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Alterity and Alien Contact in Lao She's Martian Dystopia, *Cat Country*

For well over a century now, the planet Mars has been a rich source of imagination and has served as a science-fictional mirror reflecting and refracting diverse features of human existence—from H.G. Wells's *War of the Worlds* (1898) to Ray Bradbury's *Martian Chronicles* (1950) to Kim Stanley Robinson's MARS trilogy (1993-96) to more recent stories such as John Barnes's *In the Hall of the Martian King* (2003).¹ Many are set in the future, focussing on alien contact in the context of interplanetary exploration. In 1934, Stanley G. Weinbaum published "A Martian Odyssey." This story chronicles the journey of a shipwrecked explorer to rejoin his group, accompanied by a Martian named of Tweel. Its theme is alien contact and, to a lesser extent, the imagined workings of an alien language. The two meet a variety of fantastic and sometimes dangerous creatures, communicate by metaphor, and, in their brief encounter, sow the seeds of recognition and friendship. "A Martian Odyssey" has become not only a classic "Mars" story of alien encounter, but is also considered to be one of the best sf stories ever written (it ranked second in the Science Fiction Writers of America vote for the best short stories of all time).²

But Mars has, or rather Martians have, also been used as metaphors for the human condition.³ Two years before "A Martian Odyssey" appeared, Shu Qingchun, better known as Lao She (1898-1966), one of the great writers of twentieth-century China, published *Maocheng ji* [Cat Country], a novel set on Mars.⁴ Lao She's astronaut discovers a civilization of intelligent "cat-people" with human bodies and feline heads. In the tradition of More's *Utopia* (1516), this satirical novel explores a new world. It portrays in the most devastating terms the China of the 1920s: the China of warlords, of Sun Yatsen, of the rise of the Guomindang and the Chinese Communist Party, and of the abdication of the Qing dynasty (1644-1911). This was also a China devastated by the aftermath of the Opium Wars and economically colonized by foreigners, its people addicted to opium, impoverished, and barely surviving through these economies of corruption.

Cat Country is a work that straddles cultures, and as such it raises interesting questions and poses interesting difficulties for both scholars of science fiction and scholars of Chinese literature. From the point of view of sf studies, how does *Cat Country* fit into the history of science fiction, of representations of Mars, and of alien contact? From a Chinese literature point of view, should we consider *Cat Country* science fiction at all? What did Lao She intend and why did he locate the story on Mars? Finally, how does *Cat Country* address issues of alterity, a topic important to both groups of imagined readers? I attempt to answer at least some of these questions. The first section introduces *Cat Country*

and the problems of interest to Lao She. The second section reads *Cat Country* within the history of Chinese literature, including science fantasy and the early twentieth-century genre of “novels of the future.” The third section reads *Cat Country* within the history of science fiction by comparing Lao She’s and Weinbaum’s handling of the nature and significance of alien contact and alterity.

***Cat Country* [Maocheng ji].** *Cat Country* is the story of an astronaut who crashes on Mars and encounters a race of humanoids with cat faces. While trying to bury his dead companions, he is captured by the cat people, who are furred, naked, and narrow-waisted, with stubby hands and feet; their movements are uncannily fluid. The astronaut communicates with them by gestures.

In the style of *Utopia*, various chapters describe different aspects of “Cat City” from the viewpoint of the astronaut. The portrait is entirely negative. The astronaut patronizingly compares the cat language, “Felinesese,” to Malay, which is, presumably, simpler in grammar and vocabulary than Chinese. The cat people are also superstitious.⁵ The staple of their society is the revery tree, introduced five hundred years previously by foreigners and cultivated for its opiate leaves to which the entire society is addicted (the allusion here is to the British introduction of opium into China and to the social consequences of widespread opium addiction in the nineteenth century). The result is a complete degeneration of the society and an “Age of Plunder.” The astronaut’s sole friend, Scorpion, is a landlord (a vexed category in 1930s China) who owns revery trees. The cat elite traditionally employ foreigners to protect the trees and Scorpion employs the astronaut for this purpose, trying to addict him to the leaves. Modeled on the Chinese warlords of the 1920s and 1930s, the cat elite are completely corrupt. Oaths no longer have meaning, but are a game for children. Servants are mistreated, as are guests, including the astronaut.

