance, arrogance and ethnocentrism, who is ignorant of their own spiritual impoverishment and insensitive to the richness of te tuakana, the older brother or sister; in this case, the Māori (Newton 2009, 11). Unless the younger brother or sister were willing to bow their head, inequality in society would remain unchallenged, and both parties would be widely divided but equally unhappy. Worse still, the materially rich, apathetic Pākehā-dominated society, Baxter argued, was blind to its own unhappiness and indifferent to the suffering of its fellow members. Aroha was the Baxterian answer to the perennial Pākehā problem: the Pākehā descendants’ strong sense of isolation and separation in New Zealand. Baxter observed in 1969 that:

The Kiwi is indeed a stranger in paradise. … solitary Adams … relearning the nature of the Fall by gazing at the beautiful forbidden face of the earthly paradise, which we can indeed enter, but never possess, because we are alienated from it and from ourselves … Sometimes the paradise is not solitary. In a hundred novels and a thousand poems New Zealand writers construct it in memory and people it with a fictitious unfallen couple. … We cannot escape some knowledge of its presence and condemnation … The commonest escape route is to become Utopians. Utopias are man-made constructions, imagined heavens which always turn out to be new jails. The earthly paradise, on the other hand, was made by God for man to live in; … some of us—and especially the young—become aware of its true nature and suffer its condemnation and begin a lifelong revolt against the horror of expected Utopia. The paradise is real, though we are not fit to inhabit it; and this is the cause equally of our sorrow and our joy. (2015b, 3:47–48)

This passage presents Baxter’s self-reasoning for the aroha principle. From Baxter’s point of view, Pākehā New Zealanders face an awkward double alienation: they are unable to establish a bond with the land as the Māori do, and yet they are no longer part of the European environment which was held so dearly by their ancestors. The Fall has a dual interpretation here: it could either refer to the familiar Genesis story or it may point to the colonisation history of New Zealand when fallen Adams and Eves (Baxter’s ancestors as the colonisers) brought condemnation to the earthly paradise. He argued elsewhere that colonialism and money-worshipping capitalism generated pain for the colonised and alienation for the coloniser (2015b, 3:431–38). This agonising and inescapable condemnation authorises a process of relearning. Baxter’s envisaged
relearning process provides an antidote to the segregation caused by colonial and capitalistic ideologies.

Aroha achieved through poverty provided a model for achieving individuality through communality. Baxter relied on the poverty principle to achieve a vague, ideological sense of boundary (and thus a form of isolation) and the aroha principle to form a new union (which enabled a new communal or tribal living style). In Jerusalem, the aroha principle united a new tribe not defined by consanguinity. Believing that the modern nuclear family in a capitalistic society failed people as it did not allow “many strong relationships outside (one’s) own family” (2015b, 3:172), Baxter used the Māori concept aroha and gave it a broader meaning, which reached far beyond its original cultural realm. It referred to the ideal and nourishing communal love that exists also in South-East Asia and many other societies or communities that embrace the strong sense of connectedness and unity. The two principles do not work in perfect synergy (though Baxter stayed optimistic in this regard), but rather in paradoxical tension, and it is to this tension that I now turn.

The cure for being human: conflicts and paradoxes

With confidence, Baxter asserted in Jerusalem Daybook: “The main problems of the Jerusalem community are not community problems. … All our main problems come from outside.” (1971a, 24) Such problems have been analysed carefully in this chapter. This section, however, argues that there were also conflicts within the community itself and that Baxter’s utopianism was innately paradoxical.

On a materialistic level, his poverty mission was hardly practical and the open-door policy made self-sufficiency for the community less likely. Theft was a reality that Baxter had to deal with often in the communal life and he confessed of some members that:

They are attracted by poverty but cannot persevere. … They have eaten the poisoned fruit of materialism from the time they began to see and speak. Only God can cure them. I can’t. (2015b, 3:280)

Most of the community’s cash income came from Baxter’s personal earnings (Newton 2009, 70). He worked hard publishing books, doing speech tours, and raising funds to support the community financially (70). The community also received donations and relied on the kindness and charity of others, including the Catholic sisters, local Māori neighbours and sometimes, visitors (McKay 1992, 269; Newton 2009, 57). Ngā mōkai
also tried to provide for themselves by gardening and hunting wild goats on the Whanganui river, but the yield of the land was far from constant or stable (Newton 2009, 70). When resources got scanty, unpleasant and dystopian features began to emerge. Hunger followed at the community’s heels and the question “what shall we have for the next meal?” always dominated the discussion of ngā mōkai. As a former member, Mike Minehan recalled: “You’ll eat anything after a while, even a stew with fatty coagulated goat hair floating on top. You’ll smoke anything too including the roots of prickly lettuce and mint.” (2002, 26) Hunger and poverty drove some ngā mōkai to steal. A well-known commune identity, ‘C,’ emptied the meat-safe, which was used to keep mutton for the presbytery of Father Te Awhitu. Chrissie Zurcher, in an interview with Newton, confessed stealing and smoking hand-rolled cigarettes from Father Te Awhiti when doing housework for him (Newton 2009, 57). Baxter himself was not exempt. He admitted that he once thought about hiding the rest of the cigarettes from his ngā mōkai so that he could enjoy them alone, an act which he defined as “a severe breach of the spirit of poverty” (2015b, 3:476).

That was not the only breach of this spirit. Baxter’s battle against his fame and cultural recognition for his powers as a poet and leader through self-abnegation proved rather fruitless; so much so that he lamented: “One cannot yet be entirely poor. That is where the pain lies.” (1971a, 23) His failure to become mentally poor was the result of media coverage of the Jerusalem community combined with his own reluctance to refuse public exposure for his social activism. Baxter was caught in a dilemma: for his “good cell” mission and his advocacy of the aroha principle, he could not afford to withdraw himself completely from the media, nor could he shut the door to people who were potentially interested in joining the community. Baxter expected Jerusalem to be a healthy counter-example for a sick system infested by self-interested materialistic acquisitiveness. Consequently, there was a social obligation to display the community to send out the message—not only to Baxter’s usual readers and supporters but also to a third audience, an interested and bewildered New Zealand public. The problem was that most stories and images of the community, in Newton’s observation, “focused almost exclusively on Baxter himself” (2009, 12). The most symptomatic case was “a larger-than-lifesize colour photo-portrait of Baxter on the cover, and a further extravagant photospread inside” (66) that accompanied a story on the community in the New Zealand Weekly News (Dykes 1971). This avid attention to Baxter consolidated the public’s perception of his status as a well-recognised literary writer turned the hippie
guru. The more people the Jerusalem story reached, the more influence and fame Baxter enjoyed, and the more impossible it was for him to stay faithful to his poverty principle.

There were also moments when Baxter violated his aroha principle. When interviewed by reporters from *The Listener*, Baxter suggested that “the problem [of society] cannot be solved by any intellectual diagram. It can only be solved by loving” (Baxter 1971b, 13). On the surface, what Baxter promoted was an unconditional, egalitarian love between the Jerusalem members in which all would be respected equally for their freedom and individuality. The open-door policy could be viewed as an implementation of this non-judgemental love. But in fact, Jerusalem had its rules (a textual example would be “A Cast-Iron Programme” (1971a, 11–12) that I quoted from earlier in this chapter) and Baxter, despite his suggestion that he was not different from any other member, enjoyed an authoritative position in Jerusalem as the creator and executive officer of such rules. One of the most obvious rules discouraged drug-taking (Newton 2009, 74), though Baxter seemed to have a higher tolerance for people’s use of marijuana than for what he believed to be the more harmful LSD (McKay 1992, 262). Out of respect, understanding or appreciation, most tribe members accepted Baxter’s moral stance in this matter (some were even encouraged to throw away their medications prescribed to treat mental illnesses). Many of the residents fought battles against their addictions on the site, however, both marijuana and LSD were in fact used in the community (Newton 2009, 74). In one case, a persuasive Californian drug guru known as Gridley Wright was asked by Baxter to leave the community because he freely supplied LSD to other members (2009, 75–76). To allow the presence of a young man with plenty of drugs to hand out would certainly challenge Baxter’s anti-drug message and possibly threaten his authority. Either way, Baxter quickly got rid of the challenger by threatening to call the police to identify him as a drug dealer (2009, 75–76). When the man left the community, the unity of the tribe was damaged and at least one young female member left with him (ibid).

Another clash between Baxter’s opinions and the freedom of ngā mōkai was caused by the issue of nudity. It was recorded that Baxter once came across a young naked female member doing gardening work (McKay 1992, 261). After commenting that she reminded him of the innocent Eve working in Eden, Baxter told her that her nudity might cause trouble if seen by the Māori neighbours; she then took his advice and retreated into the house on that day (ibid).

These conflicts within the community reveal the fundamental paradox within Baxter’s utopianism. Baxter’s proposed transformative self-negation (as regarded
mental possession) only further underscored his authority, but the utopia lived off precisely this mental possession, not only as a chief source of its monetary income but also as a supply of support. To fully impoverish Baxter would cause the utopian dream to end, yet to continue the dream would mean, once again, adding to his social status, influence and authority. Moreover, his other principle of love and respect of individual freedom led to the predicament of choosing between the individual and the collective. The unlimited power of the individual can and will (as shown by the cases I discuss in this chapter) infringe on the rights of others and threaten the unity of the collective. But for a community to function properly, a certain level of conformity is needed. Therefore, no individual could act freely according to their will. Having both an individual and a communal will in one utopia would be incompatible.

This chapter has discussed how Baxter’s utopianism reacted against the deeply problematic racism caused by the colonial history of New Zealand and the materialistic acquisitiveness of capitalistic society. By rejecting the established and the powerful, Baxter’s utopianism strongly echoed the global counterculture movement in the 1960s and 1970s. His personal experiences in Asia, his religious background in Catholicism, his experiment with the communal living project in Auckland, and his knowledge of Māori spirituality, Buddhism, Hinduism and Marxism (despite his insufficient understanding of these sources) were combined in founding the bicultural Jerusalem community. Thus, Baxter’s utopia is a site of cross-cultural encounters of multiple cultural, religious and political influences. Baxter attempted to bridge the divide between Pākehā and Māori by gathering a new tribe that celebrated poverty and aroha. However, the community was beset by challenges from the outside, conflicts within the community, and the fundamental logical paradox of Baxter’s utopianism. Baxter’s social mission of being “a good cell” failed. The next chapter investigates how similar tensions, conflicts, contradictions and paradoxes also shaped the writing of his poetic utopia.
One writes telling me I am her guiding light
And my poems her bible
   —JAMES K. BAXTER, “Jerusalem Sonnet 11”

We enter a moment where it’s no longer possible to talk about him without addressing the ways that he thinks and writes about women.
   —JOHN NEWTON, “James K Baxter, Rapist”

In contradiction … I was born.
   —JAMES K. BAXTER, “Home Thoughts”

The Jerusalem community relied on the principles of poverty and aroha. Similarly, Baxter’s literary utopia embraced a poetics of poverty. This chapter will show that Baxter’s efforts to rid himself of his poetic riches is also equally paradoxical. His renouncing of poetry and poetic fame turns out to be poetic assertions of self-abnegation. The paradox penetrates every element of his poetics of poverty, from his attempted linguistic intermarriage between Māori and English, to his use of profanity and coarseness, to his suggested equality in gender and power in his textual utopia. This poetic paradox is similar in form to the one in real life. As we have seen in the previous chapter, Baxter’s utopian community and poetic utopia are intimately connected components of his utopianism, and both are haunted by the same authorial paradox, which leads to multiple contradictions and problems. I should point out at the outset, however, that my analysis does not reduce Baxter’s writings to indexical notes to his
sexual abuse of his wife and alleged assault of other women. While I will address the overlap between Baxter’s poetic depiction of female figures and his mistreatment of the women in his life, my chief purpose remains to show that the inconsistent, ambiguous and problematic portrayal of women in Baxter’s poetry should be understood as part of his fundamentally paradoxical utopianism.

This chapter focuses primarily on Baxter’s poems of the Jerusalem period (1969–1972), most of which are collected in the Jerusalem Sonnets (1970), Jerusalem Daybook (1971), and Autumn Testament (1972). Where relevant, however, the analysis also draws on some of his earlier poems to illuminate his poetic utopianism. Baxter both builds on the identity anxiety and sense of unsettlement promoted by critical nationalists such as Allen Curnow yet also revives the utopian settler alternative based on a romanticized view of the union between Māori and Pākehā settlers. A close reading of Baxter’s poems reveals the centrality of poverty to his poetic theory and practice. Baxter’s poetic utopia is congenitally flawed, marked by an overarching poetic paradox, multiple contradictions, and the deleterious gender problem. This chapter debunks Baxter’s self-styled myth that his utopian dream was overcome by reality and shows that the disruptive forces were written in every fabric of his poetic paradise from its inception.

Unsettling paradise

Baxter’s effort to bring Māori and Pākehā together is partly a response to what Alex Calder calls the “unsettling” of “settlement” (1998, 165) and of Pākehā identity in the work of critical nationalist modernist writers. Among such writers, Robin Hyde, drawing on her experience in war-ravaged China in 1938, reflected on Māori-Pākehā relations (Hyde 1991, 119). This concern can be clearly seen in her work in the 1930s, among which “Prayer for a New People” is a prominent example (Hyde 1991, 83–144). The more symptomatic poem of the anxiety is “The Islands” (1939) by Charles Brasch. The poem portrays New Zealand as a land of unsettlement:

Always, in these islands, meeting and parting
Shake us, making tremulous the salt-rimmed air;
Divided and perplexed the sea is waiting,
Birds and fishes visit and disappear.

... Everywhere in light and calm murmuring
Shadow of departure; distance looks our way
And none knows where he will lie down at night.

(1987, 57)
Inward anxiety is reflected in this poem’s external environment: the islands, the air, the sea, birds, fishes, and the ships all are in movement, conveying a sense of unsettling angst. The familiar landscape of the country no longer offers comfort or promises prosperity as it did for the European-New Zealand settlers. In all aspects of the environment depicted by the poem, there lurks a sense of danger, which peaks in the last line “none knows where he will lie down at night”, uniting the outward motion with emotional insecurity. The uneasiness is personal (the singular pronoun “he”) but also communal and representative (“none knows”). Brasch’s poem reflects the endemic concern of Pākehā writers in New Zealand, who gradually realised that they were no longer closely associated with the British empire yet were struggling to form a sophisticated sense of independent cultural nationhood. Some major literary figures of the 1930s, including poets Allen Curnow, A.R.D. Fairburn, and Denis Glover, started to look at the issue seriously and voiced a reaction against established ideas and conventions. These poets attacked the simplistic and utopian romanticising of the country and recognised the persisting and vexing problem in New Zealand history, yet did not attribute this to the pain and injustice inflicted on Māori by the colonial history.

In contrast, Baxter also revives the utopian settler alternative based on a romanticised view of Māori and their union with European settlers. Baxter’s poetry diagnoses colonialism as the cause of Pākehā pain and for the darkness into which it thrust their Māori brothers. He seeks to create an inverted hierarchy in his poetry: to learn from Māori as the wise elder brother he believed they are. Even though he inherits from his ancestors an optimism in establishing a utopia in New Zealand, Baxter has a different view of the land and its relation with the New Zealanders. Observing his ancestral path, he writes:

Gaelic-speaking men and women, descending with their bullock days and baggage to cross the mouth of what is now the Brighton river; near to sunset, when the black and red of the sky intimated a new thing, a radical loss and a radical beginning; and the earth lay before them, for that one moment of history, as primitive and sacred Bride, unentered and unexploited. (2015e, 2:131)

The land-bride metaphor has very clear sexual connotations. Baxter portrays the earth as a submissive bride, who can only passively wait to be entered and exploited. This differentiation of sex roles strongly suggests male dominance and gender inequality within this colonising logic. Pressured by economic concerns, Baxter’s ancestors, the
Scottish settlers to New Zealand, who also suffered as the colonised and lost their land and language to the English, were strongly motivated by a pursuit for a better domestic life. While they hoped that the opportunity to own a piece of land of their own in New Zealand would open up vast economic opportunity to realise their utopian dream, they nonetheless repeated the same kind of painful colonisation process that they themselves went through, although this time as the perpetrator of colonial violence rather than the victim of it. Baxter recognises that the Māori connection with the land was much more profound than a simplistic use in the form of exploitation: the earth is the mother of the Māori, not a “primitive and sacred Bride” waiting to be “entered” by its colonisers. To ease the Māori ancestors’ anger, Baxter in “Sestina of the Makutu” (1972) imagines an acceptance of Māori revenge for past wrongs:

I know the axe  
Of the makutu was made in a yard  
Where warriors drank black water before this  

For their mother the land.  

...  

Blood swallowed by the sand  
Rises again out of the sand.  
On an old pakeha’s head let this  
Makutu break its axe  
(Baxter 1995, 590–91)

The poem is dedicated to Makutu, which means “magic,” “sorcery,” or a specific “spell” or “curse.” It not only recognises the colonial past of New Zealand as a bloody act but also seeks to reverse the violence by a humbling and meek acceptance of Māori anger. In this regard, Baxter, like the 1930s nationalists, also invents a new cultural identity through his poetic writings. A compassionate Pākehā who is dedicated to reinventing the colonial past of bloodshed, brutality, and violence.

It is important to note that Baxter is not interested in a self-styled New Zealandness, but a poetic utopianism that is bilingual and bicultural. Baxter suggests that the nationalists had shunned the pressing sociological themes to write “more readily of mountains than of marriage” (1951, 7). Baxter’s poetic marriage of Māori and Pākehā seeks to turn round “the wheel of history”(2015b, 3:269) by intending to reverse the direction of assimilation and its racial hierarchy in the Pākehā-dominated society. Māori are now the teachers of fellow Pākehā who, through learning from the Māori worldview, are re-accepted into the tribe. Again, Baxter argues that identifying with the
Māori people is done either by marriage or by friendship, in which case Baxter himself believes that through “writing” and “example” he practices both.

Baxter believes that when Pākehā society laid down its pride to embrace Māori tribal identity, the colonial malaise that haunted the country would cease. His use of Māori culture to reinvigorate New Zealand poetry follows the pioneering efforts of Māori poets such as Hone Tūwhare, who proposed a qualitatively different perspective to make New Zealand poetry new by drawing on Māori culture (Tūwhare 2014, 335–52). Baxter’s turn to Māori culture echoes the approach of modernist poets such as Ezra Pound (Pound 1934). When Pound combined Christian influences with his rendering of the systemic perfection embodied in Da Xue (The Great Learning), a canonical Chinese text of Confucianism, he proposed a model of poetic renewal through dynamic cross-cultural exchanges (Sun 2003). Like many other modernist poets, Pound rejected monocultural and Eurocentric views by attempting to take poetry, in Charles Bernstein’s adaptation of Charles Olson’s words, “out of the Western Box” (1992, 205). But Olson believed that Pound, despite his cross-cultural poetics, was still trapped in the Western Box. Olson hoped to escape this box by looking to the Mayan culture.

According to Bernstein, Olson’s effort represented a comparative, cross-cultural turn in English-language poetry (J. Edmond 2012, 166). The proponents of this turn embrace multiculturalism to challenge a homogeneous Western tradition. The escape routes they take are thus often to another culture with a long history that is less familiar to a Western audience. In the same manner, Jerome Rothenberg’s concept of “ethnopoetics” (1968) and its critical attention to the world-creating potentials in languages (Rothenberg 1985) justify what Baxter adopts in his utopian poetry: a cross-cultural, spatial, and comparative method. But as Edmond rightly notes, such comparative method is not excused from anxiety to differentiate itself from the antecedent homogenising imperialism or colonialism that it resists (J. Edmond 2012, 165–71).

Baxter’s apparent abnegation of Pākehā culture in favour of Māori culture, in fact, turns out to be a more subtle form of Pākehā colonisation and further continues the logic of male dominance. Similarly, as we will see, Baxter’s poetics of poverty and self-abnegation instead became a reassertion of his poetic riches and authority.

The poetics of poverty

Baxter’s poetry in the Jerusalem years is governed by a poetics of poverty, which comprises an estrangement from the Pākehā identity and a rejection of his status and abilities as a poet. Baxter suggests that the final destination of his self-abnegating
journey is self-annihilation: James K. Baxter would become *Hemi te tūtūā* (James the nobody, tūtūā means low-born or common). Baxter’s utopian poems register a struggle for self-abnegation. As a result, these poems are intensively private, intimate and (sometimes unpleasantly) candid. While some of his poems irritated critics, such as C. K. Stead, who disapproved of the self-consciousness, iteration, narcissism and sentimentalism that they effuse (Stead 1973), other poems were deemed the best fruits of his poetic creativity (Manhire 1981; Simpson 1981). Stead himself also spoke appreciatively of what he believed to be Baxter’s final abandonment of his Romantic inclination during this period (Stead 1973). In fact, Baxter’s poems have a clear mission: guiding Pākehā to the poetic utopia that he proposed. With unabashed bluntness, Baxter denounces Pākehā dominance through a conflation of Māori and English and counterbalances his poetic fame with profanity and coarseness, resulting in a Baxterian mishmash of register, form and content. These elements are crucial to Baxter’s poetics of poverty, which is manifested in the two representative poems of his poetic utopianism: “Ballad of the Junkies and the Fuzz” (1969), and the sonnet sequence “The Moon and the Chestnut Tree” from *Jerusalem Daybook* (1971a, 17–18).

“Ballad of the Junkies and the Fuzz 11” offers a starting point to understand Baxter’s poetic utopianism. This poem is an overture to Baxter’s utopian dream. Here Baxter mingles his past as an alcoholic, his empathy with the drug addicts, his shift in religious belief (his baptism as a Catholic and later conversion to Roman Catholicism in 1958), and his role as a social critic. Baxter’s past and present come together and start to merge in this poem. Baxter employs a traditional plot-driven ballad form to introduce the two major (groups of) characters in this story: the junkies (drug users) and the fuzz (the police). Each stanza in the poem captures a scene or a crucial moment in the trail of events. Baxter’s poetic voice speaks throughout stanzas, working together with stresses and rhyming to create a sense of emotional urgency that targets the heart of the readers, and guides them by revealing what tragedy will befall the junkies: they will be tossed into the bin (loony bin, a mental hospital) or the clink (slang for prison) so that the middle-class men could feel safe and sleep at night. Almost inevitably, readers are persuaded to sympathize with the underdogs (junkies) who dwell and find shelter in darkness and are relentlessly hunted down and persecuted by the fuzz “with torches and full bellies” (“Ballad of the Junkies and the Fuzz 2”). In this series of ballads, Baxter puts himself in opposition to the educated and the bureaucrats, and the ballad allows him to become a popular poet that tells stories in simple, lively, and lucid language. The message this poem carries is so clear that it cannot be misunderstood: “us each are
persons and capable of love” (“Ballad for the Junkies and the Fuzz 11”). The junkies represent the marginalised, the despised, and the rejected: the homeless, the jobless, and the poor. In short, they are people with no possessions. The fuzz, along with the judges, the wealthy, and the middle-class, are a symbol of the establishment that Baxter rebels against. The two, the have and the have-nots, co-exist in one place (Auckland). To invite readers into the unknown “underworld” of metropolitan Auckland where junkies and the middle-class coexist, Baxter starts with a depiction of the night-life of the two parties:

Ballad of the Junkies and the Fuzz (for Hoani)

1

Oh star I do not believe in, speak to me!
Star of the harbour night, wave after wave rising and falling
Under the bows of the Devonport ferry that carries a cargo of people home to their well-lit prisons,
Boys half lushed and girls in jeans or party dresses, older men looking vacantly at the black waves, women who do not show their souls in their eyes—
Star I do not believe in, shining also
In the rickety streets of Grafton where many gather
In a single house, sharing the kai, sharing the pain, sharing the drug perhaps, sharing the paranoia;
Bearded, barefoot or sandalled, coming out crippled from the bin or the clink.
(The windows painted black; yet the black paint was scraped off again)—
In order that the junkie rock may crack and flow with water
And the rainbow of aroha shine on each one’s face
Because love is in the look, stronger than lush, and truth is in the mouth, better than kai—
Rain down your light, oh star of paradise!
(1969; 1995, 442)

The first poem of the collection introduces the junkies and the middle-class. In the first stanza, the passengers on the ferry, boys, girls, men, and women, have booze to drink (half lushed), clothes to wear (jeans or party dresses), money to buy the ferry tickets that get them home, but they, in fact, are soulless bodies trapped in the modern, capitalistic, and materialistic society. Without the awareness of their mental poverty, they take a vacant look at their environment and are ignorant of the fact that they are merely prisoners in the game of pursuing materialistic complacency. The deprived junkies, who just come out of the prisons or the mental hospitals (the clink and the bin), seemingly
somehow manage to escape the snare and the curse of the soul but suffer for a different cause. By repeating "sharing" for four times in a single line in the second stanza, Baxter allocates to these junkies a rather unconventional trait: compassion. They allow each other access to both the materialistic possessions (kai, which means food; and drugs) and express sympathy for each other’s sufferings. They gather together in darkness, crippled and paranoid, to clear the wounds caused by painful mistreatment of the fuzz and the judges, and to comfort each other in the time of uncertainty: all they have is a rickety roof above their heads.

Nonetheless, Baxter hints at the possibility of a reconciliation between the two. They do share things in common: the boys have the booze while the junkies share the drugs. Booze and drugs are only tools that they employ to escape from oppressive reality. It should be noted, however, that even though Baxter sympathetically discusses the situation that these junkies are facing, he believes that both need to be set free, from either their self-made snares (materialistic possession) or the traps society sets for them (fear and sense of inferiority). Baxter argues that neither party is capable of providing the cure. As a result, he suggests that the star is the external source of enlightenment. The star, which appears three times in the poem, continues to be the object of Baxter’s communication through the majority of the other ten ballads. It is a star that is capable of giving Baxter the instruction that he longs for and providing a means of salvation for both the middle-class and the junkies. Baxter confesses that he does not believe in this star of paradise, yet gradually he comes to realise his need for the star’s wisdom, and finally, he arrives at the conclusion that the star has the power to “rain down light” from above that could expel the mental hollowness that haunts the middle class and the fear that dwells in the hearts of the junkies.

This poem can be read as a dramatic monologue in which Baxter explains the reasons why he resorts to the power of religion as a solution to the difficulty of uniting the two seemingly unconnected groups of people. In opposition to the artificial light (a symbol of modern civilization) in the first stanza (“well-lit prisons”), the star of paradise (a symbol of divine revelation) possess the power to offer an overwhelmingly spiritual catharsis (“rain down”) that cracks “the junkie rock” and lets the rainbow of aroha (love) shine on each one’s face. However, ambiguity in subjectivity is clearly at play here, and thus, it opens up multiple interpretations of the role of Baxter in such catharsis. It is clear that Baxter does not believe in the star; however, he is asking the star to speak to him and calling on the star to “rain down” light. Therefore, he is a medium and a catalyst in bridging the divided social groups, but also one caught in the
contradiction of believing and not believing. The poem is a clear indication of the contradictions at the heart of Baxter’s utopianism. His utopia can only exist through his self-abnegation (he must give up his doubt and cede his power to the “star”). Yet his vision of a utopia which would bridge class and racial divides depends precisely on his poetic sovereignty: on his ability to control the star to which he must defer.

Leaving Auckland for Jerusalem, Baxter further engaged the poetics of self-abnegation, but the tension between poetic authority and self-abnegation remains unsolved, if not deepened, in “The Moon and the Chestnut Tree”:

**The Moon and the Chestnut Tree**

1

The chestnuts that fall on the grass beside the community house
Have for protection a hedgehog bundle of spikes,

Green when young, brown when old, that pierce the naked foot
And make your fingers bleed when you tug them open

To get at the nut—the nut also can
Put slivers of shell under one’s fingernail,

And all this is appropriate. I tell my Catholic visitors
The chestnut explains to us our own religion

With the nut of love well hidden under spikes of fear
In case we become rash—call it God’s joke perhaps,

I can laugh at it even when the blood runs!
The chestnut, as it happens, can be eaten raw

But many prefer their nuts boiled for an hour or so
And served up with butter spread on the knife blade.

2

If that great boulder on the back of the pa
They call the church is ever to be shifted

It will take a delicate crowbar. Somebody said once,
‘It is time to drive the devil out of the pa’

And somebody replied, ‘It will take two generations
To make them Christian’—that boulder blocks the well

The Maoris call Te Whaea—not the blue and white
Lady of our adoration,
But a woman built like a tank (both senses of the word)
Who swears in English at the pakeha truckdriver

And says to me, stroking my beard gently,
‘I can’t help feeling sorry for you.’ Up at the wharepuni

She said, looking at new planks, ‘The old ones will be pleased,’
And broke with her heel the spiky chestnut shells.