Although Scorpion hires the astronaut to guard the revery forest, the cat folk are terrified of foreigners. This ambivalence reflects, on one hand, a long history of Chinese self-regard as the central kingdom, superior to all “barbarians,” and on the other, the “Century of Unequal Treaties” and the economic colonization of China by European powers after the Opium Wars. Cat City evokes late nineteenth-century Chinese cities. It is lively but squalid, filthy, primitive, and crowded, with no clear streets and no sanitation. The astronaut lodges with a widow and her late husband’s eight concubines. She describes their histories and personalities: one is a child, another an addict, a third a “modern woman.” The concubines had several sons, but all had been killed in household jealousies. The widow has no hope even of the traditional funerary tablet of a Chinese “virtuous widow.”⁶

Scorpion’s son, “Young Scorpion,” describes his grandfather’s generation as blaming all troubles on foreigners. His father Scorpion is a “new man,” initially against revery leaves and in favor of the liberation of women, but now thoroughly conservative. Scorpion uses his knowledge of foreign things for practical purposes, but otherwise is no different from his own father. Young Scorpion, however, is different. He eats revery leaves to “muddle through” and sees no hope for social change. He refuses traditional marriage arrangements

and lives as friends with a woman named Revery, an arrangement that starts a “free love” fad.

Education and culture fare no better. The astronaut discovers teenaged children preparing literally to dissect their teachers. Cat Country once had an ancient culture, but much of its education system was borrowed from abroad. Over time examinations were abandoned, and eventually all students were given university graduation certificates on the first day. When universities had curricula, there were no jobs for graduates, and over time the government cut all budgets for educational institutions. The education system also declined because no value was placed on the integrity of teachers. When the astronaut meets scholars from Cat Country—including an astronomer, a philologist, and a historian—the senior ones turn out to be filthy, indigent, contentious, and addicted to revery leaf. The junior ones are foreign-educated, cleaner and livelier, but full of incomprehensible jargon; they are “simply people who had been abroad and had seen or had heard a little about new methods of classification and display” (205). The main purpose of museums and libraries is to smuggle valuable antiquities and books abroad and sell them off.

Politics and government are dominated by “Everybody Shareskyism,” the theory that society is a machine in which “everyone lives for the sake of everyone else” (213). In the rush to appropriate foreign ideas, “parties” become “brawls,” with each one claiming to serve the common people. But the people grow poorer and poorer, and the politicians sell all the land. There is no longer any agriculture, economy, or government and, by the time of the astronaut’s arrival, the cat people seem on the verge of extinction.

The novel concludes with an unspecified foreign invasion and the destruction of Cat Country. Orders are given to move the capital, but the population is forbidden to leave. Students under the influence of “Uncle Karl” (presumably Karl Marx) propose to placate the foreigners by killing their fathers and the Emperor. But the enemy do not consider them human and slaughter them like animals. Lao She describes the scene as

a huge chaos of naked cats scurrying madly across the hot sands, each of them apparently pushed to the verge of madness by fright, hurtling forward for his very life. A group of, a field of, an entire horizon of, a whole planet of madmen!
(272)

Yet they also fight each other, and enemy soldiers find the last two survivors of Cat Country in mortal combat:

Rather than killing them, the enemy soldiers locked them in a large wooden cage where they continued their struggle until they had bitten each other to death. Thus the cat-people themselves completed their own destruction. (294)

The astronaut eventually encounters a French aircraft and returns to “my own great, glorious, and free China” (294).

Lao She wrote *Cat Country* shortly after his return to China after ten years abroad. As an educated Manchu—the ethnicity of the rulers of the Qing dynasty—he was very aware of his marginalized status in his own country in the decades following the collapse of the Qing. He left China for England in 1924

(Vohra 14-18).⁷ From 1924 to 1929 he taught as a lecturer in the School of Oriental Studies of the University of London (now the School of Oriental and African Studies, better known as SOAS). Like other intellectuals of the May Fourth and New Culture movements, he was intensely interested in Western culture and literary forms. His first three novels were written in England and were strongly influenced by English novels. *Lao Zhang de Zhexue* [The Philosophy of Lao Zhang, 1926] was modeled on works by Charles Dickens; at the time, Lao She had just finished reading *Nicholas Nickleby* (1838-39) and *The Pickwick Papers* (1837).⁸ The second novel, *Zhao Ziyue* ([the name of the main character] 1928), is an account of the lives of students in post-May Fourth Beijing.⁹ *Er Ma* [Mr. Ma and his son (literally, The Two Mas), 1928-29] is set in the London of Lao She's own experience.¹⁰ In 1929 he left London for Singapore, where he taught for a year before returning to China in 1930. *Cat Country* was written two years later in 1932 and clearly reflects Lao She's alienation from the China to which he had returned.

Three years later, Lao She wrote a series of commentaries on his own major novels, including "Wo zenyang xie 'Maocheng ji'" [How Did I Write *Cat Country*?]. Most of the essay concerns his perception of the weaknesses of the book. In particular, he was dissatisfied with its balance of irony and humor, and specifically with the absence of the humor that would characterize his later writing. Here he mentions the influence of Aristophanes (Alisiduofen) and the importance of comedy. He describes *Cat Country* as a parody or satire (*fengce*) and states that it was written in part because of his disappointment on returning to China.

Why Mars? In Chinese astronomy and astrology Mars (*Huo xing*, literally the fire star) is associated with the direction south, the season summer, the color red, the directional animal Vermilion Bird, and the heart-mind (*xin*) among the organs of the body. Mars was also a potent symbol for destruction: "Mars in Heart" (*Ying huo zai xin*) was a rare astrological portent, signifying political upheaval.¹¹ Does this history underlie the choice of Mars?

Apparently not. Lao She comments on both his choice of cats and his choice of location, and explicitly denies that either is important in itself. He chose cats because of the domestic coincidence that he had just adopted a yellow and white kitten. "My cat people are cat people by accident," he wrote. "If at that time I had had a rabbit, the cat people would probably have been rabbit people. But cats or rabbits, they would have been bad!" He also makes it clear that the dystopia's location was of no importance: "Go to the moon or to hell," he says—clearly, it makes no difference ("Wo zhenyang xie 'Maocheng ji'" 188).

***Cat Country*, Chinese Literature, and Science Fiction.** *Cat Country* problematizes the cultural specificity of science fiction in several ways. Set on Mars, it fits squarely within Western definitions of science fiction. Lao She specifically mentions H.G. Wells's (Wei Ersi) *The First Man in the Moon* [sic] (1905) (*Yue Liang Shang de Diyige Ren*) as a model for another mode of human civilization. Nonetheless, we can also read *Cat Country* within several Chinese

contexts of varying intersections with Western literary genres, including science fiction.

First, despite the explicit Western influences on Lao She, it is possible to locate the content and style of *Cat Country* within Chinese accounts of alternative worlds, with no reference to science fiction. Chinese “alternate worlds” texts present both mundane alternate worlds that coexist with normal reality and accounts of leaving the mundane world for “transcendent” realms associated with Buddhist or Daoist heavens under the rule of the Buddha and the Jade Emperor. The oldest such account is the *Liexian zhuan* [Collected Biographies of Immortals, 1st century BCE]. It is the first Daoist hagiography, and presents the life stories of seventy-two legendary Daoist immortals (*xian*), including commoners, women, hermits, heroes, and mythical characters, who make spirit journeys to distant places or who leave the world entirely.¹²

Taohua yuan [Peach Blossom Spring] dates from the Six Dynasties period (ca. 220-589 CE). It tells the story of a fisherman who drifts into a valley hidden from the world and discovers a utopian village of

rich fields and pleasant ponds all set with mulberry and willow. Linking paths led everywhere, and the fowls and dogs of one farm could be heard from the next.

People were coming and going and working in the fields. Both the men and the women dressed in exactly the same manner as people outside; white-haired elders and tufted children alike were cheerful and contented. (Birch 167-68)

Its inhabitants explain that their forefathers were refugees from the Qin dynasty (221-206 BCE), and have been cut off from the outside world ever since. The fisherman remains with them for several days, and then returns home. He later tries to retrace his path, but is never able to find the village again.

Xiyou ji [Journey to the West] is a fictionalized account of a journey by the Buddhist monk Xuanzang (c. 596 or 602-664) to India to bring Buddhist scriptures to China. It also contains accounts of Daoist and Buddhist heavens, spirits reincarnated as monsters, and alternative societies, such as the “Country of Women.”¹³ *Jing huayuan* [Flowers in the Mirror] was written by Li Ruzhen in 1827. It is set in the Tang dynasty (618-907) during the reign of the empress Wu Zetian (r. 684-705), and describes flower spirits relegated to human life on earth and a fantastic journey by the hero Lin Zhiyang that also includes an encounter with a “Country of Women.”¹⁴ *Cat Country* also fits into the genre of “tales of the strange and supernatural” (*zhiguai*). These highly moralized stories of human-animal hybrids portray humans and animals as part of a continuous moral community, virtuous or vicious.¹⁵ Both approaches locate the novel squarely within traditional Chinese literary genres.