3

The clear moon in a clear sky
Offers a kind of peace, after a day of visitors

Who wonder, ‘Will they be able to readjust
After this kind of life?’—or else,

‘Where do they sleep?’ Tame, Ria, Wehe,
Have taken their worries to Wanganui,

And the nuns are catechizing in another place;
The cops are asleep, I hope. So I go barefoot

Along the grass tracks below the church,
That shrine of hard work and cleanliness,

And say to the moon, ‘Mother, remember us,
Heal for us what we cannot bring together,

‘The bright and the dark, the vagrant and the Pharisee,
The pa’s love and the church’s law.’ My feet are very cold.
(1971a, 17–18)

The sonnet sequence, as indicated by its title, juxtaposes two worlds that are seemingly irrelevant or incompatible. The moon grants the poetic persona peace, and it is the subject to which the prayer in the final lines is dedicated. The chestnuts, on the other hand, symbolise the Catholic religion: love, being the core of them, is hidden underneath the spikes of fear, which inflict suffering on people’s hands and feet with their piercing shell slivers. The poem suggests that the right way of getting to the core of Catholic love underneath its spikes is to appeal to the Māori Te Whaea (The Mother, i.e., the Biblical Mary, Mother of God), who has the power to break the chestnut shells with her strong and powerful heels. However, many prefer not to eat the chestnuts raw. Rather, they boil them for an hour or so and serve them with butter and knife. Without a doubt, the latter method, sophisticated and genteel, kills the love inside the chestnuts,
leaving only an empty shell of spikes. The first sonnet attacks the hypocrisy of the bourgeoisie and mocks their pretentious faith in Catholicism.

In the second sonnet, Māori (Te Whaea) and the Pākehā (I) co-exist on the pā. The second sonnet is also the most ambiguous in the trio. Who is, indeed, the devil that should be “driven out of the pā”? A keen reader of Baxter’s poetry and prose of Jerusalem years, or anyone who has an understanding of his social mission might find an ostensible answer: the devil is the church, which represents the Pākehā settlers, who like the “great boulder” forcibly blocked Māori access to their land, Papatūānuku (the earth mother), and demonised their gods, driving them out. But reading the second sonnet alongside the first one seems to offer another probability that overthrows, or at least challenges, such an easy presumption. If Pākehā has lost the love inside, and the pā now has the love (last line) as embodied by the compassionate and powerful Mother figure, it would not be an exaggeration to say that Pākehā looks more like the devil now. In this perspective, line 3 to line 6 in the second sonnet imagines a reversed learning: that the Pākehā might spend two generations under the Māori Holy Mother’s guidance to become truly “Christian”. The ambiguity continues in line 12 with Te Whaea’s words: “I can’t help feeling sorry for you”. She could either be feeling sorry for the persona’s bleeding (line 11 in sonnet 1), or prophesying the difficulty of making others aware of the necessity of re-learning, or pitying him for his attempt to bring together the incompatible.

The third sonnet contains two sets of contrasts: The visitors’ worries of the everyday life of Jerusalem members at the beginning of the poem contrasted with the prayer for spiritual healing at the end. Three Māori locals are mentioned in this sonnet: Tame, possibly Tame Hemahema (2015b, 3:454, 502); Wehe, probably Wehe Wallace (2015b, 3:298); Ria, who only appears here in the Jerusalem Daybook, but reappears in “Autumn Testament 8” as the wife of Toro Poutini (1972, 18). A reasonable conjecture is that these three are mentioned here as representatives of Ngāti Hau who stand in opposition to the nuns and the cops, who are portrayed as unloving and unconcerned. Beneath the beguiling simplicity of its text, however, lies an interesting and profound argument: while the persona confessed his inability to bring peace and reconciliation to the two worlds, the two worlds stand side by side on equal ground in the lines. If the two tribes cohabit in the second sonnet in a somewhat uneasy manner (the Māori woman’s swearing at the Pākehā truckdriver in line 10; the tension between the pā and the church), here in the barefoot man’s humbling scene the competitive worlds make a truce. This poetics of poverty (in this case, a confession of the speaker’s powerlessness),
as revealed by the sonnet sequence, is achieved through the conflation of languages, the use of profanity and coarseness, and a mixed use of form, content, and register. These three components will be examined in the next section.

The conflation of Māori and English
Baxter’s utopian poetics of poverty firstly aims at negating his problematic Pākehā-ness through a conflation of te reo Māori (the Māori language) and English. To a non-New Zealand reader, the extensive use of Māori in Baxter’s poems in the Jerusalem years must be a notable feature. More than ever before, he embraced linguistic hybridity of English and Māori. His poetry thus becomes a micro-experimental ground for the peaceful cohabitation of two cultures: a linguistic projection of his imagined utopia. Baxter’s bilingual conflation is, however, questionable in two regards. Firstly, his linguistic conflation potentially extends the readership of his work, which works against his proposed poetics of self-abnegation; secondly, his conflation is built upon an erroneous understanding of the Māori culture, which again defies his proposal to negate the Pākehā legacy truly and to learn from the Māori.

There are basically three groups of Māori words that Baxter deploys in his poetry: (1) religious names associated with both Christianity and Māori mythology: Te Atua (God), Te Ariki (Jesus Christ, also used for Māori gods), Te Wairua Tapu (the Holy Spirit), Te Whaea (Mary, the Mother of Christ), Hātana (Satan), Taniwha (the water monster in Māori myths), Tūtānekai (the Māori legend figure who played the flute); (2) Māori vocabulary and phrases associated with everyday life or cultural tradition: kai (food), tikareti (cigarette), manu (bird), waiata (song), moana (the sea), te rā (the sun), hāngī (an earth oven), tangi (funeral), aroha (love); (3) place names: Rakaia, Rangitata, Ohau, Otaki, Ohau, and Wanganui. All three kinds of words can be found in this sonnet sequence: (1) Te Whaea; (2) pā (repeated three times) and wharepuni (the meeting house), Pākehā, Māori, and personal Māori names; (3) Wanganui (now commonly spelled as Whanganui). The first sonnet is completely written in English, the second sonnet with six words and phrases in Māori and the last one with five.

The conflation of two languages here achieved at least four functions. The visual appearance of Māori in an English poem, firstly, challenges the lack of representation of Māori in one type of the earlier settler writings discussed in the previous section. Secondly, by replacing the Christian terms with their Māori translation and bringing in figures from Māori traditional beliefs, Baxter draws on Māori culture’s blending of
Christianity with Māori spirituality. What Baxter leaves ambiguously undiscussed, however, is the tension between this religious marriage and the non-Christian Māori belief system, a system in which the gods were characterised as the “devil” by the early missionaries to New Zealand. Therefore, the Māori words serve to offer what Baxter believed to be both a “truer” Christianity and also an alternative to it. One typical example is the pā, which has an ambiguous double meaning in Baxter’s poetic utopia: it is an embodiment of the real Christian spirit, and also the Māori alternative to the church. Thirdly, the everyday life of the Jerusalem community, which seems not vastly different from the world outside, in terms of eating kai and enjoying tikareti (cigarettes), is fashioned, in a rather romantic way, into a miniature utopia of artistic creation. In other words, with the Māori designation of the basic fabrics of life, Baxter attempts to create, in his poetry, an estranging effect in the aesthetics of the everyday life with which a Pākehā reader would be well familiar. He depicts a lifestyle that defies the pursuit of superfluous possession in a middle-class capitalistic society by appropriating an imagined conception of Māori collective living rooted in farming, grazing and hunting. Fourthly, the Māori place names, on the one hand, fix Baxter’s utopia in New Zealand context, and on the other hand, reiterate Māori ownership of and spiritual connection to, the land their Te Whaea (the Holy Mother). In these linguistically conflated poems, Baxter reverses and reinvents the colonial history of violence and bloodshed by negating his racial identity, forming a spiritual lineage with the Māori, and re-entering the paradisiacal land with humbleness and respect, as a guest into a welcoming host’s tribe, so that Pākehā and Māori could coexist peacefully. It is to regain an opportunity that was lost because of ignorance:

for we had a chance to become in some measure white Polynesians, and enter in some degree the community of neighbours, but we will have thrown it away through apathy and ignorance and greed. (2015b, 3:13).

In “Two Songs for Lazarus” (1971), Baxter chanted:

(i)

I am King Dives until
I put on Lazarus’ coat.

(ii)
Not I, not I, but Us,—
My soul has found release;
Now we are at peace,
Brother Lazarus;
I think this quiet country
Is the land of the Trinity.
...
Praised be the pain of hunger
That eats my body now;
As by the marriage vow
We share God together,—
Not I, not I, but Us,
Brother Lazarus.
(Baxter 1995, 521–22)

With “Brother Lazarus” and “King Dives”, Baxter adopts the Latin version of Jesus’ parable in the book of Luke to a modern New Zealand context. The former is poor but blessed; the latter, rich yet condemned. Applied to Baxter’s time, it is a fitting description of the racial inequality between the Pākehā and the Māori as a result of the repression imposed on Māori. Baxter succinctly observes: “Equality is a bus the Polynesian never quite catches.” (2015b, 3:504) “And the poor were (and are) especially found among Māori” (2015c, 4:146). His proposes to form a collective unity (“Us”), or in his words, “a theology of communality” (1971a, 1), by putting on a coat of pain and hunger (visible forms of self-negation seen also in the acceptance of the chestnuts spikes) and sharing of a “marriage vow” before God. Only through this reconciled brotherhood does the land become one of “the Trinity,” an earthly paradise.

But Baxter’s imagined linguistic intermarriage proves to be dubious and controversial. In the 1994 biography of Baxter, W. H. Oliver criticises Baxter for degrading the Māori language, using its words as “a cosmetic device” or “an earnest affectation” and doubted Baxter’s understanding of the Māori culture (1994, 146). The editor of Baxter’s prose volumes, John Weir, counters this criticism, arguing that Baxter made “a genuine attempt at using a bicultural language in this country when no other Pākehā was doing so” and deemed the fact that Baxter’s burial ground is in the land of Ngāti Hau a sign of Māori acceptance (2015c, 4:146). In line with this view, John Newton comments that some Māori he interviewed welcome Baxter’s interest in, and use of, their language and culture (2009, 14). On the contrary, Baxter’s wife, Jacqueline Cecilia Sturm (Te Kare Papuni), herself Māori, argues that his imperfect understanding of Māoritanga (Māori culture and its traditions) is romanticised through the lenses of Greek mythology. She comments that Baxter is drawn to the Māori communal way of
living because it is “the nearest to his own private utopia” (Millar 2005, 156), but he fails to comprehend that tribal life requires “a very rigid structure” (2005, 157). Baxter’s own testimony expresses a rather modest standing in this differentiation. In a confessional tone (which came to dominate in his Jerusalem poetry), he writes in “Jerusalem Sonnet 11”:

Yet the red book is shut from which I should learn Māori And these daft English words meander on (1969; 1995, 460)

Baxter’s fluency in Māori language and his understanding of the culture are peripheral questions in this issue. He indeed showed a great effort to learn the language and used it in poetry to create a bilingual landscape, which was not a popular practice in his time. His efforts, in both writing and life, indeed aim at promoting cultural awareness of bilingualism. It is not a surprise that, as a second language learner, Baxter’s linguistic command of Māori remained insufficient or inaccurate. And it is only natural for one to rely on a comparative approach and to summon the previous linguistic knowledge of languages to acquire a new one.

But there exist two major and disturbing problems in Baxter’s use of Māori. Baxter’s proposed bilingualism is an equally paradoxical part of his poetics of poverty: it is a disavowal of his Pākehā privilege and his claim to fame as a poet. Yet far from disavowing his privileged position, his use of Māori if anything extends his existing readership and so his fame. Any newly gained readers would augment his position as an established poet, nullifying his self-abnegating effort.

The second problem is Baxter’s homogenous view of Māori culture. In his writing, Baxter presents Māori as the antithesis of the corrupt Pākehā society and the antidote to Pākehā capitalist social problems. While recognising the robust tribal unity of Māori culture and its many attractive cultural features, Baxter fails to see the complex divisions of Māori society, which comprises many āti (tribe), which are a confederation of hapū (clans), which again comprise many whānau (extended families). Whereas different tribes substantially resemble each other in many cultural aspects, they have distinctive customs, dialects, and lineage. As Sorrenson rightly notes: “in attempting to describe the Māori and his culture, we are creating a stereotype that did not exist; for there was no one typical Māori but many Māoris; no one Māori culture but regional and tribal varieties of culture” (1990, 59). This problem expressed itself in both poetry and life. Millar suggests that Baxter repeatedly asked and enticed his wife to join
him in Jerusalem, commenting: “One might construe that he did not fully understand the importance to Jacque of her turangawaewae [place where one has rights of residence and belonging through kinship and descent], or that he did not care” (2005, 159). Baxter’s concluding note on the first poem of “He Waiata Mo Te Kare” (A Song for Te Kare), which he dedicated to Jacqueline (Te Kare, meaning “love” or “dear”, is a common form of endearing address in Māori), expresses a wish for them to be buried together in one urupā (cemetery) in Jerusalem (he was well aware that he would have the right to be buried there):

Woman, it is my wish
Our bodies should be buried in the same grave.
(1995, 537)

But Jerusalem is on Ngāti Hau ground while she is of the Taranaki iwi. Jacqueline’s direct response to this request, in poetry, is:

As for the spot: definitely
Not that place up the river—
I’d hate that
(2000, 48)

When she was interviewed by Millar, her response was: “No! No-no-no-no. It’s not my wish. There’s no way I would be buried up the Wanganui River. I mean, my tūpuna [ancestors], they’d turn in their graves. No!” (Millar 2005, 159). This unmindful request, in poetry and in life, reveals an ignorance of, if not impertinence towards, Māoritanga. Rather than being self-abnegating, he here asserted his own cultural assumptions. Similar problems arose again in his use of profanity and coarseness, which is discussed in the next section.

“Coat of vanity”: the use of profanity and coarseness
The second component of Baxter’s poetics of poverty is the recurrent use of profanity and coarseness. The former includes both bawdry and desecration; the latter penance and slovenliness. Baxter manoeuvres with ease through high-register Latinate lexicons, traditional English poetic forms (such as sonnet, sestina, ode and ballad), plain themes, and trivial domestic subject matter. As a result, his later poetry presents a fascinating mix of aesthetics and approaches: from the sacred to the profane, from controlled metres and rhymes to a loose, prose-like conversational style, and from the speech of
sophisticated and cultivated literati to the curses of a vulgar, ill-tempered labourer. When compared with his early poetry, this shift seems to convince critics such as John Weir that “his lifelong search for personal integrity had led him to abandon rhetoric” (J. Weir 1995, xxv). Baxter’s biographer, W. H. Oliver, echoes this view and contends: “The two major sequences written at Jerusalem, and a handful of related poems, have little of the tension and density of the Dunedin poems. The language is relaxed, easy-paced, conversational and ‘prosy’” (W. H. Oliver 1994, 146). On the contrary, Baxter actually develops a different rhetoric in his poetry that carries the same level of tension and density as his early works. He seeks to create, in his later poetry, a textual transformation that parallels his real-life metamorphosis. Just as his self-fashioning transformed him from a Burns Fellow with a suit and tie to a barefoot, bearded, long-hair and shabbily dressed hippie-prophet, this visible transformation in poetry that embraces profanity and coarseness helps estrange himself from his established literary fame as a renowned poet, so advancing his quixotic quest for poetic poverty.

His new poetry gives him a new identity, which he hopes would free him from his poetic riches. He becomes “somebody else”: a poor man, physically, mentally, and finally, poetically. This imagined metamorphosis is documented in the poem “Brother, I am like a Dead Man” (1971):

I am somebody else, I am not the man I was.  
The soles of my feet are thick and black  
Though I still can’t walk on bramble.  
My hair hangs like bindertwine.  
The fleas are cutting a bush track round my balls.  
The cuffs of my coat are made of leather;  
I got it from the Maori Welfare Officer.  
(1995, 495)

As Newton observes, “in this re-invention he discovered a path, if not precisely in his poetry then through it, to the public vocation to which he had always aspired. The poet emerges as social activist” (2005, 11). In other words, by stripping the poetry of its flowery garnish, Baxter seeks to unite his poetics of poverty with his new utopian mission to be alienated from his past as a widely recognized poet. Stead suggests that “the most distinctive tone of Baxter’s poems in the Jerusalem era is demotic and plain language” (Stead 1973, 10). In this way, Baxter makes himself more available to the ones for whom he was concerned: the poor, the dispossessed, the marginalised. But it turns out that this beguiling simplicity actually undermines, not upholds, Baxter’s self-abnegating mission. The capability of poetic evolvement confirms his linguistic
command of the language. In reality, it proves that his use of profanity and coarseness won him the praise of the critics and once again expanded his readership. Both are detrimental to his attempt to achieve poetic poverty, which is to negate his fame as a renowned writer.

In the Jerusalem years, Baxter used profanity with an unprecedented frequency and density. His use of bawdry language in poetry, in general, includes an open and blatant depiction of voyeurism, rape, prostitution, masturbation and sexual organs, much of which was considered a social taboo in his time. Examples abound:

and I’ll confess that surely
the over-forty fuck
touches my mind when Nikki
goes down to have a wash
in the arms of the taniwha
with her little bulging puku [belly]
and her hair like a midnight cloud,
but the sandflies nip my ankle
and it’s enough for this
dead man to rest his head
for a minute on her tits
and tell her she looks fabulous—

In Paremoremo
Two men held me
While eight men fucked me.

As if a scabbed bitch who’d been fucked
By every prick in town
Should snarl at a lively friendly chick
For wearing an old gown
(“Truth Song,” 1971; 1995, 527)

Have a wank for me, on the grass beside the Varsity
(“Letter to Peter Olds 7,” 1972; 1995, 581)

Auckland, you great arsehole,
...
The statue of a Greek god lay on the floor
With his prick and balls knocked off by a chisel.
‘Alison,’ I said, ‘they’ve buggered the god of death,
cut the balls off the god of love.
...
The Auckland Varsity gives me a pain in the rectum.
...
The Auckland Art School gives me a pain in both my testicles.
...

69
Auckland, even when I am well stoned
On a tab of LSD or on Indian grass
You still look to me like an elephant’s arsehole
Surrounded with blue-black haemorrhoids.
(“Ode to Auckland,” 1972; 1995, 597–99)

Desecration, for Baxter, is often rendered as theological jokes, ambiguous doubts or praise of paganism in his writing. He records how the famous “shooting angels” joke became Baxter’s ritual of performance for newcomers in Jerusalem:

I bend my knees slightly, point my hand stiffly at the ceiling, and fart four times, very loudly, in rapid succession.
‘I’ve shot four angels,’ I say.
(“Jerusalem Daybook,” 1971; 1971a, 26)

Doubt about his Christian faith is expressed through the poetic persona who worships a pagan god:

Christianity has weakened my brain cells
(“Ode to Auckland,” 1972; 1995, 599)

And they will turn their wild pure golden discs
Outside my bedroom, following Te Ra
Who carries fire for us in His terrible wings

Te Ra is the sun god. This poetic scene is followed by an immediate self-criticism in the following line: “(Heresy, man!)”. The persona embraces penance (both physical and mental, which contradicts his lack of deference in his use of desecration) and slovenliness. In most cases, the latter is implicitly turned into a testimony for the former:

My feet are sore, being bare, on the sharp stones
And that is a suitable penance.
(“Autumn Testament 1,” 1972; 1972, 15)

Let the Maker of rainbows and mountains do what He wishes
With this poor idiot, this crab in His beard
Who will not be dislodged—

Many may think it out of date
That I should bend my back in a field,
Eat watercress, catch lice and pray
Wondering if the next gale at night
Will flatten the whole ziggurat and leave me to shit naked

The most vivid example is to be found in “Jerusalem Journal”, where penance and slovenliness go together:

I have gone without food for a month. I have walked barefoot forty miles over stones. I have slept wherever there was a place to sleep, in strangers’ houses, under flea-infested blankets, on the wet grass beside the road. I have often stayed awake while nga mokai got rid of their inevitable tensions by card-playing and shouting … I have lain in front of the altar in many churches, with my arms spread out, asking Te Atua to give me grief and give nga mokai joy. My feet often burn like fire with the cold. When I hit my back with the buckle of my belt, it makes me grit my teeth. (2015b, 3:291)

These many examples represent Baxter’s repeated attempts at self-abnegation. His poetics of poverty makes him well aware of the problem of his poetic riches. Seeking to negate his poetic power, he turns against his own mastery of language and the result of this tussle is the sudden shifts of poetic ambience and register in his late work. One example is the anti-climax in “The Moon and the Chestnut Tree”. After the spiritual prayer to the moon up on high, the poem ends with:

‘Mother, remember us,
Heal for us what we cannot bring together,
‘The bright and the dark, the vagrant and the Pharisee,
The pa’s love and the church’s law.’ My feet are very cold.
(1971a, 18)

Then the poetic persona suddenly brings the readers’ attention down to the ground: “My feet are very cold.” This embarrassing realisation of physical discomfort deflates the solemnity generated by the grand prayer and acknowledges the persona’s weakness. Other times, this shift is in the register, as Mervyn Dykes comments in New Zealand Weekly News, “At times his speech is deeply spiritual and gentle, but in a flicker he becomes crude with the tongue of a worker who has dropped a hammer on his toe.” (2015b, 3:228) His language of profanity and coarseness, however, is accompanied by a careful selection of forms: sonnets, sestinas, odes, and ballads. In the end, contrary to Baxter’s self-abnegating intention, many critics highly celebrate this mishmash strategy.
O’Sullivan praises Baxter for his “coarse richness” (1976, 35) in openly speaking of sex to flaunt the prurient and sanctimonious society. Brooke contends that Baxter wonderfully and skilfully combined, in his sonnets, “social commentary with bawdry and metaphysical statement with the elements of raw human behaviour” (1995, 65). Stephanie Burt also argues that Baxter’s poetic style was characterised by a balance between self-abnegation and conscious control of the sonnet form (2009, 147–62). The contrast in content, style and form also worked wonders for those who found Baxter’s overt religiosity difficult to swallow. For instance, Oliver commented that “Theology permeates [Baxter’s] poems, but it is not allowed to make them solemn.” (1994, 147) This mishmash also had an impact on his readership. Despite Baxter’s self-reflection that the use of swear words made some of the local neighbourhood uncomfortable (1972, 44), he had experienced in the past how his use of profanity, for example, bawdry language, won him an affectionate response from readers. In 1967, he composed “A Small Ode on Mixed Flatting” (1995, 396–98) in response to the decision by the then University of Otago vice-chancellor to ban the practice of gender-mixed flatting among students to prevent possible promiscuous behaviour. The poem showcases an early model for a mixing of a range of poetic techniques with a poetics of bawdry. Its language, its theme and its stance all appealed to the students. It would be hard to believe that Baxter was unaware that poems of this kind would have great potential to extend his readership. After all, as Liam Mellvanney (2012) notes, Baxter argued in The Man on the Horse that it was Robert Burns’ authentic poetics of the bawdry that “explains ‘the exceptional love that many Scotsmen have felt towards Burns’” (1967, 96–97). Despite his knowledge of the possible contradictory consequences, Baxter still insists on producing poems that are suffused with profanity and coarseness.

Baxter attempts to account for this discrepancy in Jerusalem Daybook, when he talks, with simple-minded optimism, about how his coarseness would prevent him from becoming an idol:

I am a coarse man by intention. Perhaps it is a way of safeguarding my particular brand of purity. People may feel hostile or friendly towards a man who seems to be stitched together from old sacks. But they are less likely to idolise him. (1971a, 26)

This is another attempt by Baxter to, in Oliver’s words, “make us believe that the bright coat of his art had been taken away from him” (1994, 146). While the bright coat of his
art might be off, Baxter himself soon realised that he had put on a “coat of vanity”. Baxter again chose to record this self-reflection in the form of poetry:

I think the Lord on his axe-chopped cross
Is laughing as usual at my poems,
...
Because I’d spout nonsense, and wear my poverty
As a coat of vanity.

The gesture that Baxter and his tribe took to make their poverty “visible” in Jerusalem (and in Baxter’s case also in poetry) inevitably encourages vanity, of which some of ngā mōkai became aware. Mike Minehan has an echoing line of this Jerusalem pride in her poem, which is titled “To be Poor is to Know a Certain Freedom”:

We were poor and wore our poverty like a badge,
like our bare callused feet, our old worn out, first up best dressed clothes.
(2002, 28)

This is also picked up by Broughton, who suggests that the tribe’s poverty mission registers not only a respect for the value of humility and materialistic detachment but also a Lucifer-like pride in the same abnegation (Broughton 1975, 86). Baxter, through his writing, aims at assembling good cells to rebel against the corrupt society. In order to remain good and to protect what Baxter deems a “brand of purity”, a certain level of isolation is called for. The spirit of poverty clashes strongly with the capitalistic and materialistic Pākehā obsession with property and thus is worn, firstly by Baxter, and then by ngā mōkai, as an armour, a shield and a symbol of tribal communality. Paradoxically, it then ceases to be a means (poverty) to an end (self-abnegation), but a method and a purposeful one (being poor for poverty’s sake), and in turn became a source of fame. This paradox again echoes the fundamental paradox in Baxter’s utopianism: a utopianist who uses his poetic and social authority to propose self-abnegation as the only means to construct a utopia. This paradox is explored in detail in the next section.

“How dark a light”: the Baxter problem
As we have seen from the previous two sections, Baxter believes that his two-fold poetics of self-abnegation is what makes a utopia possible. This section investigates the problems with his proposed poetic utopianism from three perspectives: race, gender,
and power. Three representative poems are chosen to analyse these problems respectively: “Jerusalem Sonnet 11” (1969), “The Tiredness of Me and Herakles 4” (1972), and “Winter Monologue” (1971). All tensions and contradictions in Baxter’s poetic utopia, in fact, point to an overarching Baxter problem: while advocating self-abnegation as an approach to building utopia, Baxter insists on his poetic authority; the utopia comes into being and continues to exist by the binding force of Baxter’s authority, and thus its very existence affirms, rather than diminishes, his authorial power, and renders his proposal of self-denial dubious. Baxter’s poetic utopianism comprises a constant struggle between the denial of authority and the persistence of writing, of which “Jerusalem Sonnet 11” provides a good example:

Jerusalem Sonnet 11

One writes telling me I am her guiding light
And my poems her bible—on this cold morning

After mass I smoke one cigarette
And hear a magpie chatter in the paddock,

The image of Hatana—he bashes at the windows
In idiot spite, shouting—‘Pakeha! You can be

‘The country’s leading poet’—at the church I murmured, ‘Tena koe’
To the oldest woman and she replied, ‘Tena koe’—

Yet the red book is shut from which I should learn Maori
And these daft English words meander on,

How dark a light! Hatana, you have gripped me
Again by the balls; you sift and riddle my mind

On the rack of the middle world, and from my grave at length
A muddy spring of poems will gush out.
(1969; 1995, 460)

This poem presents a failed attempt by Baxter to negate his poetic riches (fame, influence and recognition gained through the readership of his poetry). We see him torn between the temptation of fame and the effort of self-abnegation throughout the poem. From the beginning, after the poetic persona is called a “guiding light” and his work “the bible,” the word-maker’s response immediately shifts the attention to the coldness of the morning, seeking to diminish the mental acclaim he received through physical suffering. The second temptation comes in the form of a demonically personified magpie, who, as the messenger of Hatana (Satan the devil), brings in a bad omen: the
self-abnegating Pākehā poet who is eager to separate from his fame is prophesied to become “the country’s leading poet”. Seeking to escape from it, he goes to the church to stay with the Māori, seeking their guidance. He chooses to speak particularly to the oldest woman, possibly a symbol of the ancestral Māori wisdom. But it remains ambiguous as to why the conversation stops abruptly after the two exchanged simple greeting words “Tena koe” (hello to one person). The next line reads like a plausible explanation: the red textbook from which he learns Māori is shut, and English words continue to dominate both the poetic world and his mind, a cause that probably hinders him from engaging the Māori woman in an in-depth conversation. An unrecognised fact is that, besides the language, the form of this poem is also non-Māori: it is a traditional European sonnet. The exclamation reads like a prelude for him to give up the fight: he will remain subdued to the devil’s torture till the day of his death (despite his endeavour to fight back by using profanity and coarseness to negate his poetic sovereignty, and thus, to defy the evil prophecy). But even the most extreme form of self-abnegation, death, fails to prevent the augmentation of his poetic riches: just as the last line shows, his posthumous readership will not diminish since “a muddy spring of poem will gush out” of his grave” (460). In the end, the poem declares his struggle against his poetic riches—in his quest for poverty and humility—a failure.

This failed journey ends with the abrupt closure of conversation between the poetic protagonist and the eldest Māori woman. Baxter’s endeavour to solve the Pākehā problem by looking to Māori can be seen repeatedly in his writing and in his community living. As the poem shows, however, his proposed negation of Pākehā identity by using Māori wisdom is problematic. Talking about the respect he had for Māori communal values when interviewed by Sunday Times reporter Barry Watts in 1970, Baxter remarks that unlike Pākehā society, which upheld the individualistic spirit, Māori are highly united and collective. He emphasises that this collective unity is “a heritage we’re trying to take from them” (2015e, 2:196). But his understanding of Māoritanga as a homogenous entity (as discussed earlier in this chapter) is as logically flawed as the Pākehā-created romanticised and sentimental Aryan Myth. The Aryan Myth, which erroneously defined the Māori as the Aryan and thereby assimilated them into the Pākehā bloodline, served to establish New Zealand’s imagined nationhood on an undeclared commitment to the white supremacy (Sorrenson 1990, 21). In addition, there exists a contradiction between Baxter’s suggestion of Māori as the problem solver, and his failure to convincingly offer a poetic delineation of how they could solve the Pākehā problem. Baxter’s problematic treatment of race is especially pronounced when
considering Baxter’s assertion that “the pakeha’s belly had grown big with swallowing the land; and since I am pakeha, this act of spiritual reparation is necessary” (2015b, 3:264). By making “spiritual reparation,” Baxter was implicitly affirming Pākehā’s capacity for self-redemption. Māori do not liberate the poetic protagonist from his struggle against the evil temptation. It contradicts Baxter’s proclaimed Māori remedy to the Pākehā problem. In fact, it is Pākehā pride and ignorance that prevent the poetic protagonist from truly humbling himself and accepting Māori wisdom.

Baxter’s assertion of his sovereignty and authority is seen again in “The Tiredness of Me and Herakles” this time from a gendered perspective. I do not think that there should be any dispute about how Baxter terribly abused his wife by firstly raping her (probably repeatedly) in their marriage and then confiding to another woman his sexual desires about this rape without a hint of guilt. In a letter to Phyl Ferrabee in 1960, Baxter told her:

If we were together anywhere, any time, without snoopers, I would f. you hard and long; and only an absolute refusal, which you meant from the soles of your feet to the crown of your head, or the direct intervention of God would prevent it. … It has something to do with my recognising a certain rare spirit in you; that you are a woman where most women are dishrags and time-servers. I think we are equal, God help my arrogance. … J. needs a husband absolutely. Her pride and her peace depend on it. … Indeed she has never understood for a second the meaning of physical love in me or any man; and she is often enough a querulous tyrant, a shrew and a termagant. These features in her were unbearable to me when I was softer. (2019a, 568)

The letter conveys a disturbing tone of male authority. It recreates a hierarchy with most women (whom in Baxter’s eyes are “dishrags” and “time-servers”) at the bottom, and women with “rare spirit” who can be equal with a man of letters, such as Baxter, in the middle, and Baxter himself, who will again rise to dominance through the form of intercourse (“f.”), at the very top. Baxter’s asserted respect for her “rare spirit” in the imagined sex, his praise of her (probably literary) abilities, his claimed equal status between them, and his half-hearted confession of “arrogance” all prove to be pretentious and hypocritical. This is again proved in another letter that he wrote to Ferrabee later. In an abhorrently unapologetic manner, he blatantly claimed that he had solved the marital tension by rape and attempted to legitimise his violent act of non-consensual sex on an untenable cultural bias:
Sex relations with wife resumed. This at least gives some common ground to stand on to clear up difficulties. Achieved by rape. From a very clear knowledge no other way could break down J’s reservations & that she was gradually shoving herself round the bend. She seems ten times happier in herself. But it looks as if each new act will have to repeat the rape pattern. … Perhaps we men are trained to be too considerate & our marriages crack up because we try to be civilised, whereas our wives secretly equate love & violence. … I do not blame myself any more for loving beyond J.—as long as I give her what she needs. … Curious that rape should win the battle where kindness, gifts, poems or persuasion never could, perhaps it is the Māori way of doing things: to every Hinemoa [Māori mythical female figure who was seduced by Tutanekai’s flute and then married him against her people’s wishes] her Tutanekai. … It is not quite the European style, but it may be the truth behind the pretty Maori myths. … Our European pattern is much more sophisticated though of course the same factors are at work deep down underneath it. (2019a, 619–20)

As Sharon Matthews suggests, the female characters in Baxter’s short stories (including prose poems) are mainly maternal figures. She argues that they fall into two antithetical categories: the Blessed Virgin as the good mother of spirit and the Temptress as the bad mother who governs the flesh (2017, 54). In Baxter’s poems, both of the mothers can be found. But his portrayal of them is equally problematic. For the good mother, as represented by Te Whaea in “The Moon and the Chestnut Tree”, he worships them and then develops an overdependence on their unconditional love and providence. This parallels his identification of Ngāti Hau as the real-life mother (for the Jerusalem community and also for Baxter), from whom he expected unswerving support and care. In this regard, Baxter perpetuates the same gendered image of pre-European New Zealand in his own association of Māori as the wāhine (the feminine), always ready to be used and exploited. For the bad mother, Baxter appeals to masculinity and imagines a callous, violent and ambiguously sexual conquest over them, as shown in “The Tiredness of Me and Herakles 4”:

**The Tiredness of Me and Herakles 4**

In the battle with the shield-bearing women
I got this wound that makes me limp a little,
An arrow lodged one centimetre
Above the right testicle.
They cut one breast off to draw back the bowstring,
The other breast they keep to feed their children.
‘Pornographer,’ they shouted, ‘you have poisoned the wells!’
The dust rose on a desert whirlwind.
Their queen Hippolyta grew amorous
After defeat. I did not like her.
She smelt of Dexedrine and cabbage water.
(1972; 1995, 596)

Ironically, Baxter portrays the motherly figures as beastly and frowns on their domestic and maternal love for their children. Refusing to be emasculated in the poetic world, the poetic “I” was given the lucky escape and keeps his masculine power uncastrated. Considering that the female warriors cannot win the battle even by paying the cost of one breast, the poem implicitly boasts of manhood and the masculine power. By suggesting that the queen grows “amorous” after defeat, it gives a problematic and disturbing interpretation of the female-male relationship: a barbaric and brutal contest between the conqueror and the conquered. In Baxter’s poetic world, the male almost surely wins. In this poem, he again affirms the male dominance by condescendingly turning down a sexual offer, by accusing her of being overtly domestic, and thus lack of sexual appeal. In fact, Baxter openly expressed his gendered bias in 1960 (the same year that Baxter’s admitted marital rape took place) in an address to the audience at the New Zealand Universities Art Festival:

Many writers, like Yevtushenko, tend to symbolise their country in female terms … Metaphorically I tend to think of my own poems as semen deposited by me in the sad barren belly of this society … But deep in the marrow of my bones I still have an agonised despairing affection—all the stronger because it hurts so much—for this poor old maltreated bitch. (2015e, 2:32)

This statement offers an example of Baxter’s belief in the power of poetry, and of his own embodiment of such power. His habit of solving tensions in his life through the act of writing continued in his domestic life and in the Jerusalem years. Baxter’s wife Jacqueline noted Baxter’s manipulative use of poetry to solve conflicts in their marriage made her quite uncomfortable. She recalled that when their marriage was getting rough, he once told her: “I’ll have to write another little poem [for you]” (Millar 2005, 158). In addition, this sexual metaphor embodies Baxter’s complicated attitude towards the female gender yet ends unmistakably with an assertion of male dominance: the gendered bias that shames the female for her infertility. The same celebration of male dominance again takes place both in writing (the imagined male conquest over the Amazon female warriors in his poem) and in real life (his marital rape of Jacqueline). It turns out that Baxter repeated the very logic of the capitalistic and oppressive culture
which he argues his utopianism denounces. His own self-abnegation proves to be nothing more than a pretence.

There is also an imbalance in power between Baxter and his ngā mōkai. The tension exists not only between the Jerusalem community and people outside (such as the police, the farmers, or the hostile sceptics) but also between Baxter and his dearest ngā mōkai. His stated self-sacrificial love for them (which always takes in a poetic form of Eucharistic death) is evident in “Winter Monologue”:

**Winter Monologue**

One has to die here on earth,  
My beard has got the stink of the ground already,  
The opossum thuds in the roof like a man dropping bricks,  
My belly is content enough  
With two cups of tea and two bits of cake  
Wehe gave me today as I sat on her doorstep,  
But the night comes like a hammer cracking on an anvil  
And all nga mokai huddle in the big house,  
Playing the guitar, lighting up the little stove,  
Not finding fault—one has to die  
In order to water the roots of the tree with blood,  
Guts, nerves, brains—once I was a word-maker,  
Now my bones are buried at Hiruharama,  
But the bones talk, brother. They say—‘Winter burns us like black fire!’  
Ah well, soon I will go up the hill  
To where the drain and the ditch and the new pipe  
Are tangled in the dark—How cold it is!  
The plumber has laid on running water  
From the spring above the road—water, water,  
That has to be added to porridge or coffee  
Before we can eat or drink—water is the sign of God,  
Common, indispensable, easy to overlook—  
How cold it is! Death will kill the cold  
With one last stab, they say, and bring us to the sun-bright fields of Canaan,  
But I must stay outside till the last of nga mokai  
Straggle in—time then to soak myself in the hot springs of Heaven!  
(1971a, 14–15)

This whole poem is built upon death: “one has to die” is repeated twice. The poetic voice tells us that he is well prepared for it (“has got the stink of the ground already”), both physically (by taking in very small portions of food, a slow death that almost reads as suicidal) and mentally (the word-maker will make words no more and so negate poetic riches; but contradictorily his bones will continue to utter words, just as this poem again is composed to write about the very negation of poetry). The poem then
begins a double ascent, one real (going up the hill) and one imagined: “going to the sun-bright fields of Canaan”. Every ascent is accompanied by a note of coldness (“How cold it is!”) It is hard to overlook the contradiction between the declaration that “death will kill the cold” and how the bones of the dead continue to bemoan the pain bestowed upon them by the winter. The poetic voice states that his death is for ngā mōkai. His bones have to suffer the cold of winter underground so that ngā mōkai can play guitar and huddle together in a house with stove and fire. Furthering this Christ-like sacrifice, he is determined to make sure the last of ngā mōkai will enter heaven and finally he is the last one to enjoy the God-given warmth. Along with the examples quoted earlier in this chapter, it again bespeaks a failed attempt to throw off one’s mental possessions by deploying self-negation.

In Baxter’s poetic utopianism, ngā mōkai are never granted equal footing with the poetic personification of Baxter himself. This inequality is bespoken by the ambivalent doublings of ngā mōkai’s designation. Although Baxter insists that it means the father-less ones, it can also refer to pets or slaves in Māori. The latter meaning suggests a rather sinister view of Baxter’s relationship with his tribal members. In this light, his repeated declaration of self-sacrificial love can be interpreted as an implicit condescending act of self-assertion and the eucharistic offering of his life a boast of his redeeming capacities. The recurrent statement of his love for ngā mōkai puts the latter at the receiving end of grace. The poetic persona, by dying the noble death, is exalted to become an uncrowned saviour. This metamorphosis of identity takes place in Baxter’s poetic utopia, where Baxter is simultaneously ngā mōkai’s spiritual father:

Since a man who’ll die someday should hardly fear the dead,
And the tribe need a father who is afraid only
Of ceasing to love them well.

Their tribal chief:

Always because
A man’s body is a meeting house,
Ribs, arms, for the tribe to gather under,
And the heart must be their spring of water.
(“Te Whiori O Te Kuri 7,” 1972; 1972, 52)

Their shepherd:
No thoughts of mine survive  
And I have lost the flocks I used to drive  

And finally, their Saviour:

one has to die  
In order to water the roots of the tree with blood,  
Guts, nerves, brains—once I was a word-maker,  
Now my bones are buried at Hiruharama  
(“Winter Monologue,” 1971; 1971a, 14)

In Baxter’s poems, one sees the actions and the lives of ngā mōkai, but knows little about their thoughts and beliefs. Minehan recollects that Baxter once told her Jerusalem must have no rules, because he believes that unconditional love and total acceptance for the youth are the cure for the social malaise (Minehan 2002, 44). However, “A Cast-Iron Programme for Communal Activity, at Jerusalem, in Crash Pads, or in People's Homes” seems to offer a very different approach:

Feed the hungry;  
Give drink to the thirsty;  
Give clothes to those who lack them;  
Give hospitality to strangers;  
Look after the sick;  
Bail people out of jail, visit them in jail, and look after them when they come out of jail;  
Go to neighbours’ funerals;  
Tell other ignorant people what you in your ignorance think you know;  
Help the doubtful to clarify their minds and make their own decisions;  
Console the sad;  
Reprove sinners, but gently, brother, gently;  
Forgive what seems to be harm done to yourself;  
Put up with difficult people;  
Pray for whatever has life, including the spirits of the dead.  
(1971a, 11–12)

Using a tone that is reminiscent of God’s voice giving the Ten Commandments to the Israelites, Baxter lists fourteen acts that Jerusalem must abide by, all of which written in imperative sentences. Each line starts with a verb or a verb phrase: feed, give, give, give, look after, bail, go, tell, help, console, reprove, forgive, put up, and pray for. It reads more like a guide book for communal living in Jerusalem or as a manifesto for a Baxterian utopia than the welcoming message of a no-rule zone. As the poet/creator of the programme, Baxter separates himself from ngā mōkai; they are his disciples, his
exponents, his spiritual children, but not his counterparts. He would provide for them, teach them, support them, care for them, or even die for them, but he also demands their compliance and refuses to acknowledge their competence as equally capable utopianists. Ngā mōkai are given the freedom of dreaming, but the dream they dream must be the Jerusalem dream, or in other words, Baxter’s dream.

As we have seen in this chapter, there exist many contradictory inequities of race, gender and power in Baxter’s poetic utopianism. All of them point to the same pervasive paradox: Baxter’s poetry imagines a utopian world of equality on the basis of his willing self-abnegation, but this self-abnegation proves to be self-assertion, as represented by his persistent act of writing poetry. This conflict is inherent in the way in which Baxter structured his lived and poetic utopia. It cannot be reconciled even in death, as his poetic vision does not prevent the ongoing readership of his poems and, in real life, produces more fame. Therefore, James K. Baxter the poet could never truly be Hemi te tūtūā. The Baxterian dream of a poetic Jerusalem is rendered impossible by Baxter’s own authority in asserting that dream in life and in art. In the following two chapters, I shall explore how a similar paradox also haunted the Chinese poet Gu Cheng, who hoped to realise his utopian dream in New Zealand twenty years later.
THE INVERTED DREAM: GU CHENG’S WAIHEKE UTOPIA

Many things in my dreams are strange, yet they always present a reality that cuts to the bone …
夢里的很多事是很奇怪的，但是又总有一种透骨的真实……
—GU CHENG, “The Only Revelation is my Dream”

Is all that we see or seem
But a dream within a dream?
—EDGAR ALLAN POE, “A Dream within a Dream”

Masks are wonderfully paradoxical in this way: while they may hide the physical reality, they can show us how a person wants to be seen.
—JOANNA SCOTT, “In the Theater of Isak Dinesen”

In this chapter, I investigate how Gu Cheng’s utopianism functioned as an interface between dream and reality and analyse how his utopianism produced contradictory emphases on freedom and authoritarian control in both writing and life. Gu’s use of isolation and linguistic and geographic estrangement was, in fact, not just about getting away from authoritarianism but about building a new authoritarianism. Even his transgressive dress and desire to escape the confines of his gender was, in the end, about asserting his authority. His disavowal of male desire was equally about controlling the narrative of his literary world, in which Xie Ye and Li Ying served only as objects of his male gaze. As a result, his vision of Waiheke as an escape from the city and the violence of recent Chinese history (Gu and Li Zi 2005), his purported disavowal of his
masculine identity (Gu 2005e, 29), and his writing’s claim to establish a heavenly
kingdom beyond reality (Gu 2011, 128) all failed. Instead, his utopian practice was
marked by a brutal return to the reality of masculine authoritarian violence. I do not
intend, however, to analyse Gu’s utopia as yet another utopian dream overcome by
reality. Instead, I argue that his very utopian dream was itself flawed in its authoritarian
claim to be able to change the world: a claim that reasserted the very authoritarian
reality that the utopian dream was supposed to escape.

I look at how Gu conflated dream with reality through isolation, estrangement,
and transculturation to form a utopia with blurry boundaries and uncertain or even
incompatible elements. His journey to this utopia started with his exile from China as a
geographical displacement and was followed by his self-exile to Waiheke Island where
he further isolated himself geographically and linguistically by actively refusing to learn
English (Gu Cheng Zhi Cheng 2005; Gu Xiang 1994). His estrangement plays on a
reinvention of the self, unorthodox use of poetic language, and the treatment of life as
art. His little neo-nuclear utopia of three people, Gu’s wife Xie Ye, Gu’s lover Li Ying,
and Gu himself, bespeaks the inspiration and influence of multiple cultural sources:
Taoism, Buddhism, Marxism, Christianity, and Islam. In this way, his utopian practice
constantly had to negotiate its internal conflicts, which concurrently drew on and
betrayed the utopian tradition. He proposes a different world, yet the shape and the
boundaries of this dream world remain blurry. Gu’s utopianism drew on multiple
traditions but his fusion of such traditions and cultures is deeply problematic.

At the heart of Gu’s utopian practice lies a paradox that, for all their differences,
takes a very similar form to Baxter’s: Gu’s utopia, though it aimed at self-abnegation,
was built on poetic sovereignty. The paradoxical nature of his insistence on authorial
sovereignty ultimately undermined his utopian pursuit in the way suggested by the self-
contradictory doubleness in the Ancient Greek roots of the word “utopia” εὖ-
τόπος (eu-topos, good place) and οὐ-
tόπος (no place). The demand for authorial control is
undoubtedly reminiscent of the totalitarian logic that plunged China into an abysmal era
of suffering. It might seem that his pursuit of a hybrid utopia of dream and reality,
through text and through life, negates the status quo and depicts a heterogeneous space
in which a wide spectrum of forms—traditional and modern, Western and Chinese,
artful and everyday—can be accommodated. From this point of view, Gu’s attempted
utopia on Waiheke seems to work as a counter-example to the resurgent nationalist
political discourse of “the China Dream” (中国梦) in recent years as “the shared hope
and expectation of every Chinese” (Mühlhahn 2019, 563–64). But Gu’s journey to an
imagined better place that builds on the human desire of moving beyond being to
becoming ironically ended in blood, making an alarming return to the dystopian way of
living that he claimed to escape. This paradox draws attention to a question that arose in
the post-Cultural Revolution era but remains pertinent and poignant to this very day:
Should the world dream only one dream? Or does each person dream their own dream
within a world of dreams? Is every world just a dream within worlds of dreams?

Figure 9. Looking out from the Quickcat ferry, Matiatia Bay, Waiheke Island.
Photographed by the author in 2017.

Looking at reality through dreams
Gu’s utopianism proposed dream as a new method of seeing reality. His use of the
concept was closely connected to the Misty Poets’ reaction against the Communist
Party’s authoritarian control of art and literature (Yeh 2001, 463). The Misty Poets were
a group of independent-minded writers who first published their work after the end of
the Cultural Revolution. They were dismissed and attacked by Communist Party poets
for their “exasperating obscurity” (M. Zhang 1980), and this denunciation later became
the group’s designation. The group embraced the epithet, for being obscure reflected
their shared pursuit of poetic independence and integrity, which was a “defiant, humanist indictment of the horrors of the Cultural Revolution” (Crevel 2008, 16). One of the Misty Poets, Yang Lian, commented that “Misty Poets were like les Fauves of France. The designation came from criticism and condemnation, which unexpectedly turned into laurels on our heads” (“朦胧诗就像当年法国的野兽派一样，称呼来自于批评和诅咒，但是不期而然地变成了我们头上的一项桂冠”; Phoenix New Media 2013a). The Misty school included poets such as Bei Dao, Gu Cheng, Yang Lian, Shu Ting, Duo Duo, Mang Ke, and Xi Chuan. However, as the Misty Poets ironically reproduced the personality cult of Mao in their worshipping of poetry, Gu’s insistence on authority and individuality also introduced historical and existential paradoxes into his utopia, which ended as a dystopia in 1993.

In Gu’s vocabulary, “utopia” is closed related to the concept meng 梦 (dream). His word choice evoked both a renewed vision of reality and a historical moment of challenging reality through dream-making. In this way, utopia in Gu’s use was redefined as a new perspective that viewed reality though dreams. “Dream” as a shared human concept frequents authors’ imaginations in literature across linguistic borders. Dream is also frequently linked by many writers to cross-cultural imaginings. Contending that dreams are involuntary fulfilments of repressed libidinal desires of the past and the present, Freud wrote about how he ventured into Chinese, hoping to find, in this cross-cultural encounter, working analogies to dream’s unavoidable indefiniteness and concluded that “Nor was I disappointed” (Freud 1920, 196). An etymological inquiry into “dream” in languages of different origins suggests a common connection between the lexicon and the optical sense, such as in Latin (vīsum, “thing seen”), Greek (ἐνύπνιον, “appearing in sleep”), Old English (gesihð, “vision, sight”) (Potter 1952, 148), and traditional Chinese, in which the character “梦” (dream) innately means “not clear” (“梦，不明也”; S. Xu 1963, 142) or “the shape of things seen in sleep” (“寐中所见事形也”; Kangxi 2002, 182). Building on the cross-cultural comparison, the concept “dream” evokes a sense of vision-sight that can be blurry, misty and obscure.

This paradoxical quality of dream, which simultaneously enables and disables the beholder’s vision-sight, reminds one of a special moment in Chinese literary history. After the havoc of the Cultural Revolution, the Misty Poets defied the collective and restrictive dream of social realism. The party’s propaganda advocated a unified dream-vision, in which art and literature were “a component part” of “the whole revolutionary machine” that aimed to “fight the enemy with one heart and one mind” (Mao 1965, 70).
It should be noted that the Misty Poets’ awakening from this collective nightmare grew out of cross-cultural literary encounters first enabled by the underground reading movement, through which readers in a China isolated by the Cultural Revolution were able to encounter Western modernist texts in Chinese translation (Y. Song 1997). By reading outside rigid party literature and “riding dreams as horses” (Hai Zi 2016), these poets acquired new visions of China that broke through the geographical, ideological, and cultural confinements, seeking expressions of individualistic and introspective experiences. Their visions, however, were haunted by the country’s radical mass utopian experiment. While advocating personal freedom, the Misty Poets’ visions nonetheless are infested by the problematic exaltation of poetry as cult and poets as high priests (Yeh 1996), which ironically echoes the Red Guard’s cult of Mao’s personality.

Carrying on this problematic legacy, the representative Misty Poet Gu Cheng established an unconventional utopia in New Zealand. The title of his prophetic poetry sequence “The Dream of the White Cloud” (2010c), written when he was sent with his family to the countryside to be re-educated in the 1970s, fortuitously echoes the popular (albeit disputed) English translation of the Māori name for New Zealand, Aotearoa, “the land of the long white cloud.” Despite obvious links with the Misty Poets’ emphasis on the freedom of individual dreaming, there are at least two unique features of Gu Cheng’s utopianism in New Zealand. Firstly, Gu’s utopia extended beyond the textual level in a way that complicated the relationship between dream and reality. Secondly, as suggested by his epithet “fairy-tale poet,” Gu had a distinctive obsession with the blurry boundaries of fantasy. Starting in the mid-1980s, the need for comradeship among the Misty Poets in the face of political oppression gave way to an individual stylistic development and an emphasis on acquiring a unique vision. Gu Cheng summarised his self-searching dream in New Zealand with an ungrammatical yet succinct statement through the vicarious narrator G in his only novel, Ying’er: “我喜欢我的看” (I like my see; C. Gu and Lei Mi 1993, 125). Gu’s phrase insists on individuality in both its meaning and its idiosyncratic expression. But it was in part because of this authoritarian insistence on “my” vision that his utopia was plagued by both historical and existential paradoxes and ended with a dystopian murder-suicide in 1993 (Department of Justice 1994) of both personal and allegorical significance.

The birth and death of the Waiheke dream

To fully comprehend the personal and allegorical significance of the dystopian death of Gu’s dream, we must first take a look at the birth of his utopia on Waiheke as an escape
from the city and a violent Chinese reality. As utopias forever point to either a yet-to-arrive or lost-forever time and space, isolation from the here-and-now is quintessential. This critical distance “keeps alive the possibility of a world qualitatively distinct from this one and takes the form of a stubborn negation of all that is” (Jameson 1971, 111). The isolation principle was faithfully implemented in Gu’s real and literary lives, but the form of execution differs.

One example of the isolation principle in his literature appears at the end of his novel *Ying’er*, where a revisit to the theme of seeing things better in the dark is coupled with a recognition of the critical distance between the negation and the negated. When the narrator enters the cabin of the commuter ferry that runs between Waiheke and Auckland, the darkness grasps him and, for a moment, almost deprives him of vision. However, in that dim environment, where his visual sense is diminished, his memory is revived and he thinks of how, once, on one of the meandering roads on Waiheke, G told Ying’er: “得从这儿看，我们的家越远越好看” ([You’ll] have to see it from here. The further away our home is, the better it looks; 1993, 314). As elsewhere in *Ying’er*, the boundary between Gu’s real life on Waiheke Island and the fictional life depicted in the novel mingle so much that it is almost impossible to tell the two apart.

This example reveals two important aspects of Gu’s utopianism. Firstly, the two conflicting sides co-exist in Gu’s utopia through his advocacy of vision and sight. G’s somewhat boastful declaration that the home looks more attractive from afar simultaneously suggests that their home might not look as good close up. The home is the same, but the distance placed between the beholder and the object alters the perception. Secondly, Gu tactfully involves his readers as co-builders of the expanding dream worlds but also insists on his sovereignty. In the quoted example, the world of G and Ying’er comprises the first world, where G dominates the narrative. Ying’er remains silent when G points out the importance of distance in perception. The second world, in which the narrator enters the dark ferry cabin, is connected to the first world when the narrator’s vision is partially deprived and a distance is placed between the two worlds in the form of memory. In a rather half-conscious way, the narrator expands the first world by submitting to the directions given by G in his talk. The third world (or the countless worlds to come) is the world of readers of the text. Bringing in the readers in the act of reading places further distance between the second and the third world. While readers seemingly enjoy the power to interpret the text, they have no other choice but to once again complete the act of reading (or interpreting) G’s announcement through the narrator’s recollection. There is indeed darkness in Gu’s logic of expanding the utopian
structure. First Ying’er, then the narrator in the novel, and finally the readers, all involved must conform to the dictating statement of G. As a matter of fact, G (the textual embodiment of Gu) argues that only by submitting to the creative authority can the expansion of dream worlds yield positive results: the further away it is, the better it looks.

Gu’s utopia of dream on Waiheke functions by practising an extreme form of geographical, linguistic, and cultural isolation. But the celebration of his importance as not only a creator but also a dictator shows an adamant refusal to give up or share his sovereignty, contrasting with his literary claims to involve readers in co-creating multiple worlds of possibility. The dystopian end of his utopia made a ghastly and gruesome impression on readers, further complicating the relationship between his life and his work and leading to biased readings that are prone to the biographical fallacy. It is then understandable that isolation, as one of the most noticeable features of his utopia, became an easy explanation for his death and for his violence. Anne McLaren (1995), for example, labels Gu Cheng a “frustrated exile, the recluse who communes with nature and retreats by degrees into either stoicism or madness and death,” concluding that “the final act of savagery and tragic end of this most gentle and imaginative of poets is explicable as the culmination of intense isolation from his cultural roots, an isolation which severed him not only from his own race and people but also from the human community and intimate family ties.”

I argue, however, that isolation is critical to Gu Cheng’s vision of a real-life utopia. To be dislocated to a geographically, linguistically, and culturally alien place is fundamental to his effort to negate the reality that in the 1980s he found hard to bear, be it the reality of China recovering from the collective nightmare or the reality of New Zealand cities, where capitalism produced a modern lifestyle that idolised wealth. Being alien is part of Gu’s critical stance towards reality and “key to the aesthetics of an avant-garde that casts its innovations as invocations of elsewhere” (Reed 2016, 12). Being isolated in an exilic condition on Waiheke promised him personal freedom and provided him with “a free space or playground at the intersection of various cultures and political systems” (Spariosu 2015, 30). Situated “between cultures, languages, social structures,” Gu’s in-between position creates a vast amount of freedom that transcends his exilic condition by engaging in a kind of utopian play. Just as Reed points out,
although many moderns had (and have) migration thrust upon them, many others—especially modernists—eagerly sought out geographic displacement, from the provinces to the city, as from the hegemon to exotic elsewhere. … To be alien is, among other things, to be free from the constraints of one’s home culture and, because foreignness can serve as an alibi for many forms of deviance, free, too, from many of the constraints the host culture imposes on locals. (2016, 12–13)

Gu was no stranger to this modernist celebration of alienation and he shared with many modernist poets a tendency to oppose the evils of the modern to city to an idealized countryside. Whereas a poet like W. B. Yeats made the Irish countryside one of the muses for modern nostalgia, Gu’s ideal landscape is deeply abstract and carries no distinctive geographical marks and is thus localisable anywhere. Gu Cheng presented his utopia as an antidote to a problem-rife society, but he was not really as isolated as he wanted or as his critics argued him to be, nor was he free from a romanticised vision of the countryside or nature.

Gu’s geographic isolation started with involuntary exile from China to New Zealand, which was then followed by self-exile to Waiheke Island. The adventure began in May 1987, when Gu Cheng and his wife, Xie Ye, took the opportunity, in a moment of China’s liberalization and opening-up, a rarity in the country’s recent history (Sullivan 2018, 359), to travel abroad for the first time. The nature of their leaving their home country is often described as an “exile” that was begun “with some urgency” (Chung 2012, 5) as a result of the harsh treatment imposed on dissenting artists in an array of ideological campaigns in the 1980s (Minford 1998, 265). Many Chinese poets who took this chance to travel overseas realised only later, especially after the June 4th incident, that the time that they must spend outside China would be much longer than they had expected. However, Gu seemed prepared for a never-to-return journey. Poet Yang Lian, Gu’s close friend and also a Misty Poet, recounted that Gu Cheng took all of his identity documents with him when he left the country, making his departure look like the actualisation of a well-devised plot to flee permanently from China (Phoenix New Media 2013a). This view is echoed in Gu’s lecture notes, in which he implied that his arrival in New Zealand was, in fact, a self-exile caused by what he had witnessed in China’s political turmoil: “In order to find a piece of land of my own, a home among the trees, I came to New Zealand” (Minford 1998, 268). Accompanied by Xie, Gu then participated in Münster Poetry Days in Germany at the invitation of Professor Wolfgang Kubin. He went on to visit Hong Kong and was invited by the then professor of Chinese
at the University of Auckland, John Minford, to teach at the New Zealand university in 1988 (Gu Cheng Zhi Cheng 2005).