Contemporary scholars of Qing dynasty and twentieth-century Chinese fiction have proposed three genres that include science-fictional elements, so it is worth asking whether any of them apply to *Cat Country*. The first is the deliberate reworking of earlier literature in a late-Qing context, especially the great novels of the Ming dynasty (1368-1644). For example, Yu Wanchun's *Dang kou zhi* [Quelling Bandits, 1853] is a reworking of *Shuihu zhuan* [The

Water Margin]. It juxtaposes foreign futuristic technology and Daoist magic.¹⁶ Set in the Song dynasty (960-1279), the novel imagines an alliance between foreign arms experts and the Chinese rebels of the original novel. At one point (Chapter 113), when Wu Yong, the strategist of the Song rebels, has suffered a major defeat, he meets a native of “Atlantic Europa,” a specialist in the design of military hardware who can produce a “galloping thunder wagon” and other such devices (Wang, *Fin-de-Siècle Splendor* 258). The most important example of reworking earlier literature for modern purposes is Wu Jianren’s (1866-1910) *Xin shitou ji* [New Story of the Stone], first published in serial form in 1905 and then as an illustrated book in 1908.¹⁷ It reworks the great Ming novel *Shitou ji* [Story of the Stone], but in this version the protagonist, Jia Baoyu, manages to escape the constraints of the Jia household, study abroad, and explore new worlds.¹⁸

The second is a genre identified by David Der-Wei Wang as “science fantasy.” These works imagine a new future for China by combining knowledge of modern science with a traditional mode of utopian writing. Wang describes these as “novels that yearn to cross the threshold of Western positive science while retaining their foothold in the traditional systems of the fantastic and the supernatural” (Wang 11, 252-97). For example, in *Yueqiu zhimindi xiaoshuo* [Tales of the Moon Colony, 1904], a scholar from Hunan named Long Menghua is forced to flee China after killing a government official. His ship is sunk, but he is rescued by a Japanese inventor who has created an electric-powered dirigible. They travel through Southeast Asia in search of Long’s wife, who was lost during the shipwreck. After many adventures, they decide to flee a corrupt world, and fly to the moon, where they establish a utopian colony.¹⁹ Wang stresses the dual nature of these works, combining as they do Western science-fiction motifs with Chinese *zhiguai* and fantastic motifs. Wang includes both the reworked Ming novels and works such as *Tales of the Moon Colony* in his genre of science fantasy. But merging them together ignores important differences. The reworked classical novels of the first group use Western science to re-imagine the Chinese past. The second group uses science to imagine a Chinese future.²⁰

A third possibility is what Henry Zhao calls the “novel of the future,” a subgenre of the utopian (or dystopian) novel. This group, like science fantasy, concerns the future, but does not use traditional modes of writing. Zhao argues that Chinese utopian narratives of the future occupied a very limited niche in Chinese literary history during the first decades of the twentieth century and for a brief period in the 1990s (456-71). They arose as a direct response to Western concepts of progress (with all its Darwinian overtones) and historical teleology (with all its Hegelian overtones). The first Chinese novel of the future was written by none other than Liang Qichao (1873-1929), one of the creators of the post-imperial Chinese state. *Xin Zhongguo weilai ji* [The Future of New China] was serialized in the important journal *Xin Xiaoshuo* [New Fiction], edited by Liang himself, in 1902. Another example is *Xin jiyuan* [New Era, 1908], set in 2000, which imagines a war between Chinese and foreign powers over whose

calendar should be used. China conquers the western portion of the United States, the Panama Canal, and other territories.