If Gu came to New Zealand in order to isolate himself from the undesirable political context in his home country, a desire shared by many of his fellow poets in China, then his migration to Waiheke Island seemed to be a continuation of a perennial personal desire to escape from the city and go to the countryside. He sought on Waiheke a possible site for achieving autarchy in a pristine natural environment with radical freedom. According to Gu, he spent twenty years of his life searching for the place where he could be himself:

Not far from Auckland I found the place I needed. It is a piece of primeval forest, and on it stands a run-down old house. Not many people live on the island—some of them are Europeans, some are Māoris. And on those parts of the island where there are no people, there are sheep. The first day I went there I said to my wife: I have spent 20 years of my life preparing for this. Now, at last, I have made the leap, left behind that wretched world, and come to the place where I wanted to be. Now my life can begin. (quoted in Minford 1998, 268)

Nowadays, Waiheke Island, with its benign climate, has become a safe haven for wealthy Aucklanders or European retirees. But according to the recollections of Gu’s student and close friend Anne-Marie Brady, in the late 1980s, unlike the present-day hustle and bustle brought by the many tourists and the real estate investors, Waiheke was “bush-clad and quiet with beautiful beaches,” and many of its residents were seekers of alternative lifestyles (Brady 1997, 129). When Gu Cheng visited the Island to view the house that he considered buying, the Quickcat, the fast commuter ferry which connects Waiheke to Auckland, had just been introduced (Caldwell 2010). The ferry service “provided a boom for commuters” and consequently changed the island “from being an island of hippies to an island of yuppies” (Gulf News 2017). However, in 1988, this shift was just beginning, and the Island was still somewhat isolated from modern city life. The affordable price of the house he viewed was enticing, but it is reasonable to argue that the Island’s geographical isolation and the natural environment were particularly attractive to Gu Cheng. Waiheke proved to be an excellent choice for his utopia. He claimed that “这是我梦想二十年的地方……这就是我的小邦，爱的家” (“This is the place that I dreamt of for twenty years … This is my little nation, my home of love; C. Gu 2005b, 44).
For Gu Cheng, this overtly claimed love of nature constitutes the primary theme in his aesthetics, and the metaphorical use of the city and countryside, as antithetical representatives of culture and nature, frequents his writings. Forever affected by his traumatic experience of Beijing, he depicted the city as the noisy, immobile centre of political horror and material ambitions, whereas the countryside was for him a cradle of pastoral purity that nurtured freedom and tolerated differences. Of course, this aesthetical hierarchy of the countryside over the city was neither Gu’s creation nor a unique argument. Similar sentiments that demonise the city abound in the work of Gu’s contemporaries, including the so-called root-seeking generation (Yingjin Zhang 1996). Similarly, poet Yang Lian depicted Beijing as “that ancient city buried in dust and yellow earth” (J. Edmond 2012, 37). But a careful examination of Gu’s celebration of nature reveals its paradoxical nature. When Gu insisted that his dream for such a “little nation” started twenty years ago, he was probably referring to the time when he and his family were sent to the countryside, as part of the nation-wide Up to the Mountains and Down to the Countryside Movement (上山下乡运动), to be re-educated and work as peasants in a rural village called Huo Dao. Interestingly enough, while Gu was often labelled as an apprentice of nature and he himself seemed to embrace such an image, his first journey outside the city into the countryside was not at all pleasant. He recounts:

It was the autumn of 1969 when I learnt that my whole family was going to be sent to the countryside. I was nonetheless very delighted. I thought that I could finally go among the insects at my free will. The truck took us to a village named Huo Dao [Fire Road]. My enthusiasm waned. What appeared in front of my eyes was not an Arcadia or grassland, but dark thatched roofs, mud walls, and desolate beaches that extended to the horizon …

六九年秋, 当我听到要全家下放时, 竟十分欢喜, 想着终于可以自由地到昆虫中去了。卡车把我们拉到一个叫火道的村子里, 我的欢喜凉了下来, 眼前出现的并不是田园和草原, 而是暗色的茅顶、土墙, 和直达天际的荒滩…… (2005b, 22)

Later, Gu made contradictory claims. On the one hand, he contended that “I’m not used to the city, I’m used to the countryside … where I was forged into shape.” He started to romanticise his childhood years spent in Huo Dao Village: “when I arrived in Greater Khingan, I felt that I had gained one thing, a thing that recurred. That place has only natural history and no human history … At that time, it felt like Eden.” This shift in vision took place when his family were called back to Beijing, and Huo Dao became a
site of sweetened memory. Among the effaced city people who are reduced to uncertain
ghost-like shadows, Gu envisaged himself as an itinerant persona with an implicitly
floating subjectivity, a *flâneur* “walking, as if alone, in [the modern city’s] streets”
(Williams 1973, 233), which, according to Walter Benjamin’s commentary on
Baudelaire’s lyric poetry, was a particularly modern response to the disenchantment
brought by modernity—a figure who seeks to “endow the crowd with a soul” (1968,
195). The opening lines of Gu’s poem “Metropolis” adopt the perspective of an
unwelcome prodigal son in the country’s biggest political centre:

Every door
Vomits out some people
Who are trailing indefinite expandable and contractible shadows

每扇门
都吐出一些人来
拖着伸缩不定的影子
(1995, 783)

It should be noted, however, that Gu’s depiction and configuration of Beijing as
representative of modern Chinese cities was localised and deeply embedded in a
complex Chinese tradition of tensions between *cheng* 城, meaning both “city” or
“town” and “wall,” and *xiang* 乡, “land” and “village.” The former typically refers to “a
walled city, highly recognised, managed, and planned in detail,” whereas the latter
usually implicitly relates to “rustic, pastoral, idyllic, and bucolic” agrarian land or an
agricultural community (Yingjin Zhang 1996, 6–7), and both are removed from the
English understanding of “city” and “country.” It is the isolated experience in Beijing
that initiated Gu’s re-invention of the village life by negation: for Gu, the countryside
came to represent everything that the cities did not.

From here, as critic Tang Xiaodu noted, the city (城市) and the grazing land (牧
场) become a set of binary oppositions in Gu’s poetic imagination. The former is a
specific reference to “narrow, confined spaces, mapped out roads, polluted air and souls
wrapped in fashion garments,” a symbol of “the rule of mechanical power that is
universal and omnipresent in the real world” and that manifests “all the follies and evils
of industrial civilization” (Tang 1999, 41). The latter, the grazing land, by contrast,
symbolizes “a vast and free space in which [Gu] can let loose his imaginary spiritual
horse” that “existed in the past, in the rural memory of his childhood” (1999, 42),
namely, in the memory of his time in Huo Dao in Greater Khingan. Based on this
analysis, Tang arrives at two conclusions. First, Gu once owned a patch of grazing land in his childhood, lost it, and believed that it would be regained in the end. Tang asserts that “from it we instantly discern the prototype of the modern Utopia mixed with the ‘Garden of Peach Blossoms’ (Taohuayuan) and ‘the return to the Garden of Eden’, its two ancient prototypes” (1999, 44). Second, Gu was deceiving himself, because his roots were not really in the countryside, or rather, his roots were not in the real countryside. Tang further dismisses Gu’s ideal land as “nothing but a poetically conceived illusion” and an “abstracted … countryside subconsciously selected or a utopian countryside” (1999, 42).

Tang rightly points out that nature is deeply romanticised and thus serves more as a symbol than as an existential entity in Gu’s ideal world, which echoes Raymond Williams’s analysis of the rural-urban divide in English literature since the sixteenth century, where the country is “a persistent and particular version of the Golden Age” and “a myth functioning as memory” (1973, 43). But neither of Tang’s conclusions follow. First, Gu’s idea of utopia was not, as Tang argues, modelled on the “lost paradise” of his childhood, but rather made possible through the acquisition of a new vision or a new state of feeling. What Gu Cheng had on the island in 1989 was a leaky run-down house, which, frankly speaking, was not much of an improvement on the “dark thatched roofs” and “mud walls” that he experienced in his childhood. But this time, Gu Cheng seemed certain that he could pursue an unprecedented form of life here on the little island. When asked a question about the difference between Huo Dao and Waiheke Island in an interview in 1992, Gu Cheng responded:

The desolation of Huo Dao Village was that of barrenness and desperation. But when I arrived at that island, I walked into a thick forest. One might say that it is like a prehistoric forest. … But this time I felt like I was arriving home. … Nature is not in the forest; it is in your heart: the natural state of your heart, your language and your feelings.

火道村的荒凉, 是那个白茫茫大地好干净的荒凉; 而我上那个岛,我走进的却是一片茂密的树林, 可以说有点儿原始森林的样子。……但这一次我真有了一种到家的感觉。……自然不是树林,自然是你的心——你心中的自然状态、你的语言的自然状态, 你的感觉的自然状态。(2005b, 311)

5 Here the original text “白茫茫大地好干净” alludes to the tragic finale of the classic novel *Dream of the Red Chamber* by Cao Xueqin. I have adopted a semantic translation approach in producing the target text.
Secondly, Tang conveniently ignores Gu’s inconsistent perception of Huo Dao, which provides an interesting juxtaposition of two versions of the countryside: one of “an Arcadia or grassland” or “Eden,” and the other of darkness and desolation. The first offers an idealised image that is virtuous and natural, while the second is a degraded image that is backward and unbearable. What makes Gu’s reminiscence interesting was the fact that his first encounter with the village arguably enabled his first experience of the shocking clash between dream and reality and started a transition in his vision. Gu Cheng’s immediate disappointment with Huo Dao village was caused by its inability to appeal to his romanticised vision of “living among the insects,” a haven promised by his reading of Fabre’s *Chef d’oeuvre*. Instead, he lived among the swine. But when he left the village and tried to readjust to city life in Beijing, he felt a disheartening awkwardness. At that point, his life in the little backward village seemed unprecedentedly desirable in comparison. The vision of Huo Dao as Arcadia is a product of Gu’s introspection, in that it merges the gloomy barrenness of real life with the nature-inspired invigoration of imagination. It is of course inherently paradoxical, but not, as Tang argued, because it failed to represent life faithfully: Gu was not interested in mimesis. The real paradox lies in the fact that his countryside lacked the autonomy of independent existence and had to be forever defined by its relational antithesis to the city.

Moreover, Gu did not simply equate Waiheke island with the countryside. Tang argues that “Life on Waiheke Island was the last miracle that Gu Cheng left for this world … no matter where he was, he seems to have lived life like an isolated island. He seems to have carried Waiheke Island with him and slowly turned himself into such an island” (1995, 47). One has to understand the island’s centrality to Gu Cheng’s dreams. It is precisely the island’s boundedness and its distance from the mainland (or the city of Auckland, in this case) that makes it a universal symbol “par excellence of dreams” (Franks 2006, 4) and a “controllable and paradisiacal” (1) crucible for artistic creativity and radical experimentation. The smallness of an island tricks the human mind into the hope of gaining full understanding or control of it, so much so that Melville wrote: “in the soul of men there lies one insular Tahiti” (2014, 344). This is particularly appropriate in Gu Cheng’s case. Two weeks before his death, Gu and Xie took a transit flight from the United States to their home on Waiheke. On the way, they visited Gauguin’s abode on Tahiti (X. Gu 1994, 10). Gu’s idealisation of Tahiti coincided with exoticised Western representations of Tahiti as a miniature of paradise. As Rod Edmond suggests in reference to Western representations of region, “the Pacific was, and in a
debased sense remains, a place of dreams” (1997, 6). Gauguin’s conflicted perception of Tahiti and his repeated attempt to re-fashion himself as savage, as argued by Edmond, reminds one immediately of Gu’s contradictory use of Waiheke and his persistent self-presentation as someone who sits outside the norms of his society. Seen in this light, Gu’s Waiheke dream is both Western and colonial.

There exists also a conspicuous intertextuality between Gu’s celebration of isolation in nature and the Chinese literary hermit tradition. But Gu’s utopia was also mixed with influences from his experience as part of the generation called Zhìqíng (知青), also known as rusticated youth or educated youth. Gu’s comments on “the natural state of the heart” can be traced back to the most renowned representative poet/hermit, Tao Yuanming. Tao made his name as a recluse through his constant refusal to participate in public officialdom and through his contemplative writings in which he proposed the idea of reclusion in the realm of men (Cai 2004). He lived mostly in reclusion in the countryside and wrote introspective poems about his lived experience in an unorthodox, uncomplicated, and unmannered literary style that was distinctively different from the official literary style (Tian 2010). His writings helped create a myth in which hermits are exalted as spokespeople for ethical integrity who oppose political reality by a critical absence or silence. But modern homages to this tradition attracted wide criticism. The second stanza of the fifth poem in Tao Yuanming’s arguably most popular poem series “Four Poems written While Drunk” reads:

I pluck chrysanthemums under the eastern hedge,
And gaze afar towards the southern mountains.
(quoted from Minford and Lau 2000, 503–4)

Lu Xun, for example, satirically dismissed hermitage for posturing as consciousness for the masses so as to belie its hypocritical, self-centred nature (2005, 231–34). He suggested that Tao “became a government official for food, and in the same manner, became a hermit for food” (“登仕，是噉飯之道，歸隱，也是噉飯之道”; 232). Since Tao became the icon of a recluse, this “chrysanthemums gathering” was also turned into a symbol of the hermit tradition. Lu speculated that if Tao had no tenant peasant tilling
his land, he “would have starved to death a long time ago beside the eastern hedge [where he gathered chrysanthemums]” (早已在东篱旁边饿死了”; 232).

Gu Cheng, however, had to find food so that he could continue being a hermit. His Waiheke self-exile was not a simple imitation of the early utopian models established by writers such as Tao Yuanming, nor was it a reproduction of his lost childhood experience in Huo Dao. Despite the spiritual resemblance of Gu’s celebration of Waiheke’s natural beauty to Tao’s praise of harmony with nature, Gu’s utopia placed greater emphasis on isolation. Gu’s tilling of his own land on Waiheke reminds one of Gu’s sojourn in Huo Dao in his early years as part of the generation that was sent to China’s countryside to be “educated.” The generation was called by Michel Bonnin the “lost generation,” who were filled with “youthful illusions” and “pure idealism” yet were deprived of “the opportunity to study at the age of study” (2016, 756). Even though Gu learnt to appreciate, through his rustication experience, the ethics of getting food through one’s own toil, he had no intention of mimetically recreating the rustication experience, since he was thrust into the rustication process involuntarily. Gu’s insistence on geographic and spiritual isolation was part of his conscious effort to get away from authoritarianism in China, and more implicitly, to build a new authoritarian world in which he could reign as king. The next section explores how Gu further implemented an adherence to estrangement in his utopia in order to achieve this goal.

The estranged heavenly kingdom
Gu’s utopia embodied a spirit of estrangement which estranges living by turning everyday life into art. Gu made a self-reflexive comment through the narrator in Ying’er: “Primarily, art must be divorced from life” (艺术最主要就是要脱离生活”; 1993, 118). This comment seemed to be truly reflected in his utopia, even though the relationship between art and life is more complex than a total divorce. This alienated form of existence allowed him to imagine a marriage between the poetics of exile and notions of exilic freedom through estrangement. With resolution, Gu Cheng engaged in making his art strange through self-fashioning, through inventing different and difficult forms of language, and by presenting a strange and transformative vision of everyday life. His use of estrangement aesthetically connected him to Viktor Shklovsky’s concept of ostranenie or defamiliarisation. Estrangement in language and life enhanced his utopia but both forms of estrangement are innately paradoxical in logic. Estrangement for Gu was “both an artistic device and a way of life” (Boym 1996, 513).
interlaces dream and reality to build the perfect place, the place implicitly brings into play the sovereignty of the poet as its sole creator. In this sense, the effort to keep his utopian dream alive reinforced his authority through authorship so that he oppressed any other writer’s representation, seeing them as threats to his design. The contradiction of his utopia since its inception persisted after Gu’s death and constitutes his ironic legacy.

As Anne-Marie Brady noted, unlike many Asian immigrants to New Zealand who missed the lively hustle and bustle and the crowded environment back in their home countries, Gu found New Zealand to be a sanctuary that he was unable to find in China (1997, 127). The narration in Ying’er suggests that it had actually become his spiritual home: “In B City G always had an air of homesickness about him, but reputedly, it was not that he missed his ancient culture of thousands of years of history, but that he missed the Island where he had lived for five years” (“G在B城永远做出一副思乡的样子,不是思念他那个据说有千年文化的古国,而是思念他那个住了五年的小岛”; 1993, 12). Gu commented that his living on the Island gave “a broader form” to his life:

On that Island, if I could forget about it. No one would remind me that I was Chinese or a foreigner. I could be none of these. Not Gu Cheng. Not a man. I had only to forget all the signs the world had attributed to me, and they were no longer there. … I think that if you forget about all the duties and symbols the world forces on you, your life can gain a broader form.

I have to point out here that Gu’s utopia on Waiheke, at least in regards to his lifestyle, did not immediately display “a broader form.” In Gu’s plan, the old run-down house he bought would be converted to a castle, which would occupy the centre of his totally self-sufficient utopia. Excited by the fact that he was now a landowner, he sketched a blissful life where the Island’s rich resources would provide enough food for fish farming, clam harvesting, forestry, and, especially important for him, chicken-raising (2005b). Gu described the kind of “modern primitive life” that he sought to create on
the Island: “[They] removed rocks and worked the land, collected sea shells and raised chickens. They drank only rainwater and burned wood in the fire” (1995, 1).

On the surface, life on the Island did not look different from the ordinary life of a modern peasant. What Gu Cheng believed made “a broader form” possible was a new and estranged perception formed by bringing together various cultural inspirations. Three estranging elements of Gu’s utopia, the castle, chicken-raising, and land ownership, illustrate his efforts to reach out to other cultures or times to build his dream. Gu Cheng’s castle was an example of his cultural borrowing from Islam. The depiction of this ideal is found in his novel: “When we first came to the Island, I did a drawing for you. It was a handsome aerial view of Islamabad. There were pointed arches, suspension bridges and gigantic winding battlements with a flying corridor across the sky” (1995, 160). This solid castle was fortified with “arrow slits” (2005b, 44) to allow it to be protected from the outside world, which was a constant imaginative threat to Gu’s utopia. The wonderful castle is strikingly surreal when one considers what Gu started with: a dilapidated house. Her hands covered with scars, the narrator’s wife Lei Mi responds to him: “If we go on at this speed, our castle will take five hundred to eight hundred or so years to complete. Khan … you only did some repairs on the ruins. You’d better make sure that the rooms don’t leak rain first” (1995, 160).

Gu’s surreal vision nevertheless marked the difference between his utopia and the utopianism of the Cultural Revolution. As his references to himself as a Khan suggest, Gu’s insistence on owning land of his own appeared to be a modern revival of the feudal dream to be a lord of the land, a dream rendered impossible in China after 1953, when the law abrogated private ownership of land by landlords and initiated collective land ownership (Walder 2015). Gu Cheng’s obsession with raising his own chickens and selling them for profit would have likewise easily attracted attacks as “tails of capitalism” in the Chinese commune movement (He 2015b; Yasheng Huang 2008, 85), and some communes specifically forbid their members to raise privately owned poultry (He 2015a).

Gu sought to build an estranged lifestyle around a reversed vision of reality that would allow him to travel freely to different times and places. As Gu reflected,

My life after arriving in New Zealand was reversed, like a latent image reverting to a visible image or vice versa. There when I opened my eyes, I saw mountains, the sea, and the simplest things like trees, grass, and stones. Maybe fifteen words are enough to describe the things around me. But when I closed my eyes, I would immediately be standing on the streets in Beijing. This time my real life was like a dream, whereas my
What Gu Cheng seems to suggest is that a new perception of life was formed in the inversion of life and dream. His utopia became the interface between his inverted dream and reality. Crossing the boundaries of these parallel yet sometimes intermingling worlds required a special vision or sight. This vision or sight rejected the current state of being and created new meanings out of the inversion of dream and reality. In this sense, Gu’s utopia provided the impetus for him to write a new form of poetry.

Here my reading contrasts with the view held by some scholars that Gu’s attempt at a real-life utopia smothered his poetic creativity. For example, Li Zhengguang, when explicating Gu’s “escape” took place gradually, initially in poetry, then in real life. Li argues:

Gu’s passion for writing poetry was much less than his passion for building “the ideal kingdom” in reality. Gu busied himself with trivial matters such as cutting down trees for logs, raising chickens, and building his house … Gu Cheng’s natural philosophy eventually destroyed his poetry.

Contrary to this view, Gu’s attempt to create a real-life utopia and his poetry worked in synergy. Each was a different means to the same end. Gu described his poetry as an attempt to access another world: “I believe that I am always writing poetry not in order to be a poet, but rather, in order to gain and to remember this feeling; which is to say, this world is not the only one.” (“我想我一直在写诗，并不是为了做一个诗人， 而是为了获得和记住这个感觉； 就是说——这个世界并不是唯一的。” ; 2005e, 69) “This feeling” refers to Gu’s feeling that one can find an exquisite and magnificent world in even a drop of dew on a pine tree, an early memory which Gu defined as his
first experience of the beauty of poetry (2005b, 11). Further elucidating the meaning of “this world is not the only one,” Gu, in a 1992 seminar, stated that

These things that [I] experienced on the Island might seem rather irrelevant to art. But in fact, [my] feelings towards the world changed dramatically. When I looked at a bird, I was also a bird; when I looked at a tree, I was also a tree. With this, when I arrived in Germany, my heart was quiet, seemingly knowing that I was a person who had walked out of his homeland and could return at any time. No matter where I went, I had a way out. I knew now that this way out was my little house on the Island. My poems changed accordingly … I spent days like this on the Island, and at night I also dreamed. This dream was very different from the ones I had in China. On the Island, all I dreamt about was Beijing. Once I closed my eyes, I was immediately in Beijing. … When I dreamt in Beijing, it seemed that I forever dreamt of another sky.

Beijing the city and Waiheke the island come to be the two contrasting and intertwined centres in Gu Cheng’s utopian imagination, and the fictitious links between them comprise the axis of his utopia. Despite Gu’s utopian descriptions of Waiheke, his utopia failed miserably in real life. In 1988 and 1989, Gu Cheng’s salary from his teaching was not enough to make ends meet, and the couple had to take odd jobs and to sell spring rolls at the Island’s weekly market (Brady 1997, 140). They were never successful at self-sufficiency. Gu Cheng himself either was oblivious of or was reluctant to face the fact that the radical freedom promised by his utopia remained subject to societal forces. Their logging of trees on their property was criticised by eco-friendly lifestyle neighbours (141). Xie was poisoned on one occasion when she ate an inedible native plant (C. Gu 2005d, 372). And the old house remained a half-finished project after Xie’s and Gu’s deaths. No matter how much Gu’s utopian vision convinced him that he was a king ruling a new realm of freedom, Waiheke was not centred around him, and both the rule of law and the Island’s communal tradition were established long before his arrival. This external rule of law was highlighted when the council ordered Gu to remove his two hundred or more chickens, which he believed to be the
embodiment of financial and metaphorical independence and self-sufficiency but which had created noise and stinky waste that horribly disturbed the neighbours (Phoenix New Media 2013a) Gu and Xie ended up beheading all the chickens that they couldn’t keep (C. Gu 2005d, 393–96). The blood-shedding of the chickens insinuated the underlying paradox of his utopianism. Gu advocated and prided himself on freedom, and yet this freedom was a right only for those who were submissive to his power. Any defiance of Gu was punishable by blood.

Gu’s second form of estrangement was an exploration of linguistic defamiliarisation, a Shklovskian attempt at de-automatisation, which is alternatively known as defamiliarisation or making strange. It refers to the artistic presentation of familiar objects in an unfamiliar or strange way so as to overcome the automatic responses that, according to Shklovsky, block us from truly perceiving the everyday world around us. Hilary Chung (2012) contends that “Gu Cheng refused to engage in any meaningful way with the language or the people of his chosen domicile,” which was “merely a perpetuation of the way Gu Cheng had lived his life for many years. His life as a poet was already a deeply personal kind of exile which involved an intense relationship with language itself and an ambivalent relationship to interaction with the outside world.” (12) Similarly, Anne-Marie Brady (1997) recalls that Gu Cheng vowed never to learn a foreign language as he feared learning one would affect his ability to write (129). (One should note, however, that Gu’s writings and his sister’s memoir suggest that he made an effort to learn simple English words to communicate with his son Mu’er after returning to New Zealand in 1993.) On the surface, Gu seemingly refused to learn either English or Māori seriously. But his life in New Zealand should not be viewed as simply a continuation of his self-withdrawn lifestyle caused by his introverted personality, nor as merely an intensification of it caused by his removal to New Zealand. Instead, his Waiheke utopia enabled a radical estranging experiment that made Chinese new.

Gu’s first experiment with making Chinese new was through a hybridity of languages. Limited as Gu was in his knowledge of English and Māori, foreign words still entered his writing in Chinese. One example appears in the last chapter of the novel Ying’er, when the narrator, who is about to leave the Island, raises a question about the meaning of the Māori word tiatia. The Te Aka online Māori dictionary defines it as “to adorn the head by sticking in a feather in the hair” (Moorfield n.d.), but the novel left its question unanswered. Considering that the ferry leaving Waiheke for Auckland departs from Matiatia Bay (figure 9), it is possible that tiatia in the novel is a reference to the
Bay. Examples of idiosyncratic Chinese spellings of simple English letters, words, and phrases abound in Gu’s writings, especially his prose: “败的” (bad), “哈字笨的” (husband), “高府门的” (government), and “埃个” (egg). These words not only anchor his writing in a real time-space in an English-speaking environment but also anticipate recent studies of “Sinophonic English” (Stalling 2011, 3), a way of mixing two languages that enriches the lexicons of both. These words are basically transliterations of the originals. This translation strategy oftentimes leads to a creative way of looking at the concepts that such words represent. For example, Gu translates “husband” into a compound of one verb meaning “sigh” (although it can also be used as an onomatopoeic word for laughter), one noun meaning “word/character,” and one adjective meaning “stupid.”

I argue that Gu’s transliterations mimick his experience of a linguistically isolated life in an English-speaking country. He possibly heard English on a daily basis but could not fully understand its meaning. Gu used a variety of techniques in his poems to convey this experience to his Chinese readers. A common practice was an excessive use of onomatopoeic words and homophonic words. For example, “han yu han qie han han 罕语憨且鼾鼾” (2015a, 154), which can be literally translated as “rare talks ingenuous and snore snore.” Gu’s experiment started before his arrival in New Zealand. When he was in Paris in 1987, he wrote:

There are many of them
A lot of happy faces
Their speech was completely incomprehensible
Passing by chirping

她们挺多
挺高兴的样子
说话完全不懂
叽叽呱呱的过去
(2015b, 280)

Recognising this visual/audial defamiliarisation contributes to a better understanding of his late poems, which have been dismissed as “sinking into the deep mud of obscurity and even ending up becoming an irritating dream somniloquy” (“遁入晦涩的泥淖，甚至沦为令人厌烦的呓语”; Zou 2002, 32). Secondly, Gu attempted to renew Chinese by

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6 The personal pronoun “她们” in the Chinese original suggests that these people are women.
deliberately making his poetic language strange. His experimental poems resulted in a new difficulty in meaning-making, echoing Shklovsky’s view that “The goal of art is to create the sensation of seeing, and not merely recognizing, things; the device of art is the ‘ostranenie’ of things and the complication of the form, which increases the duration and complexity of perception, as the process of perception is its own end in art and must be prolonged” (Shklovsky 2017, 80). The estranging effect achieved through aural and visual defamiliarisation makes possible the child-like vision of the poet, who views the world with new eyes as if he were seeing it and being amazed for the first time. Referring to Hans Christian Andersen as his mentor (C. Gu 1995, 147), Gu continued his fairy-tale in a modern way. He also recalled Walter Benjamin’s belief in children’s emancipatory or even messianic capability for a revolutionary transformation of the present world (Buck-Morss 1989). Gu’s late poetry conveys the sensation of seeing things anew with an impeded vision, which can be an unfamiliar phrase of foreign origin, an unusual collocation, an ungrammatical sentence structure, or a different and child-like perception of the world.

I am not suggesting, however, that Gu’s refusal to master a language other than Chinese was purely aesthetic. His inability to converse in English provided grounds for rejecting possible ties or communication with New Zealand culture, and less obviously, monolingualism protected Gu Cheng from being made vulnerable: it made him oblivious to discrimination and added to his narrative of utopia a layer of protection. He wrote about how his inability to communicate in English brought him many benefits, including once saving him from being fined for driving without a licence (2005d, 389–90). He commented: “I admit that my five years living on the Island are years of my own true living: the air is very clean, no one uses my language, and nobody points out to me where things should be headed” (2005b, 311–12). Gu seemed to neglect the fact that there are other lineages of the Chinese diaspora in New Zealand. The first major group of Chinese immigrants to New Zealand were the miners from Guangdong province, who arrived during the 1860s towards the end of the Otago gold rush and worked in harsh conditions, often for little reward, on the goldfields. Even though Gu’s hand-to-mouth existence was evocative of the challenging living conditions of many early Chinese immigrants to Central Otago, Gu made no recorded effort to reach out to these precursors’ history or their use of the Chinese language (in this case mainly Cantonese or other Southern dialects). In fact, he expressed one possible reason for his lack of interest when he stated: “I am willing to do work. I am not willing to make a living.” In this statement, he differentiated between the miners’ self-sacrificial way of
life and his artistic living in a personal utopia. Unlike the miners’ utopian dream to provide a better life for their families left behind in China, Gu unapologetically occupied the centre of his utopian universe. In addition to cutting himself off from Chinese cultural roots in New Zealand, Gu kept an ostensible distance from his host culture. Gu’s use of Chinese offered him a paradoxical doubleness: it was a bounded linguistic identity yet also a medium through which he could access a wider world. The same kind of paradox also permeates the issue of gender in his utopia: Gu’s self-performance as freed from gender and clothing conventions and his disavowal of his gender and male desire ironically serve to assert his authority and control the two women in his utopia. This paradox is discussed in the next section.

The kingdom of maidens and its misogynistic king

Gu commented that “[Zhuangzi’s] dream of the butterfly is not unreal. I also dreamt of myself. I think I am that person that I dreamt of” (“梦蝶并不虚幻，我也梦见了我自己，我觉得我就是我梦想的那个人”; 2005c, 28). This becoming “the person that I dreamt of” had two distinctive expressions in Gu’s life and work. Gu’s problematic self-fashioning, including both his outlandish style choices in real life and his sanctimonious and disingenuous disavowal of his masculinity, serves as both an articulation of selfhood and a motivation to continue his experiment with intermingling dream and reality across cultures. He imagined that the West would embrace his eccentric hat, his carefully fashioned identity, and his celebration of personal freedom. His effort was nonetheless a counter-example to, or a modern twist on, the tradition of self-fashioning. Here I am evoking Stephen Greenblatt’s (1980) analysis of this tradition in the Renaissance, when social acceptability was the touchstone for devising one’s own identity and public persona. Gu’s bizarre obsession with a transformative look culminated in a grey cadre suit with odd conical hats of assorted sizes, colours, and materials. This look became the most striking public image of his eccentric style after his death. Gu started wearing a hat privately at home in 1987 (2005c). In 1992, he was twice asked why he wore a hat in public after he went abroad. In New York, he said: “After I travelled abroad, I thought that the West was a place of freedom, so I wore it in public” (“出国以后，我想西方是自由的，我就戴着它走到外边去了”; 2005g, 133). In Germany, he confessed: “Back in China, truly I did not dare to wear a hat like this in public” (“在中国的时候，我确实不敢公开戴这样的帽子”; 2005c, 234). When he
was on Waiheke, Gu Cheng was jokingly nicknamed “the hat man” by residents in the neighbourhood for his idiosyncratic dress code (Brady 1997, 131).

Gu had, on various occasions, given some contrasting yet imaginative interpretations of the meaning of his hat. It symbolised a fortress protecting his thoughts from being stolen, a chimney letting out the steam of his thinking, a piece of brick on the Great Wall of China, an emblematic work of the old wall of Beijing that had been torn down, a homage to the Chinese tradition of women wearing hats to keep their heads from catching cold after child labour, or a piece of cloth cut from his trousers so that he could walk on his head while seeing the world in an inverted form (Phoenix New Media 2013b; L. Song 2012; Xiao 1994). Bewildering and miscellaneous as these interpretations are, the hat was clearly a visual statement of his isolation from the surrounding people and culture. To sum up, it is a self-referential work of cheng, his Chinese name, which has multiple meanings, including “city,” “fortress,” and “wall.” Some of the hats that he wore were hand-sewn by his wife, but she recalled that one time, amazed at Gu Cheng’s ability to use a sewing machine to make hats, she shouted out, “Khan! … You are always part of an ‘ethnic minority’. You should be a khan.” (“可汗！……你老是‘少数民族’，你当可汗吧。”; 2005c, 234) Gu also explained that “Indeed I made myself this hat. I think everyone should make their own hat, just like everyone writes their own poetry” (“这顶帽子确实是我自己做的。我觉得每个人应该做自己的帽子，就像每个人写自己的诗一样”; 2005h, 162). Therefore, the hat was not camouflage but rather an extension of self. Read in relation to his utopia, one might consider it to be an act of coronation: the hat expressed Gu’s envisaging himself as a monarch with a chic crown made from out-of-fashion cloth. The strongest case demonstrating how Gu deployed the power of clothes to make a visual statement that negated existing reality, however, happened in a post-June 4th protest and performance called “The Survivors” at the University of Auckland in 1989 (Chung 2012, 6). Gu Cheng decided to wrap his hat with a scarf and wore a bluish-green cloak that he made out of a bed sheet. Its outer side was embellished with hundreds of Chairman Mao badges that formed a swastika pattern. Yang Lian remarked that “Gu Cheng turned himself into a performance artist that day” (Phoenix New Media 2013a).
Gu adopted another kind of self-fashioning in his writing, with a rather self-contradictory substantiation in his life: he presented himself as a feminine modern-day Jia Baoyu (Brady 1997, 130) who was galvanised by the femininity of maidenhood (女儿性). Anne-Marie Brady made an acute observation on the problematic translation of “nü’er guo” (女儿国) into “Kingdom of Girls” by Li Xia, in that “Gu’s fascination was with young women, or girls, rather than with the female sex as such. His fascination was influenced by his reading of Dream of the Red Chamber, that it was a paean to the fragile bloom of young beauties. His belief also reflects the influence of Taoist sexual philosophy, which claims that making love with young women is more beneficial to one’s health than making love with mature women (Brady 1997, 137). In line with this observation, I offer in this chapter my own translation of the term as “Kingdom of Maidens” to convey the clear sexual connotations of virginity in Gu’s term.

Gu Cheng wrote a letter to Xiaonan on 25 April 1993 in which he depicted his utopia on Waiheke Island and suggested that his sole duty was to look after the watering
of the flower-like young women (Gálik 1995). He claimed that the beauty of a world of maidens could free him from the bondage of male sexual desire and his position as the perpetual conqueror. He could finally be at peace, wanting only to be a witness and contemplating mutual love between girls: “I like to see a good girl together with another good girl. In the past, I didn’t know why, but now I know that this is the only possibility of realising my love” (1992, 289).

In Ying’er, the protagonist G offers an echoing confession that he missed the only opportunity to live as a girl when he was born, and the only time he is without words is when he sees “girls together.” He argues that the only remedy for his pain is to have “wild fantasies about seeing them together” (1993, 218). He proclaims: “This was his heavenly kingdom, the only possibility of realising his dream. He expected them to be in love, or perhaps just the sight of them was enough” (218).

In line with his denunciation of the male gender, when Gu and Xie started their utopia on Waiheke in 1988, Gu strongly opposed the idea of having his son be a part of it, arguably because he either wanted no child or wanted the child to be a girl. Instead, he eagerly waited for Li Ying, a young woman whom he had met and fallen in love with before he and Xie left China, to come and join them on the Island. After he and Xie left China, he kept communicating with Li. Somehow, he persuaded Xie to give up custody of their son to a Kiwi neighbour of Chinese/Samoan descent, whose name was Poko. He also persuaded Xie to invite Li to visit them and to support Li’s New Zealand visa application. Once Gu and Xie had managed to save enough money for Li’s flights and the visitor visa was granted, Li Ying arrived on Waiheke Island in July 1991 to form, in Gu’s terms, a heavenly garden in which he believed Li and Xie were his two wives (1995, 406).

Here “sight (seeing)” or “gaze” becomes the basis in Gu’s argument for his negation of the male gender. The semi-fictional semi-autobiographical character G in the novel elucidates the significance of “sight/gaze” to his utopia:

If we turn our whole lives upside down and then look at them, what would they be like? For the first time, I look at my own life with a peculiar sight. I am filled with dread because of this newly gained perception …

如果把我们整个人生翻过来瞧一瞧那会是怎样的呢？……我第一次用一种异样的眼光来看我的生活，这种新鲜的感知使我恐惧……

(C. Gu and Lei Mi 1993, 123)
As the character continues to brood over his demon-possessed sight, he confesses:

Sometimes I think of myself, why would I go so far away to come to this place? I know New Zealand is scenic, beautiful and romantic, and it’s at a similar latitude to that of Robinson Crusoe’s island, and I have friends here. These are reasons that could well convince me in life. But it is undeniable that I have a subtle expectation in my heart. I also need something unusual, something that I cannot have in normal life.

Sometimes I think of myself, why would I go so far away to come to this place? I know New Zealand is scenic, beautiful and romantic, and it’s at a similar latitude to that of Robinson Crusoe’s island, and I have friends here. These are reasons that could well convince me in life. But it is undeniable that I have a subtle expectation in my heart. I also need something unusual, something that I cannot have in normal life.

(1993, 125)

He continued: “Then did I know, with the usual sight I can see nothing. Only when the demon possessed me, the other eye of mine was opened” (“我这个时候才知道，我用平常的眼光是什么也看不到的，而在那个邪灵侵袭我的时候，我才睁开了另一只眼睛”; 126). But it turns out that the only person delighted at the unusual sight/vision was Gu Cheng himself. In 1992, when Gu and Xie left for Germany on the DAAD fellowship (a German academic exchange service fellowship that invites a scholar to take up residence in Germany for a year to further their artistic or literary work), Li Ying eloped with a British qigong master on the Island (X. Gu 1994). Anger and the fear of losing Li Ying prompted Gu to write his novel, Ying’er. In September 1993, Gu and Xie returned to the Island without successfully locating Li Ying. Gu soon found out that Xie was having an affair with a man who was a mutual friend living in Germany and was planning to divorce him. On 8 October, Gu attacked Xie with an axe, and she died in the helicopter on the way to hospital. Gu then committed suicide by hanging himself from a tree (Department of Justice 1994).

Reading together the real-life ending and the depiction in his novel makes one question Gu’s denial of the male gender, masculinity, and patriarchal society. He seems at best an inconsistent misogynist and a king obsessed with the fanatical desire to force his subjects to submit to his will. Ying’er, throughout the book, is fashioned into a Chinese succubus who worships violent expressions of masculinity, or into a promiscuous object of desire engendered by the male gaze. Character C in the novel states: “Maybe it was because of being with Ying’er that there was this aggression in me. She liked this feeling in me. Liked a bit of roughness. In this way, she was more like a girl. She shed tears, but they were a bit affected because it wasn’t for this that she
cried” (C. Gu and Lei Mi 1995, 30). After having sex with Ying’er, Character C bragged to his wife, Leimi, that “There was a dream between us [C and Ying’er], some blurred desire, but we never thought our bodies and our desires would tally so well with each other. Her deftness made my wildness possible, a kind of display of masculine power” (“我们之间本来有一个梦想，一些模糊的渴望，但是从来没有想到我们的身体和欲望是如此的吻合。她的轻巧给了我一种放肆的可能，一种男性的力量的炫耀”; 33). Furthermore, C recalls his first night of sex with Ying’er in a self-justifying tone: “But when I got wild, she became submissive and responded enthusiastically. She liked to imagine herself trussed up, chained to the hill, dominated, tortured by a more powerful presence, with her crying hopelessly” (34). Seemingly legitimising his violent sexual assault, C concludes: “You know how sensitive, unbridled, indulgent, spontaneous and slutty her body is” (“你知道她的身体有多么敏感、放肆、任性、天然、下贱”; 126). Following the logic of slut-shaming and victim blaming, C makes a lengthy portrayal of Ying’er’s body as framed and controlled by his gaze. Her feelings, thoughts, and her own sexual drives, however, are given only marginal space. Time and again, Ying’er is reduced to a stereotyped object as a result of the male gaze. To borrow from Mulvey, Ying’er stands in this novel, which was written by an author who argued to eulogise femininity, as a passive “bearer of meaning,” instead of an active “maker of meaning” (1975, 7). Assaulted firstly by G’s violent sexual demonstration of male power and then by his linguistic power of demonization, Ying’er is reduced to a signifier that is abused twice: as a sexual victim whose value lies only in her fulfilment of a male sexual fantasy, and also as a victim of Gu’s authorial sovereignty who is despotically silenced and denied a chance at self-defence. Responding to Gu’s accusations, Li Ying wrote her own book, which offered an intertextual account of his representation of her. In her memoir, she describes the first night with Gu Cheng as a rape and life on the Island as a nightmare (Mai Qi 1995). As regards Xie Ye, her writings were mainly preoccupied with her sorrow at being denied the opportunity to take care of her son as much as she wanted. She remained completely silent on the topic of sex on Waiheke. It seems that the “gaze” towards the sex, in this case, remained decidedly male: only Gu enjoyed the freedom to stare, appraise, and possess. Here paradoxes appear once again in Gu’s Waiheke dream. His unreserved disavowal of masculinity and authority in his writings and in his literary emphasis on the readers’ co-creation of possible dream worlds (which encourage myriad visions and sights) was belied by the fact that he simultaneously asserted and celebrated masculine power by
abusing Li Ying and then stifled Li Ying’s and Xie Ye’s attempts to offer alternative narratives and, thus, challenge his authorial sovereignty. Deploying authorial power in the darkest way possible, he attempted to restrict and control his readers’ vision.

The afterlife of Gu’s work seems to have followed a similar pattern. The murder-suicide was gradually but increasingly side-lined in public accounts of Gu Cheng. Media outlets and memorial pieces composed by Gu’s friends, relatives, and admirers noted that Gu was a talented poet and obscured the fact that he was also a murderer. Ignoring the pain Gu imposed on the two women in his utopia, these writings “glorify a killing as a myth” (“一场杀戮美化成神话”) and downplayed Gu’s crime (T. Huang 2013). Characterising the viral spread of such false public memories as “a genetic deletion in progress,” Admussen suggests:

readers are losing, over time, certain details of Gu Cheng’s life. The logic of the metaphor raises the possibility that the suppression of those details eases or improves the satisfying reproduction of the story. … A careful examination of the narratives available shows a clear pattern: what is not included in these contemporary viral stories of Gu Cheng’s life are facts, quotations, or details of his biography that come through his wife and victim, Xie Ye. (n.d.)

Xie was firstly muted (and also denied a place) in Gu’s assumed and fabricated love story with Li Ying, and then murdered by her always controlling husband/king with an axe. Xie has now mutated and been killed again in the sensational, emotionally charged representations of her and Gu’s life on Waiheke. Li Ying suffered deletion as well. Her traumatic and complex experience with Gu and Xie was reduced in the 1998 biographical movie Gu Cheng Bie Lian 顾城别恋 (The Poet) to a simple story of a whore seeking to win over a married man’s heart by competing against his chaste wife, who was also a loving mother. The movie focuses on the utility of the female characters (Xie and Li) for Gu, rather than on their own stories. It remains constantly within Gu’s perspective and excuses his violent and dictatorial mindset. The movie opted, yet again, to show the two women as desirable sexual objects as seen through a male gaze. It again recalls Mulvey’s diagnosis: “the determining male gaze projects its phantasy on to the female figure which is styled accordingly … the power of the male protagonist as he controls events coincides with the active power of the erotic look, both giving a satisfying sense of omnipotence” (1975, 11–12).

Gu was unusual among male Chinese poets of his time in that he was excessively vocal about negating the male gender. He said: “I know that I am walking
on a path of men. I don’t want to be a boy. I don’t want to be a man. But there is no other way.’” (“我知道我现在走的是一条男子的道路，我不情愿做一个男孩儿，不情愿做一个男人，可是没有办法。”；2005e, 29) But both his private and public self-fashioning, which sought to escape expected gender and clothing conventions, and his denouncement of male desire and patriarchal authority turned out to be methods of asserting and consolidating his sovereignty as a de facto king surrounded by female subjects. His apparently appreciative view of the two women in his utopia was, in fact, an uneasy and aggressive expression of possession that framed both women as sexual objects for the male gaze. His emphasis on isolation, his insistence on estrangement, and his proposed disavowal of male desire serve one shared purpose: Gu remained, unapologetically, the dominating authority in his utopia and would even appeal to violence to force submission to his authoritarian control.

An inverted look: the dream and the death of Gu Cheng

Through isolation and estrangement, Gu Cheng’s utopia proposed a dream vision that sought to break down the opposition between dream and reality, text and life, art and everyday life. Gu’s utopianism emphasised that “the world is not only one” and encouraged dreams of alternative forms of being. However, as Boym argues, “the home that one leaves and ‘a home away from home,’ which one creates, sometimes have more in common than one would like to admit” (1996, 514). Gu Cheng’s utopia set out to defy the collective violence that China experienced in the midst of revolutionary politics by interweaving dream and reality to build a better place. But his utopia was in fact plagued from its inception by a paradoxical doubleness that derived from his stubborn adherence to authorial sovereignty and representational and physical violence as the basis of his utopian vision. As vocal as Gu was in explaining and delineating his dream, his utopias in text and in life sometimes contradicted each other, and his own explanations were at odds from time to time. What caused him to escape his home country was an unswerving demand for the individual to submit to the ideological control of the state. Yet in the same way he demanded that Xie give up motherhood by sending their son to a neighbour, and he insisted that she “serve him in her hardships, her bitter fate and even with her terrible death” (Gálik 1995, 295). Likewise, he demanded that Li submit to his authority and become his illegal “second wife,” thereby satisfying Gu’s “need to remain at the center of his universe” (Chung 2012, 12). From choosing Waiheke Island as the crucible for his utopia to controlling the textual representation of his utopian story, every aspect revolves around the poet as king, and
any threats to the stability of the system must be removed or oppressed. His student and close friend Anne-Marie Brady (1997) recalled that both Xie Ye and Li Ying told her in private that Gu Cheng was “resentful” when the women started writing. He also shared with Brady his secretive fear that he might be dethroned when the two women “were getting too close and … ganging up on him” (Brady 1997, 130). When the two decided to stop being loyal subjects in his kingdom of utopia, Gu chose to kill them, one in text and the other in real life.

Four years after Gu’s death, Brady (1997) observed that “In New Zealand, the story [of the murder-suicide] was reported as a brutal example of domestic violence. Gu Cheng’s fame as a Chinese poet was noted, but not regarded as significant. Gu was not well-known in his country of adoption.” (128) Gu’s story seemed to fade into oblivion. In Chinese literary circles, including in the PRC, Hong Kong, and Taiwan, however, Gu’s life in a distant land became a lucrative topic and a sensational fantasy for many. Newspapers, magazines, friends, old acquaintances, fans, or even strangers who had no involvement in his life eagerly participated in a carnival-like consumption of the notoriety of his death. Some were disgusted by the cruelty, some were ambivalent towards the event, many more glamorised or down-played his violent actions. The dystopian end of Gu’s and Xie’s lives bespeaks once again Gu Cheng’s always double-edged utopianism. Gu sought to build a utopia of freedom through dictatorship in both his life and his writing. His utopia reminds one of the neo-totalitarian regimes of Eastern Europe that, in Václav Havel’s words, commanded a “precise, logically structured, generally comprehensible and, in essence, extremely flexible ideology that, in its elaborateness and completeness, is almost a secularized religion” (2010, 11). As hypnotising and charming as it has seemed to some, Gu’s proposed utopia was inevitably totalitarian, marking a brutal return to the same kind of totalitarian logic of the state-nation that once traumatised his generation and made him long desperately for “another sky.” The real enemy of his utopian dream found its way back into his ideal castle on the Island. The walls and arrow slits were useless in fending off a threat that lurked within.

This chapter discussed how Gu’s utopia as an interface between dream and reality is deeply flawed in nature. Contrary to his claim that his utopia offered an escape from authoritarianism, in reality his utopian practice brutally returned to the very masculine authoritarian violence that he himself attacked. His use of isolation, estrangement, and self-fashioning was in the end a persistent assertion of his authorial sovereignty. His utopia on Waiheke provided a dark example of authoritarian control,
the very aspect of reality that his utopia reacted against. The next chapter looks at how this authorial sovereignty paradox also permeates Gu’s textual utopia, producing equally devastating results.
EVERY DREAM IS A WORLD: GU CHENG’S POETIC UTOPIANISM

A dream you dream alone is only a dream. A dream you dream together is reality.
—YOKO ONO, “All We Are Saying”

Reality is contradictory. And it’s paradoxical.
—TOM ROBBINS, “Interview of Tom Robbins”

You are no longer quite certain which side of the fence is a dream.
—ERIN MORGENSTERN, The Night Circus

Understanding Gu Cheng’s employment of the term “dream” to delineate his utopia is an especially challenging task. Contrary to the dream narrative in the political discourse of modern Chinese history, dream in his poetry has a distinctive volatility. A reading that compares Gu’s poetic utopianism of dream worlds to the utopian concept of dream in Chinese political history offers interesting and thought-provoking referential points for readers today. The dream form and its grand narrative permeated the official narrative since the inception of the “New China” and peaked in the Cultural Revolution when China attempted to paint its own Soviet dream about materialistic affluence and self-determination (Y. Li 2018). The dream theme made a recent comeback in 2013, when the term “The Chinese Dream” was coined by the incumbent President of China, Xi Jinping, who asked the younger generation of Chinese to dare to dream and to contribute to the revitalisation of the country (Shen 2013). Since then, the term has been
popularised in official announcements as an embodiment of the political ideology of the Communist Party leadership under Xi. According to the party’s theoretical journal Qiushi, the Chinese Dream is about Chinese prosperity, collective effort, socialism, and national glory (Shi 2013). Despite differences in its use in different historical contexts, the dream theme in the political arena has played an unswerving role: it always fuses collective aspirations and private longings (sometimes depicting the two as co-dependent) to serve and resurrect the spirit of nationalism.

In contrast, Gu’s use of dream in his oeuvre does not lead to a conformity or unity in its meaning. He composed more than fifty published poems whose titles contain the Chinese character meng 梦 (dream). (For a list of such poem titles, see appendix 1.) There are also a vast number of poems that include either a dream element or a dream theme. In Chinese, the character meng can be either a singular noun (dream), or a plural noun (dreams), or a verb (to dream; dream; dreaming). These poems bespeak, firstly, a perennial insistence on the importance of dreaming of a better world. In this respect, Gu’s use of dream resembles that in political discourse in China. Secondly, and contrarily, Gu’s poetry insists on the volatility of dreams and their ability to open up various dream worlds. In this respect, Gu rejected the consistency, transparency, and singularity of the dream in China’s political discourse. Instead, Gu’s dreams resemble a fascinating kaleidoscope, which at every available turn reveals a familiar yet slightly different shape. Sometimes the co-existence of multiple dreams is described:

I have countless golden dreams
that are lost on the road of life
我有无数金色的梦想，
遗失在生活的路上
(《中秋漫笔（四）》1971; 2010a, 76)

In every dew drop
there is a roseate dream
每滴露水里
都有浅红色的梦
(《在淡淡的秋季》1980; 2010b, 493).

Sometimes the dream challenges or substitutes for reality:

Dream, stealthily
passes me a slip of paper
telling me that
life is a sham
梦，悄悄地
传来一张纸条
告诉我
生活是假的
(《世界和我•43•争论》1980; 2010b, 512–13)

Where reality breaks
dreams
converge, becoming the sea
在现实断裂的地方
梦
汇成了海
(《世界和我•57•弥合》1980; 2010b, 517).

In some poetry, the dream is connected with temporality:

I seemed to be in a dream
sailing an imaginary boat
spurring forward on the torrent of time
我似是在睡梦中，
驾驶着一只幻想的小船，
飞驰在时间的急流上
(《梦曲（一）》1969; 2010a, 83)

Days and nights are swimming together
yesterday was a piece of a chaotic dream
白天和黑夜一起游动
昨天是一片纷乱的梦
(《波光》1979; 2010a, 315).

The dream promises a reassuring sense of the unknown future:

I love my dream
it is like a spring current that
warms my heart
我热爱我的梦，
它像春流般
温暖着我的心
(《幻想与梦》1971; 2010a, 73)

eternal dreams
purer than the life
永恒的梦
比生活更纯
(《永别了，墓地（六）是的，我也走了》1980; 2010a, 457)
Who knows
in the dreams
my hair turned grey
I was fifty years old
read the whole world
I knew everything about all of you
谁
能
知道
在
梦
里
我的
头发
白
过
我
到达
过
五
十
岁
读
过
整
个
世
界
我知道
你
们
的
一
切
(《十二岁的广场》1981; 2010a, 738).

Sometimes the dream has an alluring or alarming depth:

The colour blue deepens
so deep as that of a dream
with no boundaries
蓝色在加深
深得像梦
没有边
(《爱我吧，海》1980; 2010a, 404)

The dream is too deep
you have no feathers
life cannot measure the depth of death
梦太深了
你没有羽毛
生命量不出死亡的深度
(《不要在那里踱步》1981; 2010a, 694).

Gu’s dreams take on various shapes, versions, and attributes; on top of that, every reading of Gu’s dream world generates a new dream world. The repeated act of dreaming and co-dreaming enabled by Gu’s poetic utopianism creates an interlocutory motion through which the boundaries between the multiple dream worlds begin to blur. For the creator of the first dream world though, the engagement of co-builders gives rise to an unsettling contradiction. The dream form occasions an intimacy or comradeship between the creator of the poem and its readers, who become co-creators and whose own interpretative dreams are seemingly legitimised by the interpretative dreams of the text. Read in this way, Gu’s appeals to dreams might seem to allow an unregulated
explosion of dream worlds that compete against or defy the author’s dream world and hence threaten the authority and power of the first creator.

There is a close link between Gu’s utopian poetics and Homi K. Bhabha’s (1994) notion of the Third Space. Theorising on cultural differences and exchanges, Bhabha proposed the idea of the “third space,” which is an “interstitial passage between fixed identifications” that “opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy” and “where the negotiation of incommensurable differences creates a tension peculiar to borderline existences” (1994, 5, 312). Gu’s poetics refuses to reproduce or reinforce the dream world versus real world binary and celebrates heterogeneity and hybridity. The intermingling of dream with reality in his poetic utopia exhibits elements of a third space. Meaning-making in Gu’s poetic utopia is achieved through a co-authoring process of the poet and the readers, in which meaning stops being a fixed reference point and becomes instead an ambiguous yet dynamic product of both author and reader.

This chapter argues that Gu, through his use of repetition, contradiction, ambiguity, and estrangement, attempted to produce an infinitely expanding, multi-layered third-space that straddles reality and dream. (I used the hyphenated term “third-space” in this chapter to refer to Gu’s poetic utopia and to distinguish it from Bhabha’s concept.) However, Gu’s use of the utopian poetics of authorial self-negation and readerly freedom is contradicted by his simultaneous insistence on poetic sovereignty, rendering his utopia a paradoxical dream world. Gu’s poetic utopianism draws on and also deviates from other Chinese utopian poetry. A close reading of two of Gu’s representative poems of his poetic utopianism, “Nearby” and “A’man,” illuminate the structural contradictions and paradoxes of Gu’s dream world. By tracing the after-life of Gu’s dream world in the posthumous re-readings of his poetic utopia, I show how attention to the paradoxical structure of Gu’s utopian poetics guards against the kinds of oversimplifications that have characterised these posthumous re-readings. The paradoxes of Gu’s utopian poetic dream equally shed light on the renewed utopian discourse of the dream in Chinese politics today.

**Gu’s poetic utopia and other Chinese utopian poetry**

In Gu Cheng’s time, there existed at least four different categories of utopian poetry in China’s literary scene: the utopian poetic tradition deriving from the hermit culture of imperial China; official poetry that eulogised the utopian future of the Chinese people, or even humankind in general; critical poetry that voiced dissent and that, while
predominantly directing its critical attention towards the dystopian reality of the present time-and-space, also thereby implied the possibility of a brighter future; and Gu’s utopian poetry, which did not fit into any of the former three categories. Gu’s poetic utopianism draws on the other three categories but remains distinct from all of them.