The novel of the future became a major genre, and some thirty appeared in China in the first decade of the twentieth century. (This was a large number, especially considering the limited output of the Chinese publishing industry at that time.) Most were of more interest for historians of the global twentieth century than for scholars of science fiction. The novel of the future in China vanished with the rise of modern Chinese fiction in the second decade of the twentieth century, from the May Fourth Movement in the mid-1910s to the end of the Cultural Revolution. During this period, in Zhao's assessment, science fiction became a banal form of popular science. The two exceptions to this dire assessment were Lao She's *Maocheng ji* and Shen Congwen's *Alisi Zhongguo youji* [Alice in China, 1931]. Both were criticized as reactionary, and utopian/dystopian novels disappeared once Communism was adopted by Chinese intellectuals.²¹

Cat Country does not fit obviously into any of these three genres. It clearly is not a reworking of an earlier Chinese novel, and it is a stretch to call it science fantasy. While it uses utopian (or rather dystopian) literary motifs, it is not concerned with technological or scientific elements, beyond its *mise en scène* of a flight to Mars. The future as such is not an important element in the book. In summary, *Cat Country* is both one of the earlier works that can be called Chinese science fiction and a curious misfit to that title. It draws on the comedy of Aristophanes, the vision of H.G. Wells, and the satire of Jonathan Swift to create something very different from both the "future" novels of the early twentieth century and their Western counterparts. Thus *Cat Country* is neither a clear satire of the past nor a "novel of the future," utopian or dystopian.

Alterity in *Cat Country* and Weinbaum's "A Martian Odyssey." A comparison of Lao She's and Weinbaum's handling of the nature and significance of alien contact and alterity offers another perspective on the place of *Cat Country* within the history of science fiction, especially since the two were published only two years apart. Lao She and Weinbaum present vastly different biological, epistemological, linguistic, and sociological imaginations of the alien. In "A Martian Odyssey," a shipwrecked Terran explorer meets an alien he nicknames Tweel, and partners with him in meeting the dangers and threats of the Martian environment. This "Mars" offers not an alien society but the encounter of two individuals. Tweel bears absolutely no physical resemblance to a human, but fundamentally *is* human. The narrator, Jarvis, first introduces him through sound: "There was a racket like a flock of crows eating a bunch of canaries—whistles, cackles, caws, trills, and what have you. I rounded a clump of stumps, and there was Tweel!" (Weinbaum 15).

The description continues of a "a bunch of black ropy arms tangled around what looked like ... an ostrich." Jarvis adds that "that freak ostrich" has a name that is barely pronounceable by the human tongue; "Tweel" is the closest he can manage. At the moment of their first encounter, Tweel was being eaten "and squealing, of course, as any one would" (15). Jarvis continues:

But the bird-like thing was putting up a good battle, dealing vicious blows with an eighteen-inch beak, between screeches.... But the clincher was when I noticed a little black bag or case hung about the neck of the bird-thing! It was intelligent! That or tame, I assumed. Anyway, it clinched my decision. I pulled out my automatic and fired into what I could see of its antagonist. (16)

Tweel is finally described in more detail:

The Martian wasn't a bird, really. It wasn't even bird-like, except just at first glance. It had a beak all right, and a few feathery appendages, but the beak wasn't really a beak. It was somewhat flexible; I could see the tip bend slowly from side to side; it was almost like a cross between a beak and a trunk. It had four-toed feet, and four fingered things—hands, you'd have to call them, and a little roundish body, and a long neck ending in a tiny head—and that beak. It stood an inch or so taller than I.... Finally the creature went into a series of clackings and twitterings and held out its hands toward me, empty. I took that as a gesture of friendship. (16)

The immediate force of this description is twofold. The scene is funny but also sympathetic; Tweel is a some-one, not a some-thing. Although Tweel looks more or less like an ostrich, he acts like a person. He squeals when being eaten (as would an ostrich), but he puts up a good fight. That he carries a bag—evidence of intelligence—clinches Jarvis's decision to intervene. Tweel responds with a gesture of apparent friendship. An important theme of "A Martian Odyssey" is the possibility of communication between human and alien, including the very different ways they use language. In this characterization, Tweel is humanized in an important way: he understands language and uses metaphor.

And we like him. Judging by the Science Fiction Writers of America poll, we like him a lot. Ursula K. Le Guin turns that "liking" to her own purposes in a short account of alterity in American science fiction where, in her view, Stanley Weinbaum invented the sympathetic alien. As she tells it, Weinbaum's innovation paved the way for others, such as Theodore Sturgeon and Cordwainer Smith, to move beyond "simple racism" in their depiction of the alterity of aliens. As she puts it:

Robots—the alien intelligence—begin to behave nicely. With Smith, interestingly enough, the racial alien is combined with the social alien, in the "Underpeople," and they are allowed to have a revolution. As the aliens got more sympathetic, so did the human heroes. They began to have emotions, as well as rayguns. Indeed they began to become almost human. (209)²²

Le Guin considers both Weinbaum and Smith from the perspective of American science fiction, but there may be other options. How does Lao She's novel reflect on the sympathetic alien of Weinbaum and Smith?²³ Alien contact is central to both "Martian Odyssey" and *Cat Country*, but Lao She's aliens are nothing like Tweel. Like Jarvis, Lao's astronaut's first alien contact is with something vicious and clearly non-human, in this case carrion birds who attack him and the corpses of his dead comrades. Only then does he notice a group of men who all have the faces of cats.