Gu’s poetic utopianism has a noticeable resemblance to canonical Chinese hermit poetry in that both mobilise nature and its elements to form reality-criticising allegories. For poets in this tradition, the wind, the frost, the snow, and the rain are deployed as symbols of a corrupt government or an unscrupulous society. By contrast, the Four Gentlemen of Flowers (花中四君子), also known as the Four Noble Ones (plum blossom, orchid, bamboo, and chrysanthemum), are praised for their robustness in harsh environments (Masiola 2014, 11). The Four Noble Ones are usually deployed as personifications of the inner dignity of the poets (Zhong 2015, 144). Relying on their readers’ knowledge of this binary opposition, hermits used their writings either to portray an ideal world filled with harmonious and pleasant natural elements to contrast and, therefore, implicitly criticise reality, or to consolidate the binary by mirroring the disagreeable reality through a bipolarisation between moral nobility and corrupted evil (C. Li 2018, 75–81; Xingyu 2009; Shenglong 2003, 151–58). As I have discussed in the previous chapter, Tang Xiaodu (1999) has described a similar binary opposition between “the grazing land” (牧场) and “the city” (城市) in Gu’s poems. Tang also dismisses Gu’s poetic representation of nature as “nothing but a poetically conceived illusion” (1999, 42). I argue, however, that Gu’s “illusion” (or, to put it in simpler terms, his failure to present nature as it really is) is, in fact, a vision of his dream world, which inherently distinguishes his poetry from that of the hermit poets. This “poetically conceived” vision no longer burdens itself with the requirement that it be a faithful representation of the real world; rather, it conflates nature, or natural symbols and elements, with a self-reflexive depiction of its ambiguous relationship with reality, constructing a theoretically double-layered dream world. In addition, freed from a periodic revolution around the reality-representation axis, it acknowledges the complex multiplicity of the modern era and bestows upon itself a new mission: reaching out to other space-times, or dream worlds.
Many of Gu’s early 1970s poems shared with official utopian poetry an optimism about the human capacity to build a better future. The last stanza of the poem “Books” (1970) typifies this optimism:\footnote{My quotation of the last stanza of this poem is based on an earlier edition by Gu’s father, Gu Gong. In the more recent edition published in 1995, which was edited by Gu’s sister, Gu Xiang, many of the lines in this poem were changed. But no further explanation was given as to why such changes took place.}

Our life,  
 Emitting its light, emitting its heat.  
Our society,  
Sailing towards the Sun.  
The future and hope  
Are our sailing magnets

我们的生命，  
发着它的光，发着它的热，  
我们的社会，  
向着太阳航进，  
未来和希望——  
是我们航行的磁针

There are two conspicuous traits of Gu’s poems in this period. Firstly, they celebrate a simple, or even blind, optimism. As this poem shows, the advancement of society relies heavily on abstract and dubious tools: the future and hope. There seems to be no obstacle to this voyage towards societal betterment. Gu’s advocacy of persevering through time with a hopeful mindset strongly echoed the utopian poetry composed by party poets, even though Gu was more romantic than revolutionary. Compare Gu’s poem with an excerpt from a representative Red Guard poem:

We are the faithful Red Guards of Chairman Mao!  
What  
Could hinder our train of revolution?  
No, nothing ever could!

我们是毛主席忠实的红卫兵！  
有什么  
能把我们革命的列车阻挡？  
没有，永远也没有！
The second trait of Gu’s “Books” is a clear loss of individual subjectivity. In his poem “Books,” the first person always appears in the plural form: women 我们 (we) or women 我们的 (our). Life and society are expected to progress collectively in unity, and there leaves little room for voicing individuality.

But Gu’s poetic utopianism gradually deviated from the collective utopian logic. He began to recognise multiple voices and to insist that no one single voice should be given the right to dominate others. At the beginning of the poem “When the Great Storm Comes” (1982), Gu suggests:

When the great storm comes  
Please arrange our dreams, each and every one,  
In the cave that is close to the shore

在大风暴来临的时候  
请把我们的梦，一个个  
安排在靠近海岸的洞窟里
(2010a, 801)

While the first person still appears in the plural, the dreams start to multiply in number. There is a contrast formed between the great storm and the caves. While the power of wind poses a threat, the dreams will be kept safe underneath the earth and wait for a resurrection with the aid of sea water.

Along with other Misty Poets, Gu challenged the use of art as a political tool and the expected conformity of poetry. When the counterculture movement started to storm many developed countries in the late 1960s, China began its own rebellious movement, which was led and endorsed by the Maoist leadership against alleged subversive ideological enemies among the people. From Gu’s childhood to his early youth, poetry in China was “intensely political in nature” (Yu 1983, 703). Revolutionary Poetry (革命诗) or Political Lyric (政治抒情诗) or Political Fantasy Verse (政治幻想诗) dominated the literary scene from the late 1960s to the mid-1970s. This poetry served to eulogise

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8 The author of this poem remains anonymous. The name this poem was published under was “Xiang Ri Kui” (向日葵), which is clearly a pseudonym, as it means “sunflower.” This translation is adopted from Contemporary Chinese Literature: From the Cultural Revolution to the Future (Yibing Huang 2007).
the utopian future of the Chinese people as promised by communist ideology, and to generate support for the party’s leadership.

Besides a shared purpose, the poetry of this era echoed the radically rebellious spirit of the Red Guards (红卫兵) and shared a vocabulary with the party’s political propaganda, including words such as “Long live” (万岁), “great” (伟大), “glorious” (光荣), “down” (打倒), “smash” (砸烂), “perish” (灭亡), “revolution” (革命), “struggle” (斗争), and “swept out monsters and demons” (横扫一切牛鬼蛇神) (J. Guo 2006). To better illustrate the revolutionary rhetoric that dominated poetry in this era, I cite from an article titled “Long Live the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution” that was published in the Chinese government’s weekly English-language news magazine, *Peking Review*:

Revolutionary people, let us all unite still more closely on the basis of Mao Tse-tung’s thought!

Holding high the great red banner of Mao Tse-tung’s thought, and the great red banner of the proletarian cultural revolution, let us go forward in triumph!

Long live the great proletarian cultural revolution!  
(Hongqi Editorial 1966)

The rebellious spirit here has a very distinctive compliance: unity and triumph come only through the great red banner of Mao’s proletarian Cultural Revolution. One thought. One direction. One revolution. All other thoughts must either submit, or be marginalised or attacked. Gu, while on the one hand being undoubtedly influenced by the sweeping revolution, started to notice an awakening of subjectivity:

I am not a giant rock but I, too, am rolling.  
My poem only makes a slight sound  
It does not merge into the torrent of the era  
It is just an aria

我不是巨石却也在翻滚，  
我的诗只发出小小的声音；  
它没有溶入时代的洪流，  
它只是支独唱的歌曲。  
(2010a, 95)
Inspired by the energy and utopian promises of the revolution, Gu’s poems desire a movement and a voice, yet this movement is not part of “the torrent” but instead seems delicately solitary. In the late 1970s, Gu found a group of like-minded poets who were seeking an escape from the Cultural Revolution’s restrictions on art: the Misty Poets. The group soon gained popularity among young Chinese readers, who were desperately in need of alternative heroes who could voice resistance against conformity (D. Li 2006, 19).

It should be noted, however, that the Misty Poets were not the only source of dissent in the post-Mao era. There was a new critical poetry of political realism that expressed protest and criticism and became “‘rhymed salt’ that rubs into the wounds of the nation” by exposing “the maladies in the political system and political life under communism” and revealing “a reality very different from the myth manufactured in the poetry of the past” (Yu 1983, 718). While the new critical poets reversed and challenged the belief that poetry should be submissive to the purposes of politics, they nonetheless abided by two “unwritten laws of literary creation” (712): the present leadership should not be the target of their critical literature; and the exposure of societal or political problems must be accompanied by a firm assertion that there are already rectifying forces at work and, therefore, none of the exposed problems poses a substantial threat to the central leadership. Refusing to be limited by such restrictions, the Misty Poets wrote insightfully about the complexities of the present, and each poet proposed a different possibility for a better future. As Gu suggested, “the defining characteristic of this new type of poetry [Misty Poetry] is its realism—it begins with objective realism but veers towards a subjective realism; it moves from a passive reaction toward active creation” (Gu quoted in Sze 2010, 150). This statement reveals Gu’s understanding of the major difference between Misty Poetry and the critical poetry. Believing that the poet should take an active role in constructing an alternative world that simultaneously incorporates yet surpasses reality, Gu expects the new type of poetry to open a wider imaginative space rather than merely criticising or reflecting reality.

It should be noted that Gu also wrote poems that deal specifically with reflecting or criticising reality. Most of his allegorical poems, in which anthropomorphic animals or plants are usually the main speakers, are clearly politically charged. Blurring the boundaries between human, flora, and fauna, Gu’s poems of this kind were particularly satirical towards reality (Xie 2014, 102). The usual tone is a mixture of that of an intuitive care-free child and that of a wise and insightful bystander. One example is
“The Poplar and the Raven” (1979) (2010a, 351–52), where Gu drew a contrast between the poplar and the raven as a satirical allegory of authority. The poem begins with a depiction of a raven living on a small poplar. At first the raven worries about the safety of its nest on such a fragile tree: “so the raven piously prayed / hoping that the little poplar would quickly grow up” (“于是乌鸦便虔诚地祷告，/ 祝愿小杨树快快长高”). When the poplar reaches a certain height, its rapid growth concerns the raven, whose prayer quickly turns into persuasion (劝告) and a warning (警告) to the poplar to stop growing. The poem concludes: “Please do not blame the poplar for ignoring the leadership of the raven, / for this kind of leadership is indeed completely unnecessary” (“请不要谴责杨树漠视乌鸦的领导，因为这种领导本来就毫无必要”). Revealing the connection between reality and the allegorical world at the very end, the last line had a punning wit: ling dao 领导 is both a verb (to lead) and a noun (leadership; leader). By suggesting that it is “unnecessary” to have this kind of “leadership,” Gu directly confronted the accepted ideology of conformity and submissiveness to the party’s leadership at the time.

But as suggested earlier, Gu’s creative energy was not preoccupied with reality. The liminal zone between fantasy and reality excited and fascinated him more. Gu was not interested in creating a poetic utopia to mirror or filter reality; his sanguine gaze was forever fixed on the unopened realm of multiple and unexpected possibilities. On 23 April 1993, Gu wrote a letter in the presence of his translator, Wolfgang Kubin (Gálik 1995, 289). The letter was addressed to Xiaonan, a mutual friend of Li Ying and Gu Cheng who lived in Beijing. In the letter, Gu wrote about two gardens. One was the “Grand View Garden” (大观园) on Waiheke Island, which was a female-only abode that alluded to Dream of the Red Chamber) on Waiheke Island. The second was what he called the “Heavenly Garden” (天国花园), which was a world of pure beauty and eternity. The 1993 formation of this “Heavenly Garden” evolved from a vision set as early as 1980, when Gu wrote a short note on poetry, suggesting that:

All creatures, life forms, human. Everyone has their own dream. 
Every dream is a world.

... 
I, too, have my dream. Distant yet distinct, it is not only a world; it is a heavenly kingdom higher than any world.

... 
I will use the pure silver in my heart and cast a key to open that door of the heavenly kingdom to humankind.
万物，生命，人，都有自己的梦。
每个梦，都是一个世界。
……
我也有我的梦，遥远而清晰，它不仅仅是一个世界，它是高于世界的天国。
……
我要用心中的纯银，铸一把钥匙，去开启那天国的门，向着人类。

(2011, 128)

In Gu’s explanation of the Heavenly Garden and of dream worlds lies a dubious claim: since everyone (or even every life form) has their own dream world, why is the poet’s dream world “higher” than the other worlds? A more explicit insistence on the superiority of the poet in building dream worlds can be found in a 1979 entry in Gu’s diary: “In the spiritual world, the poet is the Creator. He paves the road of hope. He builds the Heavenly Garden” (“在精神世界里，诗人是造物主。他铺设的是希望之路，他建造的是天国花园”); 2005b, 271). The poet is transformed from a prophet of the Heavenly Kingdom into the God of the Heavenly Kingdom, and by creating a world above all other worlds, he places himself above everything else: all creatures, life forms, and human beings. This becomes the major paradox of Gu’s poetic utopianism: Gu’s conception of dream worlds depends on his readers’ empowerment as co-builders of dream worlds and on Gu’s corresponding self-abnegation, yet the very existence of such dream worlds, as by-products of the poet’s created dream world, testifies to the prominence of the poet and encourages the poet’s self-aggrandisement.

The connection between the poet as prophet and the poet as god reminds one of what Michelle Yeh calls “the cult of poetry” (1996, 51) in her analysis of the images of the poet in post-Mao Chinese poetry. In this period, poetry became almost a religion and was widely believed to embody beauty, truth, and freedom (Yeh 1996, 64). In this fashion, poets, as priests or prophets of poetry, were promised a vicarious immortality that would transcend the temporal and spatial bondage of the world. The poet was exalted as “the eternal poet: the saint in search of Heaven” (Pan 1993, 1). As Yeh points out, many post-Mao Chinese poets had a private yet shared desire to sacrifice their lives for the sake of poetry, and advocated constant suffering in marginalisation or even a glorious death that would help humankind usher in an era of light (1996). Such desires obviously echo Maoist discourse, which advocated blood sacrifice and martyrdom for

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9 In my translation, I capitalise “C” in the word “Creator,” as Gu’s Chinese original text clearly points to a Creator God instead of a mere inventor.
the revolution. In post-Mao literature and art, Chinese writers alerted themselves to the necessity to “eliminate all kinds of apparent or implicit erosions of the Cultural Revolution mentality, yet in the process of elimination they also consciously or unconsciously used the mentality and modes of operation of the Cultural Revolution” (“时时剔除‘文革’思潮的种种潜在的或显在的腐蚀，而在剔除过程中又会自觉不自觉地运用起‘文革’的思维和方式来”; G. Wang 1994, 63). Bei Ling further suggests that “Poetry in essence is very private … but in China it is a movement, a banner, a bugle, an ism, a power, even an unmovable icon—it becomes ‘Maoism’” (1994, 110).

This brutal and unfortunate return proved to be deeply paradoxical: it advocated creative freedom and individuality yet also imposed arbitrary limits on poetry; it defied official ideology yet failed to escape entirely its absolutist mentality. Gu’s poetic utopianism also exhibited this kind of paradox as he was in fact deeply unwilling to give up his poetic sovereignty even though he declared such willingness in his utopian poetry. One example of this unwillingness is a series of subjective metamorphoses in the last stanza of the poem “Daze/Stay” (1991), which reads:

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The song goes:
I am not a man of poetry
I am I
I am not a man
I am I
I am not I
I am you^{10}
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歌曰:
我不是诗人
我是我
我不是人
我是我
我不是我
我是你们
(2015b, 121)

In this poem, Gu restricted his poetic sovereignty through self-negation. “I” as a poet was negated to embrace the new identity as being one of “We,” the builders of utopian worlds. This self-negation is gradual: the three “I am not” phrases first negate the status of the poet as a man of poetry; they then negate his identity as a man before finally arriving at the destination of self-negation: I (the poet) am one of you (you the readers).

^{10} This “you” is used as a plural form in the Chinese original.
But there is a noticeable inconsistency as regards this matter in his writing, an inconsistency that is evident in his contrasting desire to reign as the Creator/King in the Heavenly Kingdom. Hindered by his paradoxical insistence on his poetic sovereignty, however, Gu’s self-abnegation was never complete. The struggle between self-assertion and self-abnegation haunts his dream world. Gu’s reluctance to negate his poetic sovereignty is shown lucidly in his novel Ying ‘er, where a pertinent example goes:

The church is there and the cross is there, but the person who died on the cross is no longer there. 
He wanted to walk around and not to go back to the cross. My boredom with the whole story had already started.

While it was not rare for Chinese modern and contemporary poets to compare themselves to, or to self-portray as, Christ-like figures who willingly sacrifice their lives for the betterment of humankind (Yeh 1996, 55), Gu refused to nail himself to the poetic cross. His craze for power and authority does not motivate him to self-sacrifice.

This section compared Gu’s utopian poetry to three other kinds of poetry that were influential in Gu’s time. Gu drew on the other three kinds of poetry in his use of natural elements and symbols, his faith in human capacity, and his criticism of reality. But, as I have shown, Gu’s poetic utopia does not simply form a binary opposition to reality (as the ones depicted in hermit poetry do). It refuses to become a space of dominant collectivity and suppressed individuality, as advocated by official utopian poetry. It also focuses on the creation of alternative possibilities rather than on the depiction of unpleasant social reality. There was a clear trajectory in the development of Gu’s perception of subjectivity in his poetic world. Gu’s utopianism started as a negation of the ossification of subjectivity, which was delimited under the Chinese Cultural Revolution mentality, according to which “I” only exists in the realm of “We.” Gu then shifted towards the pursuit of an awakened subjectivity. He depicted an “I” isolated from and developed outside the prescribed collective identity, an “I” only loosely connected to other Misty Poets by their common pursuit of a world of personal freedom. Eventually, Gu designed his textual utopia in such a way that it invited readers to co-construct the utopian world according to their personal visions. But, as discussed in this section, Gu’s poetry also reveals his insistence on poetic sovereignty, which
contradicts his utopian design. This contradiction will be explored further in the next section, in my analysis of the structure of Gu’s utopia of dream worlds.

Branching out and diving in: the structure of dream worlds
It is not uncommon to see Gu being labelled a “utopian poet” or his poetry “utopian.” Such examples abound in the work of Chinese scholars on Gu Cheng (Y. Wang 2009; Yang 2008; Luo 2007; Teng 2007; Lin 2006; J. Zhang 1999; Chen 1996; Yiwu Zhang 1994). The scholars of these works, however, do not explain their usage of terms, which seems to suggest either that utopianism in poetry is a unanimously defined term that needs no further clarification, or that Gu’s poetry possesses a utopian quality that is shared by other Misty Poets or celebrated writers and thus requires no further explanation. As I have been arguing, however, both assertions are problematic. Utopia is not a clearly defined genre, and such an understanding in any case directly contrasts Gu’s poetic utopianism, which suggests an ever-expanding space that accommodates a myriad of voices.

This section looks firstly at two representative poems of Gu’s poetic utopianism: “Nearby” (1989) (2010b, 550) and “A’man” (1993) (2010b, 855). I examine how these poems embody the tension between Gu’s negation of authorial power and his inclination towards self-aggrandisement. I argue that Gu’s poetic utopianism seeks to create an infinitely expanding structure of possible readings with multiple intersecting layers of dream and reality. Through the use of contradiction, ambiguity, repetition, and estrangement, Gu’s utopian poetry actively engages its readers, prompting them to form their own interpretations, and thus, to build their own dream worlds. Gu’s poetic prompt to interpretative expansion fulfils his utopian impulse to escape from the present place, to form a new cognition of time, to negate poetic sovereignty, and to restore an experimental vitality to the Chinese language. However, there lurks an intractable problem. The expansion of readings must start by building upon the poet’s dream world. In this sense, all the derived worlds testify to the importance of the Alpha world, and, therefore, reveal that the self-negation effort was an insincere failure.

Nearby

This is a nearby planet
so clean with no footprints
I used to walk in dreams
in the wind of an ever-hotter sun

I like this sand land of sun
just as I like forests and the rain
this is the solid fruit tree in my dreams
for which I used to move stones

approach reality through every repetition
soft branches turn into words

this is a story told gently
when it is done being told it has just taken place

The poem “Nearby” achieves its estranging effect through the intermingling of three forces: contradiction, ambiguity, and repetition. In the very first line, the other world makes its debut as the speaker’s “I” introduces it as a “nearby planet.” Here two worlds immediately, though subtly, emerge. If this world is a “nearby planet,” then a different planet (or world) on which the speaker used to dwell is also implied. The contradiction here is that the “I” attempts to lead the readers’ attention to the details of this ideal world on a “nearby planet,” yet, inevitably, the world that “I” originally inhabited lurks in-between the lines; and every appearance of the word “I” reminds the reader of the distance, or gap, between the two worlds. Whereas the speaker insists that this distance is not far (thus pointing to the attainability of this world), the spatial distance between two worlds is in nature cosmic. The attainability of this outside world is, therefore, built upon the possibility of space-travel, which immediately invokes both a sense of exploration and a sense of risk and uncertainty. The “I,” without keeping readers in
suspense for too long, in line 3, shows such travel is only feasible in a “dream.” In dreams, one world is superimposed on the other, and their boundaries dissolve. In dreams, the “I” walks on the “nearby planet” which is “so clean with no footprints.” But here a fundamental contradiction surfaces: this world’s attainability is questionable: If “I” used to walk on it in dreams, how could the planet stay clean with no footprints? The planet itself is like the “fruit tree” in line 7; it is both “solid” and dreamy. Furthermore, if the real world and the dream world become permeable, then how can the speaker guard the purity of his “clean” “planet” and so be sure that it is better than reality? While the dissolution of the boundaries between the two worlds points to various kinds of possibilities, the very existence of the world of the speaker affirms a less pleasant truth that characterises utopianism’s contradictory nature. This land called utopia is never free from the giant shadow named “the present,” and neither is its creator free from the burden of the past. The poem negates its origins, yet it is at the same time defined by those origins. Just as utopia is a good place, it is, at the same time, a non-place.

Another contradiction lies in the fact that this planet, unlike traditional utopias, embodies unpleasant or even incompatible elements. Walking “in the wind of an ever-hotter sun” does not sound pleasant, just as the sunny sandy land does not suggest a fertile soil suitable for the fruit tree growing on this planet. But the “I” states that his affection towards all elements here is the same: “I like … Just as I like” (line 5 and 6), and in fact, the poet juxtaposes these elements here as indispensable, equal entities that constitute this utopian world. Such juxtaposition subtly provides the reason why “dreams” allow the superimposition of the two worlds. By collaging elements from both—the less pleasant real world and the dreamy ideal world—a third space comes into being in this poem, in which the two worlds cooperate rather than compete with each other.

The third major contradiction lies in the role played by the speaker. In “Nearby,” the speaker provides the link between the land of hope (the “nearby planet”) and the obliquely mentioned real world. By depicting the land as pristine (“so clean with no footprints”), Gu makes the fact that the “I” walks on such land even more significant and prominent. Gu depicts the poet (as represented in “Nearby” by the speaker who moves stones to foster a story) as the forerunner, creator, and embodiment of freedom. This “I” disappears in the last two stanzas, which could be read as suggesting the poet’s willingness to give up or pass on the power of speech. However, there is a contrast between the disappearance of the “I” in the last two stanzas and the syntactically
repetitive return of the phrase “这是一个” (this is a), which appears in lines 1 and 11. The repetitive use of “this is a” implies the maintenance of the poet’s rather cryptic sovereignty. The pronoun “this” is what Jakobson termed “a shifter” (1971, 132), a word whose meaning cannot be determined without referring to both ends of the communication process: to a sender and to a receiver (to both poet and reader). The phrase “this is a” is also evocative of the common practice of teaching a child to read or of the biblical account of the first man Adam naming all the other creatures on earth. Both situations suggest the superiority of the sender (the one teaching or Adam), be it in knowledge or in status. Seen from this perspective, the phrasing contradicts what the poetic structure seems to say: the poet seems willingly to allow the reader to take over the story, while in fact remaining cannily in control.

Meaning-making in this poem is further complicated and challenged by its many ambiguities. These ambiguities appear mainly in two dialectical relationships: the imagined and the real world; and the temporality of storytelling and world-building. Just as the boundaries of the two worlds become blurry in dreams, the two worlds become permeable in the poem. In lines 7–8, when the speaker describes “the solid fruit tree in my dreams / for which I used to move stones,” it is not at all clear whether the “I” used to move the stones in dreams or in the real world. The ambiguity increases in the following line: “approach reality through every repetition.” The omitted grammatical subject in this line coupled with the undefined term “reality” allow for at least four possible readings: the “reality” that the poet approaches through writing words; the “reality” that the reader approaches through reading the poem; the “reality” that the speaker “I” approaches in either the dream world (the nearby planet), the real world (the planet on which the speaker dwells), or the third world-space that the “I” brings into being by superimposing the dream world on the real world; or an ultimate “reality,” be it aesthetic or historical, that human beings are capable of approaching through repeated effort. In addition, there are three more movements in this poem, and none of them is without ambiguity: “walk” (line 3), “move” (line 8), and “turn” (line 10). As readers, we are given a jigsaw puzzle with missing pieces. We know the speaker walks “in the wind of an ever hotter sun” on a “nearby planet,” but we don’t know why the speaker walks or where the speaker might go from there: will he continue to walk on this planet, walk towards a different planet, or travel between the two planets? We learn

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11 See Gu’s understanding of Taoism and what he believed should be a common pursuit of the supreme ideal of Dao (道) (2015c).
that the speaker moves the stones for the sake of the tree, but have no idea where he is moving the stones to or how moving stones will help the fruit tree. (Could it be that the speaker tries to pile up the stones as support for the tree against “the wind of an even hotter sun”? We have been told that the soft branches are turning into words, but we do not know how such a transformation, from being a product of nature (branches) into being a product of culture (words), could happen. It is reasonable to infer that the branches (and, naturally, also the fruit tree) form a connection point between the two spaces. In the couplet “在每一次重复中接近现实 / 柔软的枝条变成文字” (approach reality through every repetition / soft branches turn into words), the branches transform into words, and then the tree becomes a part of reality. As a result, the tree takes root in the dream world, but it branches out into the real world. In contrast, the “I” travels to the dream world from the real world. In this sense, the fruit tree, as well as the speaker, straddles two spaces and, therefore, becomes a fundamental element of the third-space, where multilayers of indistinct spatial relationships surface.

The ambiguous temporality of storytelling and world-building is shown most lucidly in the last stanza: “this is a story told gently / it happens just when it is finished being told.” The Chinese original text plays on two different timeframes and synchronises storytelling with story-happening, without having to define the tenses. Unlike in English, the form of a Chinese verb never changes, regardless of whether it is present, past, or future tense. The tenses of verbs are either designated by aspect markers or indicated by adverbials that indicate the temporal flow of events. Even though the aspect marker guo in jiang guo 讲过 (“told”) suggests that the story is old and has already completed, the adverb ganggang 刚刚 (“just”) emphasises just now, suggesting that the story is new and fresh. The two seemingly parallel yet contrasting temporalities are connected here, and thus the translation of the last line is particularly challenging. But the challenge for meaning-making does not stop here, and it is most clearly manifested in translating the poem from Chinese into English. In “Nearby,” “曾” (past tense marker) in line 3 and line 8, “过” (past tense marker), and “刚刚” (just now) decide the tenses for the verbs “走” (walk), “移动” (move), “讲” (told), and “发生” (happen), but the tenses of other verbs, such as “喜欢” (like), “接近” (approach), and “变成” (turn), remain ambiguous. Another special kind of ambiguity caused by

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12 This results from one linguistic feature of the Chinese language. There are a number of words that work as auxiliaries for the time, but the tense of a sentence is mostly defined by the context.
The difficulty in translating this poem adds to the poem’s inherent ambiguity and works very well in engaging the English translators to derive from it their unique understanding and formation of the poetic world(s). This problem of translation illuminates the ambiguities of the original. If “梦” (dream) is translated as a singular noun, then the whole poem is about the author’s dream, and the readers are not allowed to dream their own dreams.

The unconventional collocations make the meaning of Gu’s poem obscure, even for a reader of the Chinese text. In line 4, “越来越” (ever more) could refer to either the sun or the wind. As a result, line 4 could be suggesting two different images: I used to walk “in the wind of an ever-hotter sun” or “in an ever-stronger wind and it is sunny.” As for “太阳的沙地” (sand land of sun), the original phrase for “sun” can be understood either as the possessive case of the noun, meaning “the sun’s,” or as an adjective, meaning “sunny.” (I have attempted to create a similar kind of strangeness in my English translation: “sand land of sun.”) This collocation is immediately strange to the eyes of a native reader of Chinese as it reads as unfamiliar and unusual. The penultimate line also reads strangely with the use of “轻轻讲起的” (told gently) as an adjective for “故事” (story). The phrasal verb “轻轻讲起” is usually placed after the subject. When this phrasal verb is combined with “的” as an adjective for “故事” (story) without a personal pronoun as the subject, a native reader would find it to be rather unnatural and idiosyncratic. Without the difficulties generated in translation, readers of the Chinese poem still have to work out how to deal with and how to interpret the apparently strange and ambiguous use of words, collocations, and phrases.

Together, ambiguities of all kinds in this poem point to the reader—the hidden third party, other than the poet and the text—as not only a witness to but also a participant in the construction of this new world-space. This third party also includes the translators, who are firstly readers of this poem, and they will have to make translational choices of the said words based on their interpretation of this poem. The ambiguities challenge readers to find the missing pieces of the puzzle or even to make a new puzzle of their own based on their interpretations. In other words, the poem’s readers, either consciously or unconsciously, become part of the “story.” Here,

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13 Both are translated into plural forms, largely due to the emphasis in this poem on repetition and the possible correlation between stones and words. The other nouns are much easier to decide according to logic and customary use.
storytelling refers to both telling the story of the speaker’s dream and telling the story in the poem; the story happens in the speaker’s dream, and also happens in the readers’ readings of the poem. This structure resembles a world of matryoshka dolls or Zhuang Zi’s dream of becoming a butterfly: the speaker dreams of a nearby planet, the planet has a fruit tree, the fruit tree’s branches turn into words, the words compose a story, the story is this poem, the readers are reading the poem, the readers’ readings of the poem become different dreams of different nearby planets. The poet fades from the poetic stage, just as the speaker “I” disappears in the final two stanzas, allowing the poem’s readers to take over the role of storytelling. In this way, a new story is born so that the poem can have many lives.

Repetition plays a significant role in this endless incarnation of the story. I am referring not only to the fact that the word “repetition” appears in line 9 (in the third stanza) but also to the repeated occurrence of the verb “like” (喜欢, line 5 and 6), the introductory phrase “this is” (这是, lines 1, 7, and 11), and the predominant repetition of the end rhyme of the vowel “i” (see lines 5, 8, 9, 10, and 11: di 地, zi 子, shi 实, zi 字, shi 事). In fact, all rhymed lines in this poem end with the vowel “i,” except line 1 and line 3, where qiu 球 and zou 走 end with half-rhyme. The repetitive use of “like” sets the positive, affectionate tone of the poem. The repetition of “this is” suggests how the reoccurring structure is formed: a planet contains a fruit tree, which contains a story, which contains a planet, and so on. This structure is reinforced phonetically by the repeating vowel “i,” which appeared five times in the poem. What is also repeated is the reading of the poem: with every reading completed, the text travels from the page to the reader’s mind yet again. Although the poem came into being in a historical sense of time, every reading of this poem is new, unique, and current. What is superimposed in the final two stanzas is not only the shadows of the soft branches onto the speaker’s dream or the words on the page under the poet’s pen but also the words on the real reader (or, say, reality) in a different time and space: a different dream world. This space of superimposition now has at least three layers, with the third layer involving countless possibilities. And it will continue to expand and to enrich as long as the poem is read, just like the solid fruit tree branches out from one certain space to connect with the incalculable spaces of the poem’s many readers.

Through contradiction, ambiguity, and repetition, Gu’s poem “Nearby” estranges space, time, and the relation of the poet and the poem to their readers. Through such strangeness, Gu’s utopian poetic world comes into being. It exists not
only on the page, but also in the minds of, firstly, the poet and then the readers. The poem is not completed at the moment when the poet made the poem; it is made anew every time it is read. Gu’s poetic utopia not only describes dreams and possibilities, but relies on its readers’ continuous acts of dreaming, which blur the lines between their reality and fantasy, the immediate textual world and the world of imagination (a nearby planet). It includes the multiple spaces to which the poem travels and connects the temporality of the past, the present, and the future. The strangeness created by the text in this utopia engages all readers and challenges them to step outside their comfort zones and to cease relying on conventional reading. Instead, they must form their own readings, which serve as further branches on the imaginary tree of poetry. But these potentially infinitely expanding readings enabled by the co-authoring effort must compete with the dominance of the first world authored by the poet, which forever affirms the superiority of the poet.

The Poem “A’man” (1993) was written in the last year of Gu’s life. It again exemplifies his typical use of contradiction, ambiguity, repetition, and estrangement to construct a co-built utopian space of imagination. “A’man” carries the experimental spirit of earlier poems (such as “Nearby”) to the next level, and in the poem Gu’s poetic utopianism takes a slightly different form. But the same tension persists: the expansion of the dream worlds of the poem’s readers is always threatened by the poetic voice, at whose command the first dream world comes into being.

A’man

The sea water used by the wind
Has a diving wife inside it

The nut that cannot be husked
Has the wind inside it

The rooftop that cannot be broken
Has a pack of cards inside it

The person who cannot be loved
Has the night inside

The eucalyptus soft stairs that cannot be pushed
Has inside them a foot, a clock, and a piece of wave
Used in the Second World War

阿曼

被风用过的海水
里边有潜水的妻子
不能剥开的果仁
里边有风
不能破坏的房顶
里边有一副纸牌
不能爱的人
里边有夜晚

不能推的枞树柔软的台阶
里边有一只脚 一个钟 一片第二次世界大战
用过的海浪
(2010b, 855)

The most noticeable feature of this poem is its concentric structure shaped by the use of repetitions. The term “用过的” (used) appears twice (in lines 1 and 11), “不能” (cannot) occurs four times (in lines 3, 5, 7, and 9), and “里面有” (has … inside) is repeated five times, appearing regularly in each of the poem’s even lines (lines 2, 4, 6, 8, and 10). The phrasal noun structure (an adjective plus auxiliary word de plus a noun), as indicated by the Chinese word de 的, recurs eight times (line 1, 2, 3, 5, 7, 11, and twice in line 9), though this grammatical parallelism is not so clearly visible when translated into English.14 The repetition of “用过的” (“used by”) connects the beginning and the end of the poem. On the one hand, this repetition conveys completeness since the phrase can be deemed to mark one boundary in the poem’s dream world, which is encircled by “the sea water” and “the sea waves,” which appear respectively at the ends of the poem’s first and last lines. On the other hand, this repetition suggests not boundaries but expansion. The phrase appears accompanied by different subjects, wind and the Second World War respectively, so marking a shift from a non-human natural element to a historical, human event. This shift clearly points to an act of creation, which does not eliminate the possibility that the poem’s readers might add their own acts of transformation. Reading in this light, the concluding line is, in fact, a reincarnated beginning, suggesting an endless cycle of motion. The repeated use of “里

14 There is also a change of information order in the last two lines when translated into English. It is neither natural nor grammatical to arrange the information in the same order as the Chinese original. As a result, my translation made a compromise in swapping the position of “the Second World War” and “a piece of wave.”
面有” (has … inside) forms the concentric structure of the dream world: it connects
every stanza of the poem, or, say, every layer of this dream world, while simultaneously
suggesting an inclusive relationship between each adjacent layer. It again revives the
matryoshka-like structural pattern of “Nearby,” granting the dream world a sense of
depth. Every occurrence of “不能” (cannot) seems to obstruct the formation of the
dream world, whose concentric form also contains multifaceted dynamics. The sea
water, the wind, and the waves are tangible forms of movement. The diving wife, the
nut, and the eucalyptus are ephemeral creations that will exist and shortly disappear.
The night will be replaced by day when the sun rises. The night and the clock are both
traces of the motion of time, which again is, in essence, another form of motion. But the
obstacles imposed by “cannot” and all the aforementioned dynamics are overcome by a
strong and seemingly perennial power: the explorative act enabled by the desire to
“dive” into a deeper realm. The concentric pattern achieved through obstacle-defying
movement evokes the visual image of Augustin-Jean Fresnel’s zone plate, which shows
the diffraction of light that forms a succession of waves or curves, a pattern of
concentric circles (see figure 11).^{15}

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^{15} See also Hu Shaoqing’s comparative structural analysis of Gu Cheng’s poem sequence
“City,” “Ghost in the City,” and the urban design of Beijing (2015). Diffraction happens when
light encounters an obstacle and forms through an aperture a geometrical shadow of the obstacle
or aperture (Fowles 1975). Yang Lian also makes a similar use of diffraction, see Jacob
Edmond’s analyses in “Diffracted Wave and World Literature” (2014) and “Modernist Waves:
The visual form of the poem resembles montage. It is indeed strange, contradictory, and ambiguous. To start with, the title word “A’man” (阿曼) does not appear anywhere in the poem. Judging from the Chinese character 阿, “A’man” is likely to be the name of a person. Combined with the character 曼, it probably refers to the woman to whom the poem is addressed. The only female figure in the poem is the diving wife. Other than this, the only reference to a human is in line 7: “The person that cannot be loved.” It should be noted that there is an ambiguous suggestion in line 7. The original text bu neng ai de ren “不能爱的人” is an unusual collocation that appears strange to a Chinese reader. It has two interpretations. One is that the
person is incapable of loving others. The other one is that the person cannot be loved. I have chosen to translate this line as “a person that cannot be loved” in order to preserve the visual structure of repetition, but this poetic line in the Chinese can be interpreted either way. The person is presented as possessing a disagreeable character. Could this person be the diving wife that appears in line 2? If so, a contradiction is formed: the diving wife who has the ability to open and explore new realms is also someone that cannot be loved or is incapable of love. If not, then all three people in this poem remain unconnected (A’man, the wife, and the anonymous person). Then what is the relationship between the three figures, and what role do they play in the poem? In addition, other uncommon collocations (“被风用过的海水” “The sea water used by the wind”, “一片第二次世界大战 / 用过的海浪” “a piece of wave / Used in the Second World War”), ungrammatical syntax (“不能推的枞树柔软的台阶” “The eucalyptus soft stairs that cannot be pushed”), and illogical imaginings (“不能剥开的果仁 / 里面有风” “The nut that cannot be husked / Has the wind inside it”; “不能爱的人 / 里边有夜晚” “The person who cannot be loved / Has the night inside it”) in this poem contribute to the reader’s experience of difficulty. This difficulty is again escalated by a hidden connection between the stanzas and the lines. Is the wind in line 4 the same wind that “used” the sea water in line 1? Does the “foot” (line 10) belong to the “person” or the “wife”? What is the connection between the nut and the eucalyptus? Do the rooftop, the pack of cards, the stairs, and the clock all come from one house? The list of questions continues with no ready answers. If these connections exist, then the boundaries between each layer of the dream world begin to dissolve. With its ambiguities, contradictions, estranged use of language, and unsolved interpretative problems, Gu’s “A’man” is a labyrinth of questions that refuses forthright interpretation and invites readers to construct different dream worlds through their own speculation and understanding.

There is no personal pronoun “I” or “we” or “you” in this poem. Among all the unstable elements, at the heart of the poem lies a pair of inanimate objects: the rooftop and the pack of cards. But the rooftop, the cards, the stairs, and the clock all point to a world inhabited by people. Combining the clear past tense marker guo 过 and the indication of a very specific historical event, the Second World War, the poem at the very end fills the absence of time with an indefinite sense of a post-Second World War era. This disappearance of “I” contrasts with the four strong and definite “cannot” phrases and the five “has inside” revelations. These phrases and revelations all allude to
a poetic voice of authority in this dream world. “Cannot” can be understood as either
descriptive or injunctive, while the repeated use of “has inside” is reminiscent of the
tone of God in the Bible’s cosmological narrative (“Let there be light”). With ease and
(an arbitrary) willpower reinforced by poetry, the poetic voice gives structure to dream
through repetition, creates the content of every layer of the dream world, and produces a
montage of all the worlds together in a condensed space in an undefined time. The
disappearance of the personal pronoun “I” does not cancel the poetic self. Rather, the
poetic voice exalts itself above the dream world and affirms itself as the de facto
Creator. Each and every layer of the dream world attests to an incarnated poet/god, who
descends (“dives”) to dwell among his creations for a short while and who bestows
upon his followers the content of their dreams. With every reading, the poem itself
completes a reincarnation, and the poetic voice starts a new journey and a new life.

Producing dreams: the after-life of the dream world
More than two decades have passed since the dystopian murder-suicide that abruptly
ended Gu’s lived utopia on Waiheke Island. While articles on Gu’s poetry are
commonplace in Chinese journals of literary studies and cultural history, most of them
are similar in their critical and analytical angles. Most frequently, such articles revolve
around two critical themes: Gu as a mad man and Gu as a “fairy-tale poet” (童话诗人).
The mad man image is partly the result of Gu’s self-analysis in the novel Ying’er, where
he commented from another character’s viewpoint that “He is a madman in a clever
disguise. His fantasy and his capacity to realise his fantasy have reached the state of
madness. He wants to do away with everything in the world, all men, all the male-
controlled world, society, even procreation and nature, including himself” (1993, 178).
Undifferentiated arguments expand on Gu’s diagnosis. For example, Zhang Xiyi
comments:

Gu Cheng is a madman. Madness, schizophrenia, and irrationality
comprise his first personality. Secondly, he is a poet who is crafty at
using language and also capable of using weapons to harm others’ lives.

顾城是个疯子。疯子、精神分裂、丧失理性，是他的第一人格，其次他才是个善于运用语言，并且也会使用凶器危害他人生命的诗人。(1994, 3)
Contrary to this line of analysis, other scholars mainly look at Gu’s poetry and its association with, or fulfilment of, the label “fairy-tale poet.” The term was first introduced in 1980 as a nickname given to Gu Cheng by Shu Ting (舒婷) in a poem entitled 《童话诗人——给G.C》(Fairy-tale Poet: To G.C).\(^\text{16}\) In the poem, Shu Ting wrote:

You believed the fairy-tale you’ve written
and you become the deep blue flower in the fairy-tale
…
using a voice of pure silver
speaks to your dream

Reading Gu’s poems as fairy-tales is an oversimplified (mis)understanding, as argued by Tang Xiaodu:

With one glance, most people assigned him a part as a “fairy tale poet” in a play called “Misty Poetry,” meaning that although he was head and shoulders above others in talent, he was after all a child who had not grown up. He was a child who liked dreaming and would never grow up.

大多数人们一瞥之下, 便分配他到一幕叫“朦胧诗”的戏剧中扮演“童话诗人”的角色。意即他虽然才华出众, 但终于是个还没有长大, 也许永远长不大的、喜欢做梦的孩子。(1999, 38)

While rightly noting that “fairy-tale poet” is not an adequate title to summarise Gu’s poetic style, Zhang attacks the poems Gu wrote after 1986 for their gradual abandonment of the lucid use of words and images that characterises his early poetry, and for Gu’s shift towards a more sophisticated structure and a rather unconventional linguistic style. For those used to conventional modes of interpretation, Gu’s experimental poetry seemed deliberately difficult, playing with a sometimes stream-of-

\(^{16}\) Shu Ting is the pen name of Gong Peiyu (b. 1952), a female Chinese Misty Poet whose poetry was influential especially in the years immediately after the Cultural Revolution.
consciousness logic, a fragmented structure, broken grammar, and a use of words that was idiosyncratic and difficult to grasp. Zhang Hougang observes:

Because of its excessive pursuit of the purity of poetic art and its confinement to personal limited experiences and feelings, this kind of “pure poetry” generates a rupture in language and meaning, which makes readers lose interest in reading it.

由于过度追求诗艺的纯粹，又拘囿于个人狭窄经验和感受，这种“纯诗”在语言和意义之间产生了断裂，导致读者失去了阅读的兴趣。(2013, 156)

Gu’s publication history in mainland China over the last decade, however, suggests strongly that his literary writings, especially his poetry, continue to enjoy a large readership. In the past decade, by collecting and selecting from more than 2,000 poems that Gu composed in his rather short life, more than 25 books were produced by major publishers in China, including new anthologies, new editions, and new poetry collections with illustrations of Gu’s own paintings. (For an indicative and not at all exhaustive list of publications, including works by Gu and by critics on his literary writings, see appendix 2.) In addition, in 2013, Gu Cheng’s poem “Imaginary Fears” (忧天) was chosen as the essay topic in the National College Entrance Exam (高考语文作文题) of Fujian Province. (See appendix 3 for the Chinese original text used in the exam.) This is not the first time that literary works of canonical writers or poets became essay topics in the National College Entrance Exam. But as this poem is not one of Gu’s widely circulated works, it might indicate that the examiners expected the high-school graduates who were to sit the exam to have a certain degree of familiarity with Gu Cheng’s poetry. And more recently, a revived interest in Gu’s later years has led to biographical works and a documentary of his last years in New Zealand, named Gu Cheng in Exile (2016) (《流亡的顾城》).

But there clearly exists a disjuncture between a child-like poet who writes fairy-tales and a cold-blooded lunatic who murders his wife. One approach to overcoming this contradiction has led to readings of his poems as if they were nothing more than an autobiographical or indexical note to his life, his unorthodox romantic relationships, and his infamous murder-suit. Read in this way, Gu’s late poetry becomes the site for a literary treasure-hunt, in which lines of poetry are used as evidence to justify the speculation that the mad poet Gu Cheng rehearsed, plotted, and practised murder and death within his poetry. His poetry becomes merely a means to an end: “his spiritual
and mental world is in extreme confusion, and his poetry is absurd and eerie as if he was whispering in a dream” (“他的情感精神世界极度混乱，诗作荒诞怪异如梦中呓语”; Ge 2000, 72); “Step by step, he fell into a desperate abyss of madness; his early spiritual poetic language became words of madness and absurdity” (“他也就一步步陷入绝望境地的疯狂状态，早期灵性的诗语言也转变成类似疯狂的诞语”; Y. Xu 2003, 75). This (mis)reading confuses the often sullen, weary, and cold-hearted poetic persona with the poet himself and contends: “Gu Cheng, in his poetry, had always been learning to kill people and kill himself … Therefore, the end, in which he destroyed his wife and himself, seems already to have been written a long time ago” (“顾城一直在诗中学习着杀人和自杀……因此最后毁灭妻子和自己的结局似乎早已经写好了”; Z. Li 2003a, 15).

From this perspective, poetic lines such as “‘Dead people are pretty people,’ the ghost said … ‘Dead people are all beautiful’ … ‘Dead people make the air tremble’” (“‘死了的人是美人’鬼说完……‘死了的人都漂亮’……‘死了的人使空气颤抖’”; 2015, 435–36) and “Killing people is a lotus flower / kill it and then carry it by hand / the hand cannot be replaced” (“杀人是一朵荷花 / 杀了就拿在手上 / 手是不能换的”; 2015, 326) are just poetic prophecies of his bloodstained dystopia. A reading that overlooks the complexity of Gu’s poetic utopianism reduces it to a simple mirroring of reality, and deems the literary value of his poetry to be the same as that of a madman’s diary.

Not one of these readings, no matter how far they may seem to depart from what Gu actually wrote, contradicts what Gu’s poetic utopianism predicts: his Waiheke story and his utopian poems formed the first dream world, and his readers, based on their own understanding, knowledge, and perspective and through various literary or philosophical lenses, have gone on to produce their own diffracted dream worlds. Although Gu’s dream world ceased to evolve, it has, through its readers, in a vicarious way, an afterlife. As long as the reading of his dream continues, the act of dreaming continues; as long as the dreaming continues, Gu Cheng’s dream world, as the precursor and catalyst of the act of dreaming, survives in the imagined worlds that it induced (which includes this thesis and the very act of reading this thesis). But the problem of Gu’s dream world also persists: Do our readings consolidate his poetic sovereignty, and so, in essence, remain reduplications of his dream? But this would prove that his poetic utopianism failed to achieve its claim of producing miscellaneous dream worlds. Or do our readings
flourish with an array of dreamy shapes, shades, and structures that corroborate his utopian statement, and thus again reinforce his authorial sovereignty? This would demonstrate that his utopian method, self-negation, is futile, and make the construction of his dream world through self-negation suspicious.

This chapter has offered my answers to these sets of questions. Gu’s poetic utopianism hopes to create an infinitely expanding third-space of hybridity (reality and dream) through self-negation and the empowerment of readers, yet this hope is undone by his unwillingness and inability to negate his poetic sovereignty. The poetic utopia of Gu is founded on an idea of unleashing the dream worlds of writer and readers, freeing them from authority, and yet that apparent freedom is defined and produced by the poet’s—by Gu’s—poetic authority. Gu’s poetic utopia contains the same paradox and downfall as his lived utopia: all his claims to relinquish authority, in fact, only end up reasserting his power and authority. But I shall reiterate a point that I made earlier: Gu’s poetic utopianism works according to its own poetic rules and should be approached first and foremost as poetry, not an indexical note or a mere gloss to his life.

In this chapter, I have shown that, although Gu wrote his poetry only in Chinese, his poetic utopia was in fact a transcultural site that draws on translingual experiences of his lived utopia. Such transcultural aspects of Gu’s poetic utopianism, however, only served to reinscribe the oppressive ideology as represented by the Chinese political discourse of social dreaming, from which his utopianism had sought to escape. Gu’s power and sovereignty as the creator of poetic utopias was left unchallenged, or even reinforced, by his careful structuring and controlling of such transcultural spaces. In the final chapter, I look at how Baxter’s and Gu’s failed attempt to negate their sovereignty through transculturation sheds new light on our understanding of the dark possibilities of modern utopianism.
A map of the world which does not include Utopia is not worth even glancing at, for it leaves out the one country at which Humanity is always landing. And when Humanity lands there, it looks out, and, seeing a better country, sets sail. Progress is the realisation of Utopias.

—OSCAR WILDE, *The Soul of Man under Socialism*

They constantly try to escape
From the darkness outside and within
By dreaming of systems so perfect that no one will need to be good.
But the man that is will shadow
The man that pretends to be.

—T. S. ELIOT, *The Rock*

Will modernism ever stop moving and expanding?

—ANDREW THACKER, *Placing Modernism*

Baxter and Gu attempted to make their utopian dreams come true by engaging both poetry and everyday life. Their work and lives show that the “three faces of utopianism” (Sargent 1994, 1)—literary utopias, utopian social theory, and intentional communities—are thoroughly intertwined. Understanding the theoretical implications of their dreams and practices likewise requires attention to a synthesized view of their utopianism. This chapter shows how the literary texts and the lived practices of the two utopianists are best understood within a framework of modern utopianism that is characterized by the transcultural encounter, movement, and paradox.
Two terms call for immediate definition: transculturation and movement. Originally an anthropological concept, transculturation was coined by the Cuban scholar Fernando Ortiz in 1940 to describe the process of cultural encounters in which a fusion of the indigenous and the foreign takes place to create a new, unique cultural product (Ortiz 2003). The term has migrated into literary criticism and other disciplines, especially after the publication of Imperial Eyes (1992) by Mary Louise Pratt, who proposed that such a process happens in contact zones that are “social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other” (2008, 7). Julie F. Codell draws attention to the elements of change formed in such meeting places of cultures:

[I]t was not merely an uneasy fusion of two simultaneously held belief systems, but instead accounted for the historic specificity and artistic originality of new cultural phenomena, going beyond the syncretic model of two cultural systems co-existing to embrace instead those elements retained and lost by the two systems in the creation of a third. (2012, 4)

Codell’s analysis of how such changes bring about the creation of the third, hybrid cultural system conjures up the notion of Bhabha’s “Third Space”:

It is that Third Space, though unrepresentable in itself, which constitutes the discursive conditions of enunciation that ensures the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized and read anew. (1994, 55)

It is this unfixed quality of transculturation that proves especially suitable for the comparative reading of the utopianism of Baxter and Gu. The utopian worlds of the two writers, when juxtaposed, invalidate a model based upon the monodirectional influence of one culture on the other and instead create a space of multilateral cultural interactions, which include, but are not limited to, utopian traditions, theories and practices across cultural borders. Here, I borrow the definition of movement in physics to describe the mobility of such cross-cultural and cross-border encounters. In a given frame of reference (in this case, the globe), the utopias of Baxter and Gu are spatially reconfigured when they move and interact with other literary, cultural or political utopian forms. Therefore, their utopias have a constant capacity for movement (a change of position in relation to the given frame). A comparison of the two utopias helps illuminate the cross-cultural encounters that fundamentally shaped both writers’ utopian practices and poetics.
This chapter has three main sections. The first focuses on how Baxter and Gu attempted to build their utopias through transculturation so as to endow them with a dynamism that would negate the dystopian reality they each faced. The second section highlights how this transcultural aspect of their utopianism paradoxically makes their utopias sites of nightmares as a result of the paradoxes and contradictions discussed in the previous chapters. The third section concludes the thesis by analysing the significance of recognising the paradoxical, transcultural utopianism that these two writers represent.

Paths of movement: the transcultural utopias

The utopian projects of Baxter and Gu, despite notable differences in their design and practices, share a common interest in cross-cultural movement. Both their utopian communities and their poetic utopias are in fact products of transculturation. The formation of their utopias is transcultural; so is the motion of the textual utopias in their after-life via reading and translation. This section first tracks two sets of transcultural movement in their utopias—the travelling of ideas and the mobility of people—and then moves on to discuss how their textual utopias have travelled since their deaths. This transcultural aspect of their utopianism might seem to help their utopias realise specific goals; however, it instead provides a specific condition which sustained or even reinforced both writers’ dominance over their readers and the utopias that they created. Their utopias in fact became sites of darkness and suffering not despite but in part because of their transcultural movement.

The two utopianists made a similar choice regarding the location of their utopias, though their choices were inspired by different cultural sources. Baxter and Gu both shunned the cities and chose to anchor their dreams in rather remote areas of New Zealand. However, it can be argued that the two arrived at a similar decision via very different trajectories. The name Jerusalem might have had a particular appeal to Baxter because of the religious aspect of his utopian project. In addition, Baxter’s use of Auckland as a cultural antithesis to Jerusalem (i.e. the capital of materialistic and capitalistic culture versus the mecca of spirituality and communality) resembles the rural-urban divide in English literature since the sixteenth century (Williams 1973). Gu’s contrast between the city (城) and the countryside (乡), though a similar opposition, was shaped by his youthful experience of being sent to a rural village to be re-educated. His mythical account of the countryside echoes the discourse romanticising rural areas in the Cultural Revolution, yet his strong sense of repugnance towards
Beijing as the centre of political power and dominance deviates from the mainstream ideological perception of the country’s capital in his time. The concept of the island (岛) (in both the geographical and the cultural sense) gradually replaced the countryside as the binary opposite to the city in Gu’s spatial configuration. As Gu spent the first thirty years of life entirely living on the mainland, his perception of the island is particularly shaped by his reading: by his knowledge of Paul Gaugin’s life on Tahiti and Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* (Gu Cheng Zhi Cheng 2005; X. Gu 1994, 10; C. Gu and Lei Mi 1993, 125). For Baxter, the bicultural Jerusalem had a specific location but the idea it represented travels far. But Gu, while equally interested in showcasing his utopian lifestyle to the outside world, insisted that his Waiheke home was the terminus of his utopian dream (C. Gu 2005e, 44). Once it was anchored, it would not start a new journey.

Jerusalem’s open border contrasted with Waiheke’s double seclusion. But both allowed the mobility of people (though clearly at different levels) as one form of transcultural movement. Neither poet lived in complete separation from their societies for the duration of their utopian practices. Both needed to strike a balance between isolation and connectedness but each developed very different attitudes towards the borders of their utopias. Baxter opted to have an open border, establishing an open-door policy in Jerusalem. In most cases, Baxter allowed people to both enter and leave his utopia at will. Baxter used the mobility of people to further the community’s influence despite its geographical remoteness. This negotiation was needed as he designed the utopia as an example for the Pākehā community to follow: “a cell of good living in a corrupt society” (Baxter 2015a, 1:75). The social mission of his utopia demanded constant and active dialogue with both sides (although as my analysis of its paradoxes and contradictions shows his community did have boundaries in operation). The other reason for the free movement of people was that the operation of Jerusalem relied on financial support from Baxter. Therefore, he travelled extensively to raise money for the community.

Gu’s utopia on Waiheke faced similar financial challenges. But Gu demanded that influences coming from the outside world should be kept to a minimum and scrutinised the people coming to his utopia. In such a way, Gu celebrated his utopia as “我的小邦，爱的家” (“my little kingdom, my home of love”; 2005b, 44). The Chinese character “邦” here is also part of the Chinese term for utopia (乌托邦), indicating that the Waiheke utopia, in Gu’s configuration, was a kingdom within a country. It was
firstly protected by its geographical isolation (being on an island) and then further separated by its adherence to Gu’s utopian principle (a female-only policy with himself as the only exception). Refusing to envisage a different location for his utopia, Gu instead allowed for the mobility of its people in a rather monodirectional fashion. Those allowed into the dream world were not encouraged to leave. Both Li’s departure and Xie’s plan to leave Gu attracted Gu’s bitter resentment and violent retaliation. The only person who travelled freely in and out of the dream world was Gu himself. He was always ready to promote his little kingdom to any audience available, either through writing (to his readers) or through verbal accounts in the interviews or the speeches he delivered when spending time overseas.

Judging by how the textual and lived utopias of Baxter and Gu were formed, it is clear that such utopias are products of transculturation. There are many cross-overs in the two poets’ utopian imagination and practices. Whereas Baxter sought to escape Western individualism by looking to Māori and Communist collectivism for utopian inspiration (Millar 2005, 156–57; Baxter 2010, 373–74), Gu eagerly pursued personal freedom and identity to escape the nightmares of Chinese Communism (C. Gu 2005b, 85). While Baxter’s understanding of communality drew on his observation of India, Gu’s imagined kingdom had the (never completed) Islamabad as the centrepiece, which Gu designed in draft as a military fortress with strong walls that could fence off all hypothetical enemies (C. Gu and Mi 1995, 160). Baxter’s textual utopia embraced bilingualism while Gu repeatedly insisted that he would only write in Chinese. It should be noted, however, that Gu also confessed that reading the works of Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Federico Garcia Lorca and T. S. Eliot motivated him to search for his own identity through the expression of poetry (C. Gu 2005b, 101).

When juxtaposed, the utopianisms of Baxter and Gu also have many parallels. Both figures had a strong faith in establishing utopias in New Zealand, which resonates with the optimism of New Zealand’s early European settlers. Both insisted on accomplishing their utopian mission through a combined effort of writing and living. Both adopted the role of the founding father or the tribal chief in their utopias. When Gu moved to Waiheke Island in 1988, he poetically imagined his utopia in the poem “字典” (“Dictionary”). Proclaiming that “Here my wife will / give birth to a tribe for me” (“我的妻子要在这里 / 为我生育部族”) (2009, 160), Gu exiled his son from his tribal kingdom of women to form a new family. His imagined utopia resembles the family structure of an imperial king with a queen and other concubines, repressing all male
heirs who are perceived as potential threats to his rule. Baxter also had the habit of addressing his Jerusalem members as his tribe. He commented that:

I think Te Ariki [Māori: Jesus] wanted me to come to Jerusalem. He gave me some indications that he would send a tribe to join me there. (2015c, 3:451–52)

The tribe was ngā mōkai. Baxter’s writing revealed his often inconsistent self-positioning within the tribe. He remarked in Jerusalem Daybook that:

Nga mokai are not my children. I am not their father. Yet I do stand in the shoes left unoccupied by the parents who have been unable … These ones [ngā mōkai] don’t want a boss. But they do want a parent who doesn’t reject them as soon as they are independent. (1971a, 26)

Yet later in the same book, he suggested that ngā mōkai were the “idealistic, honest, curiously chaste, adult children of ours” (50). Given the religious underpinnings of his utopian dream, Baxter might well have been modelling himself on Abraham in the Old Testament or on Jesus Christ. He indeed was the de facto father of his spiritual descendants in a family not bound by blood but by a shared pursuit of utopia.

The poetic utopias of Baxter and Gu were transcultural sites where both worked across cultures to reinvigorate their poetry. Both utopias have continued to generate new readerships through new publications and translations. As previously discussed, there has been continued interest in republishing the writings of these two utopianists. There have also been many commentaries and artworks inspired by the two in the past decade (see appendices 2 and 4). The after-life travels of the poetic utopias of Baxter and Gu crossed paths in Spanish literature. In 2014, an anthology of Gu’s poems was translated into Spanish by Javier Martín Ríos and published by a Chinese publishing house (Cheng 2014). Four years later, “The Māori Jesus” and other poems were also translated into Spanish by Caleb Harris (Baxter 2018), which was believed to be the first book-length collection of Baxter poems in Spanish (Stuff 2019).

It should be pointed out that this interest in other cultures is a common feature of utopian imagination. The dreaming of a better or another world, is often associated with looking to another culture, however misguided or naïve this looking may be. It is to this kind of looking and imagining that Giacomo Balla’s brilliantly pertinent abstract painting Paths of Movement + Dynamic Sequences (1913) provides a bold visual caption. It delineates the dynamic paths of utopias that move across cultures with
promising possibilities. Depicting a flight of sparrows moving past a window (see figure 12), *Paths* reflects Balla’s long-held belief that everything is in perpetual motion, and thus, the mission for art should be an honest attempt to delineate and capture that motion (Elwell 2015). Balla’s mission echoes the Futurist movement’s conviction in the liberating force of modern art, which is endorsed by technological advancement (ibid).

Aligning with the Futurists’ treatment of art as “a reaction against ideological and political positivism, with an objective to gain a degree of uniqueness in pursuing its own outlooks” (Baldacchino 1998, 35), the painting represents “a well-balanced synthesis of light and motion, space and state of mind, objectivity and subjectivity, elaborated to the point of abstraction” (Dell’Arco and Baldacci 1995, 22). Balla integrated the wave-like movements of sparrows into the network of the multitudinous forces at play. In other words, just as the principles of aerodynamics bring together the combined forces of lift, gravity, thrust and drag, Balla’s visual representation of flying sparrows traces their trajectories in context, showing that the nature of movement is not simply a product of abstract speed but also a necessary negotiation of spatial, temporal and ontological tensions. To study the route of one sparrow, one must put the bird in context and make comparisons with the routes of other sparrows, other flocks, and even the other points and intersects that traverse its own in the network, in order to make better sense of this moment of simultaneity and juxtaposition. The multidimensional paths of Balla’s painting challenge the perception of modernity as one single temporal entity. They demonstrate that the history of modernity is characterised not only by progress but also by fragmentations, conflicts and repetitions. As Janet Lyon suggested, the artwork attests to the fact that “different ‘times’ coexist within the same discrete historical moment, just as surely as homologous ‘times’ exist across centuries” (1999, 204).
Balla’s canvas might be compared to a global map of modern utopias. The comparison reminds us firstly of the many possibilities of utopias. Utopias celebrate many different ideologies, including “socialist, capitalist, monarchical, democratic, anarchist, ecological, feminist, patriarchal, egalitarian, hierarchical, racist, left-wing, right-wing, reformist, free love, nuclear family, extended family, gay, lesbian, and many more” (Sargent 2010, 21). It also shows how such multifaceted utopias, despite their taxonomical differences, bring into dialogue different times and places, desires and paradoxes, pointing to what Edmond terms a “mutually constituting and yet mutually eclipsing otherness” (J. Edmond 2012, 42). The challenge for a reader of modern utopianism then is to understand utopia as a space of both movement and simultaneity. The latter, as explained by Foucault’s phrase “the epoch of simultaneity,” refers to the fact that “we are in the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of the near and far, of the side-by-side, of the dispersed” (1986, 22). Foucault further suggests that this simultaneity bestows upon us a new perception of the world, which is “less that of a long life
developing through time than that of a network that connects points and intersects with its own skein” (22). The network of connection and intersection, to return once again to Balla’s sparrows, not only delineates how each sparrow leaves traces of its own movement but also enables a comparative vision of how, at each specific moment, different sparrows coexist or interact with each other, forming parallels or cross-overs. In this sense, each node (being simultaneously points of arrival and departure) of the traces embodies two motions: the progressive affinity with the historical times and the relative coexistence of different times. As Wilde’s metaphor of sailing vessels suggests, a utopia is formed by different points of arrival and departure. While progress is assumed in modern utopianism, there are different paths to the final destination. As a result, modern utopianism has many forms of expression.

Baxter and Gu also sought to endow their utopias with the ability to bring different times and places into conversation. This cross-cultural movement is temporal (as a comparison between the past, the present and the future) as well as spatial (a correlation between coeval nation-states). Baxter and Gu seemingly set out to make their utopias subtle reworkings of history. They were preoccupied with identifying the unmistakable link between the mistakes of the past and the disenchantment of the present. The two utopianists offer in their imaginations and practices rectifications to, or inverted images of, a settlement history. Their utopias attempted to reinvent the history of New Zealand as the history of a peaceful, egalitarian co-existence freed from its dark and disturbing legacy of injustices, discrimination, and violence.

This reinvention of history is most explicitly represented in the land’s primal importance to both Baxter and Gu. Both shared with white European settler utopianism the idea of establishing an earthly paradise in New Zealand. In his poems and prose, Gu time and again expressed his desire to possess a piece of land of his own. His utopian project on Waiheke started with the purchase of land with a house. Interesting enough, this desire was, on the one hand, reminiscent of the Chinese utopian tradition, which valued autarky and non-reliance on the outside world. On the other hand, it was also akin to the desires of the early European settlers of New Zealand, whose utopian dreams were also sparked by the possibility of land ownership. Gu, like the European settlers, treated the country as a vast and empty land of opportunity. The other residents, if not perceived as threats, were at least marginalised.

However, Baxter’s utopias intended to revolt against exactly such a perception. His works reflect a historical tension between the colonizer (the Pākehā) and the colonized (the Māori). Baxter’s Jerusalem engaged this tension revolving around the
land issue between the Pākehā and the Māori. By creating an inverted cultural hierarchy, Jerusalem stood for a pioneering Pākehā effort to advocate for the significance of Māori culture in New Zealand society. In Baxter’s poetry, he recast the history of New Zealand as a colony by recognising that the white settlers are the beneficiaries of the Māori people’s grace. Baxter and his followers re-entered the land of Aotearoa (symbolised by the pā of Jerusalem), this time peacefully and humbly with respect and admiration, making confessions and re-learning the meaning of peace. In spirit, Baxter’s approach echoes traditional Māori communalism, which originates in tribal living and puts great emphasis on the relationship to the land and the kinship between tribe members (Sargisson and Sargent 2004, 8). Embracing his self-given Māori name, Hemi te tūtūā (James “the nobody”; 2015c, 3:138), Baxter fashioned himself as a Māori prophet of the Christian God living in a Pākehā skin: a servant of love and a vagabond on a land where he did not yet belong, lamenting the loss of the genuine, pre-colonial Māori culture, and concerning himself with achieving a future in which Pākehā and Māori would co-exist as equals.

But here the paradox again surfaced. Presenting himself as the father figure in the pā, Baxter’s poetry attested to his importance as a tribal leader, who led ngā mōkai into a new covenant with the Māori. The peaceful co-existence of the two tribes in Baxter’s poetry highlights precisely his importance, affirming his contribution to the utopia. This emphasis on his status directly contradicts his self-negation principle and poetics of abnegation. The anchoring of the dreams of Baxter and Gu in New Zealand and the reinvention of history, therefore, was deeply problematic.

Baxter’s and Gu’s embeddedness in the specific contexts and their preoccupation with locating their utopian dreams in specific places challenged the perceived boundaries between art and everyday life. Establishing a utopia in a real spatiotemporal context allows a full exploration of the potential of ordinary spaces for isolated and estranged forms of living, enabling a mutual transformation from living in mundane conditions to living in the style of art. Both poets sought to legitimise the necessity and attainability of utopia, rejecting the view that utopias are imaginary and inaccessible free-floating spaces. Their transcultural utopias were supposedly calling for “a change at the spatial level” (Vieira 2010, 10), which is a proposal to treat modern utopias as a particular “space that is filled with moving” (Bradshaw, Laura Marcus, and Roach 2016, 1).

While both Baxter and Gu sought liberation from repressive forces through their utopias’ transcultural movement., that movement—whether in the form of the travelling
ideas or people—was carefully scrutinised and controlled by Baxter and Gu. Selective of what and whom to be included in their utopia spaces, the two writers in fact never loosened their grip on the reins of their utopias. The cross-cultural vision they had was self-serving and dangerous. They guarded their power by claiming to transcend it and refused to take responsibility for inflicting pain and suffering on those involved in their pursuit of an alternative world. Transculturation, and the cross-cultural movement that it promised, was exploited by Baxter and Gu to further consolidate their power. The paradoxical nature of Baxter’s and Gu’s transcultural utopianism is discussed in detail in the next section.

Paradises of nightmares: the paradoxical utopias
As demonstrated in the preceding chapters in this thesis, the lived and textual utopias established by Baxter and Gu are unmistakably paradoxical. Designed as counter-examples to an unpleasant reality, their utopias were supposed to be sites of equality and freedom. In practice, however, these utopias were sites of nightmares that perpetuated the same dystopian logic of the reality that they opposed. This inconsistency points to the most unsettling paradox of their utopianism: the utopias were established on the two utopianists’ willing self-abnegation, yet this proposed negation only further underscored their sovereignty and authority.

Baxter and Gu promoted their utopias as sites of individual freedom yet they demanded the participants’ conformity. Only certain behaviours that did not challenge the rules of operation were encouraged and contravening these rules was not tolerated. As discussed, Baxter’s adamant insistence on the anti-drug precept and Gu’s relentless restraint on his wife’s and Li Ying’s interaction with the outside world led to a conflict between individual freedom and collective communality. Both founders caused rebellion in the participating members of their communities (at least one of Baxter’s female ngā mōkai left after the Gridley drug-orgy incident, while Li wrote about her discontent with Gu’s obsessive desire for control and left Waiheke without telling him). The discrepancy between theory and practice reflects the self-contradictory side of their utopian design: absolute individual freedom and communal cohesiveness cannot co-exist in one place. But the more alarming problem is that such communal cohesiveness is mostly an extension of the will of the creator of the utopias. Baxter and Gu not only set the targets for their utopias but also provided designated methods to achieve such aims and actively supervised the reinforcement of such methods.
Both utopias sought to become sites against social and political inequality. Baxter’s utopian design had a specific racial dimension while Gu’s was more concerned with gender. In both cases, their attacks on Pākehā, male or authoritarian dominance turned out to be reassertions of the very things they criticised. Baxter’s work at Jerusalem, despite his criticisms of the colonialist ideology, arguably perpetuated more than overturned Pākehā exploitation of Māori. Jerusalem became a place where white dysfunctional youth were tolerated or even encouraged to lie around and wait for their generous Māori neighbours to cook for them, feed them and care for them. In this sense, the community to a certain degree repeated the history of colonialism under a different name. Furthermore, Baxter’s attempted rape of Ros Lewis in Jerusalem (Lewis 2019) and his admitted marital rape of Jacqueline Sturm (Baxter, n.d.) offered two vividly painful examples of his consolidation of masculine authority and power at the expense of others. His abuse of the kindness of Ngāti Hau and the two women’s vulnerability exposed the hypocrisy in his claims to support equality across racial and gender borders and to have compassion for underprivileged Māori and women.

Similarly, Gu escaped perceived gender roles, along with the authoritarian dictatorship in China and its ensuing ideological oppression and violence, but his established utopia in New Zealand proved to be a site of violence and oppression which reasserted authority and patriarchal dominance. His praise of maidenhood and his disavowal of the male gender were unconvincing given that he possibly raped Li soon after her arrival at his Waiheke utopia (Mai Qi 1995) and indubitably abused Li in his writing. In addition, Gu’s ambivalent attitude towards Maoism implied his own authoritarian ambition. On the one hand, he consciously recognised the violence of such a dictatorship; on the other hand, he admired its power and dominance: “In fact, Mao’s time was deeply horrifying … but … with its dominant power, it [Mao’s political regime] controlled the chaos caused by the cut-off” (“本来毛泽东的时候虽然是很恐怖的……但……它[毛的政权]以它的强大控制着斩断的混乱”; 2005a, 87). His self-serving utopia demanded the same kind of obedience, loyalty, and blind enthusiasm that characterised the Cultural Revolution. After Li’s elopement, Gu found out Xie’s plan to divorce him and murdered her (Department of Justice 1994). Gu’s self-proclaimed kinghood in his utopia was almost a facsimile of Mao’s dictatorship. Baxter’s and Gu’s lived utopias recreated a hierarchical system where they were the de facto authority figures who enjoyed more power and freedom than their participants, which precisely worked against the egalitarian principles that they proposed.
The textual utopias of Gu and Baxter demonstrate a similar contradiction between readerly freedom and authorial sovereignty. The poets’ negation of their own identity and power provided the basis for these proposed poetic utopias, but neither Baxter nor Gu succeeded in abating their authorial influence. As Baxter and Gu continued to consolidate their status in the poetic universe, the battle against authorial sovereignty seemed to be equally unfruitful for both. Self-abnegation was to be achieved through different methods in each writer’s utopia: through the conflation of Māori and English and the use of profanity and coarseness in Baxter’s case, and through the eclipse of subjectivity in Gu’s. Ironically, Gu’s portrayal of the members of his community and women figures affirmed his self-identification as the dominating, masculine and patriarchal authority of his poetic utopia. Similarly, Baxter’s misperception of Māori as homogenous repeated the same kind of colonising logic that his utopia set out to attack, while his interlingual conflation further extended his readership and garnered recognition from critics. Gu’s poetic utopianism evolved in perspective, from the early stage of expressing subjectivity or individuality, to the later poetry’s deliberate attempt to abate or even avoid the use of the personal pronoun “I” or the self-referential poetic persona. But the disappearance of the persona or pronoun did not testify to the success of Gu’s self-negation. Quite the contrary: in a tacit way, he wove “I” into the structure of his poetic utopia. “I” became one with the universe as the designer and the omnipotent, omnipresent narrator who transcends the contextual bondage of time and space. Both writers’ assertions of authorial sovereignty cancelled out their poetics of self-abnegation.

Despite the different methods adopted for self-negation, Baxter and Gu shared a persistent submission to the act of writing alongside their commitment to build lived utopias. They continued to produce poetry, which helped engage more readers as co-creators of their utopian worlds and thus transformed the utopias into sites that incorporated fantasy into reality. As the utopian poems continue to attract readers today, who generate new visions and interpretations through the act of reading, these poetic utopias continue to live new lives in the worlds of readers and to embrace new shapes and forms. But such expansion affirms the poet’s status as the creator of the first poetic world. In this sense, all the derived worlds testify to the importance of the Alpha world and therefore cancel out any attempt at self-abnegation. This is a shared problem in the poetic utopianism of Baxter and Gu: it started as a denial of the poet’s authority yet that authority was consolidated by the persistence of his writing. The more effort made by
the poet to negate himself in his poetry, the more poems came into being, and the more self-aggrandisement was generated.

The most devastating aspect of this problematic sovereignty can be seen in the two poets’ abuse—in both words and deeds—of women. This abuse contrasts sharply with the celebration of femininity and motherhood espoused in their writings. In this light, both replicated the exploitative, oppressive and manipulative masculine society their utopias initially sought to oppose. Several former friends recalled that Gu was physically and verbally violent towards Xie, threatening to end his life if she dared to leave him (Gálik 1995). As for the textual world, Gu’s Ying’er (1993) serves as a perfect example of his contradictory criticism of the male gender and his deep-rooted misogyny. The novel acclaims the spirit of maidenhood yet is also filled with vicious, demonizing attacks on the character Ying’er. She is reproved for having a sexual history with other men and is condemned for not being a virgin. Similarly, Baxter’s treatment of women contradicted his public persona as an advocate of female creativity who supported writers such as Janet Frame and Mary Stanley (Newton 2019).

The writings of the female participants in these poets’ “paradises,” therefore, provide a truer and much darker image. Ros Lewis challenged Baxter’s self-presentation as a self-sacrificing father to the ngā mōkai and suggested that Baxter took advantage of the sovereignty that he enjoyed in Jerusalem for his own sexual pleasure:

Millar describes Baxter’s tribe at Jerusalem as Ngā Mōkai tribe (“the tribe of the fatherless ones”). With his charismatic, articulate voice and status as a guru concerned for the lost young people adrift in the cities, alienated by capitalism, Baxter certainly exploited the female “fatherless ones” for his own benefit. I was one of them. But I was not the only one. (2019)

Li Ying responded to Gu’s Ying’er in Heartbroken on Waiheke (1995), in which she more clearly described Gu’s utopia as a site of nightmarish darkness:

A hot, dry and unfamiliar body entered my body in my dark night. I could not tell myself clearly whether this was a nightmare or reality. … It was not until when Cheng left in a shadow of darkness that I started feeling the fear, the shame and the icy coldness in my bones … Where am I? Have I had a very frightening dream?

炽热、干燥和陌生的身体在我的黑夜里进入了我的身体。我不能清楚地告诉自己，这是噩梦呢还是真实。……城在一片黑影里走掉的时候，我才感到恐惧和屈辱以及彻骨的寒冷……我是在哪儿呢？我是做过一个很可怕的梦吗？ (Mai Qi 1995, 152, 153, 155)
The utopian communities and the poetic utopias of Baxter and Gu failed not only because of the external challenges they faced. Self-aggrandisement achieved through self-abnegation was the chief paradox that permeated every aspect of the utopias of Baxter and Gu, so their utopian designs were innately problematic and prone to generating contradictions. Consequently, these dream worlds suffered a brutal return to dystopian reality and became sites of nightmares.

Conclusion

Once an emblem of hope, the word “utopia” in the contemporary world conjures up an array of jaundiced emotional responses from tacit suspicion to unrestricted condemnation. My juxtaposed reading of Baxter’s and Gu’s lived and poetic utopias shows that, for all its faults, utopianism remains relevant to both the conception and shaping of the world. Since these two utopianists chose to extend their imaginative utopias beyond the page, their endeavours also add to our understanding of the correlation between literary and real-life utopias.

In different ways, Baxter and Gu created utopias that drew on intercultural dialogues and also invited readers to open up their own imaginative spaces, integrating their own cultural backgrounds and personal experiences. Baxter’s utopian poetry raises open-ended questions and offers no direct answers. Instead, his poetry leaves some power in the hands of readers. Gu more actively sought to make his poetry abstract and difficult. He manoeuvred poetic symbols and images as building blocks, stripping them of syntactic or contextual relations to rearrange them in a new structure. This technique engages his readers, who must negotiate this difficulty in deciphering the structure of his poetic utopia. Both poets appealed to the interpretative power of their readers—readers of not only their textual but also their lived utopias—to keep their utopian dreams alive. They hoped that their utopias would invite readers to experience vicariously a different human condition and so to perceive an alternative reality while critiquing their own.

While both writers translated their imagination into reality and established utopias in New Zealand, their lived utopias were not simply an extension of the visions delineated in their previous literary works. Their utopian practices distinguish them from many other poets and writers whose utopias exist only on the page. Such real-life utopian experiences inevitably became the source of inspiration for the two writers’ literary practice. Literature then became a locus for them to reflect on the nature of
utopianism beyond the supposed divide between the literary sphere and historical reality. This textual-existential correlation opened up a critical, indefinite space of alternative possibilities. Baxter and Gu proposed utopian methods and practices to defy mainstream societal traditions; namely, post-war capitalist ideology and Maoist communism. The models that they proposed featured multicultural influences from different utopian traditions, such as New Zealand settler colonialism, Roman Catholicism, Māori communalism, capitalism, Chinese socialism, Taoism, and Islam. Accentuating transculturation in an increasingly global context, their utopias subverted the long-held stereotyped and Eurocentric understanding of utopia as a Western invention.

As dynamic conglomerations of contradictory or even incompatible elements, the utopias Baxter and Gu created in real-life, as with the utopian structures they established on the page, were plagued by innate paradoxes and contradictions. Unsettling tensions surfaced in their utopian projects spatially, temporally, and also ideologically, making their projects extensions of the reality they originally aspired to subvert. For Baxter, this reality was the double-sided, self-contradictory New Zealand white settler utopianism. For Gu, it was the violent and oppressive political and social environment in China as represented by the Chinese Cultural Revolution. Both poets believed in the possibility of establishing utopias in real life and embedded their utopian dreams in the New Zealand context. Both utopias were intended to rectify their countries’ problematic histories by providing an alternative path towards progress, yet they both failed to transcend their own historical formation and to truly transcend racial, cultural and gender divides. While presenting their utopias as opposing dominant power structures and as actualising equality and freedom, both Baxter and Gu expressed perturbing authorial sovereignty as symbolised by their peculiar self-fashioning as enlightened poet-prophet figures who represented and embodied the truth. Reading both their lives and their writings while recognising their deeply problematic use of transculturation and the paradoxes at core of their utopianism helps us explore the complex geographies of utopian space, both real and imagined, with a new insight in ways that are relevant to the increasingly interconnected world and its intricacies.

This thesis has formulated a comparative framework for understanding modern utopianism by juxtaposing the poetic and lived practices of Baxter and Gu. In so doing, it has challenged existing readings of the two writers within strictly national paradigms. It has offered, through the analysis of their shared utopian vision and practices, an expanded sense of each national literature. Furthermore, by connecting Baxter and Gu
through their utopianism, this thesis has offered some initial coordinates for a new global framework for reading twentieth and twenty-first century literature. As Patrick Hayden and Chamsy El-Ojeili rightly remind us, “a proper appreciation of globalization and of responses to it must take into account the rich theoretical work and practical activities emerging around the globalization–utopianism relationship” (2009, 8). The utopias that Baxter and Gu established were the products of multiple intersecting cultural nodes. Together their utopian endeavours illuminate the link between the blurring of cultural and linguistic borders and the utopian tradition of mingling dreams with reality. Together they illustrate the importance of such utopianism to a comparative reading of world literature that escapes the cliché of an endless oscillation between sameness and differences, and traces instead the interface of larger global forces at play in mid-to-late twentieth-century modernity: faith crisis, anxiety, social instability, the negotiation of hope and despair, personal ambition, and the desire to reshape the world. In this sense, modern utopianism provides not only visions of other, better worlds but also a framework for mapping the ubiquitous transcultural movements that continue to shape the world in which we live.
APPENDICES

1. A chronological list of Gu Cheng’s published poems with titles that contain the character *meng* 梦 (dream, dreams or dreaming):

《梦曲（一）》(1969); 《梦曲（二）》(1971); 《幻想与梦》(1971); 《白云梦（十三首）》(1973); 《大雾梦》(1973); 《红云梦》(1974); 《孩子的梦》(1978); 《梦觉》(1978); 《种子的梦想》(1979); 《失梦（三首）》(1979);
《在梦海边》(1980); 《梦之歌》(1980); 《世界和我•9梦》(1980); 《世界和我•15梦很清醒》(1980); 《世界和我•50梦鸟》(1980); 《梦痕》(1980); 《雨梦》(1980); 《蒲公英做了一个梦》(1980); 《梦幻录像（一）（三）（四）（五）（六）》(1981–1982); 《大雁的梦》(1982); 《梦园》(1982); 《风筝的梦》(1982); 《一个旧梦》(1982); 《我梦见过鱼》(1983); 《有墙的梦寐和醒来》(1983); 《梦游》(1983); 《梦无期》(1983); 《梦中人》(1988); 《说梦》(1988); 《梦隔（一）（二）》(1988); 《梦字三题》(1988); 《梦后》(1988); 《梦字2. 11》(1989); 《梦字》(1989); 《断梦》(1989); 《做梦》(1989); 《梦里的人有一种态度》(1990); 《梦里有板》(1990); 《梦可了得》(1990); 《梦歌》(1990); 《咒语惊梦》(1990); 《梦中梦》(1990); 《梦为梦想之先》(1991); 《我做了一个梦》(1992).
2. A non-exhaustive list of reprints and new editions of Gu’s literary writings in the past decade (2009-now):

- 《顾城的诗顾城的画》 2009 江苏文艺出版社
- 《顾城作品精选》2009 长江文艺出版社
- 《顾城诗全集（上下）》 2010 江苏文艺出版社
- 《顾城的诗》 2010 人民文学出版社
- 《我会像青草一样呼吸》2011 北京十月文艺出版社
- 《一代人 远和近》2011 长江文艺出版社
- 《暴风雨使我安睡》2011 北京十月文艺出版社
- 《走了一万一千公里路》2011 北京十月文艺出版社
- 《树枝的疏忽》2011 江苏文艺出版社
- 《顾城精选集》2011 北京燕山出版社
- 《睡眠是条大河》2012 江苏文艺出版社
- 《顾城哲思录》 2012 重庆出版社
- 《顾城作品》 2012 长江文艺出版社
- 《现当代名家作品精选：顾城作品》2012 长江文艺出版社
- 《顾城的诗顾城的画（再版）》2013 江苏文艺出版社
- 《顾城诗精编》2014 长江文艺出版社
- 《顾城作品精华本》2014 长江文艺出版社


  Javier Martín Ríos（译） 2014 五洲传播出版社
《顾城哲思录（再版）》2015 重庆出版社

《顾城精选集》2015 北京燕山出版社

《顾城海外遗文集系列》—《英儿》及其他 2015 金城出版社

《顾城海外遗文集系列》—《因为思念的缘故（上下）》2015 金城出版社

《顾城海外遗文集系列》—《哲学卷》 2015 金城出版社

《顾城・故城》 凤凰网文化频道 2015 北京时代华文书局

《你是前所未有的，又是久已存在的》2015 长江文艺出版社

《“汉语江湖”书系：顾城哲思录》2015 重庆出版社

《回家：顾城精选诗集》2016 （台北）木马文化

《顾城的诗顾城的画（口袋本）》2017 江苏凤凰文艺出版社

《顾城诗集》2017 南海出版公司

《花开如火，也如寂寞》2017 江苏凤凰文艺出版社

《我的心爱着世界：顾城诗画手账》2017 江苏凤凰文艺出版社

《顾城哲思录（精装版）》2018 重庆出版社

《你看我时很远：顾城诗选》2018 河南文艺出版社

《半梦：顾城海外遗集・散文卷》2018 金城出版社

《顾城诗选：我会像青草一样呼吸》 2018 北京十月文艺出版社

《顾城的诗：金版》2018 人民文学出版社

《看见睡莲之后：顾城海外遗集・讲演问答卷》2018 金城出版社

《现当代诗歌散文经典作品：顾城诗集》2018 人民日报出版社

《顾城诗选：暴风雨使我安睡》2018 北京十月文艺出版社

《如同拾一片落叶：顾城海外遗集・访谈对话卷》2019 金城出版社
Commentaries:

朱小平（著）《我所知道的顾城》北京：金城出版社，2012
马莉（著）《黑色不过滤光芒——中国当代诗歌画史》北京：九州出版社，2013
刘春（著）《生如蚁，美如神：我的顾城与海子》南京：译林出版社，2013
夏墨（著）《一顾倾城：顾城的美丽诗世界》北京：中国华侨出版社，2013
夏墨（著）《我的海子，我的顾城》北京：中国华侨出版社，2014
刘春（著）《海子·顾城：两个诗人的罗生门》南京：译林出版社，2014
倾蓝紫（著）《在玫瑰停止的地方，芬芳前进了·顾城诗传》哈尔滨：北方文艺出版社，2014
麦子（著）《顾城诗传：我用黑色的眼睛寻找光明》北京：时事出版社，2014
韦子，麦子，江雁（著）《最有范的男人：徐志摩、顾城、海子传》北京：时事出版社，2014
北岛（著）《鱼乐：忆顾城》北京：中信出版社，2015
凤凰网文化（编）《顾城·故城》北京：北京时代华文书局，2015
《流亡的顾城》（纪录片）2016 凤凰网文化频道
陈春秋水（著）《一场盛世的狂欢：从顾城到海子》北京：现代出版社，2016
文昕（著）《最后的顾城》北京：金城出版社，2017
刘春（著）《一个人的诗歌史》桂林：广西师范大学出版社，2017
胡书庆（著）《作为自我表象的文学》北京：中国社会科学出版社，2018
冯强（著）《中国当代诗歌海外传播研究》南昌：江西教育出版社，2019
3. 《忧天》（1979）

我仰望着夜空，
感到一阵惊恐；
如果地球失去引力，
我就会变成流星，
无依无附在天宇飘行。

哦，不能！
为了拒绝这种“自由”，
我愿变成一段树根，
深深地扎进地层。

4. Published books by Baxter and selected published writings about Baxter (2009-now):


*El Jesús Maorí y otros poemas* [The Māori Jesus & Other Poems]. Translated by Caleb Harris. Bogotá: Lobo Blanco Editores, 2018

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New York: Routledge.


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Gao Like xiansheng de duihua 《浮士德》·《红楼梦》·女儿性——与高利克先生的对话 [Faust, Dream of the Red Chamber, and maidenhood: a conversation with Mr. Gálik]”. In Gu Cheng wenxuan:juan er: si yi meng long 顾城文选·卷二：思忆朦胧 [Selected writings of Gu Cheng·vol.II: blurred memories], 84–89. Beijing: Zhongguo wenhua chubanshe.


[Kangxi dictionary with punctuations]. Shanghai: Hanyu dacidian chubanshe.


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