Several points are worth noting about Lao She's story of alien encounter. First, his Martians are clearly humanoid. Except for their feline heads, they have the bodies of humans and the narrator perceives them as human. Second, "we" (in this case a Chinese readership) are not intended to like them. They are familiar but repulsive. Third, like Tweel, they have language. But here again the similarity ends. Part of Jarvis's regard for Tweel develops from his complex, if unfamiliar, use of metaphor as a means of communication. By contrast, the language of the cat people is more "primitive" than the narrator's Chinese, and resembles Malay. In other words, from a traditionally Chinese point of view, they are humans, but also "barbarians." Barbarians are not racial others; they are cultural inferiors who do not follow Chinese ways, but who could and should be "transformed" (*yong Xia bianyi*, literally, "using Chinese culture to transform the barbarians") or "Sinicized" (*Han hua*, literally, "transformed into Han") (see Dikötter, especially 2-7).

But as we learn their customs through the astronaut's eyes, we see that Lao She's cat people are the people of China. They are everything he sees as wrong with the China of his time: they are warlords, drug addicts, and moral and intellectual degenerates. They are passive and bring about their own eventual destruction. For Lao She, the other who turns into oneself is a powerful tool for social critique, and his Martians are virtually the opposite of Weinbaum's Tweel. Tweel is conspicuously inventive and represents the best capabilities of humans: intelligence, loyalty, and courage. At one point, when Jarvis does not expect to survive, he tries to thank Tweel: "'Thanks, Tweel. You're a man!' and I felt that I wasn't paying him any compliment at all. A man! There are mighty few men who'd do that" (Weinbaum 37).

We see a curious inversion here. Enlightenment satirists such as Cyrano de Bergerac, Jonathan Swift, and Voltaire used aliens to observe the foibles of humanity in general or of a particular society; their method was to expose us to the gaze of aliens. Lao She's is the opposite: he turns us into all-too-human aliens whom we observe as ostensive humans. But just as Cyrano, Swift, and Voltaire used alien encounters of the first kind to portray humanity as prisoners of ideology or limited self-interest, Lao She uses these methods to show up both traditional Chinese society and the new China that has started to take its place. Weinbaum, in contrast, does not seem to be writing out of any immediate literary or philosophical tradition, and uses Tweel as a quasi-heroic character. Yet, as Patrick Parrinder points out, in comparison to the trite and propagandistic account of aliens in stories such as Isaac Asimov's "Victory Unintentional" (1942) or Murray Leinster's "First Contact" (1945), Weinbaum develops a more complex metaphor of alien contact (Parrinder 52-54).

That metaphor becomes more complex still in Weinbaum's "Valley of Dreams," published the same year as "A Martian Odyssey." Here, Tweel reappears as a descendant of Thoth, a Martian who travelled to Earth and was worshipped as the Egyptian god of wisdom, the inventor of writing, and indeed an inventor of civilization itself. His advanced society lives in a state of anarchy, without warfare, money, or competition. This Mars is an almost complete inversion of Earth, and the impression of "realistic" alien contact becomes

increasingly strained. Unlike Lao She's narrator, who wants only to return to his "great, glorious and free China," Weinbaum's Mars is a physically hostile environment. Weinbaum's aliens reveal what Parrinder aptly describes as "a powerful, unsophisticated, and largely uncontrolled use of imaginative materials" (Parrinder 54).

It is a testament to the imaginative power of Mars that Stanley Weinbaum and Lao She should publish such different accounts of alien contact there within a few years of each other. Weinbaum's *Tweel* draws on both mythic past and imagination of the future to present a heroically human alien drawn from myths of ancient wisdom. Lao She draws on traditional society and imagination of the future to present detestably human aliens in a unique way that provides an important historical counterpart to the experiments in science fantasy or the novels of the future of his contemporaries.

NOTES

1. I wish to thank Wu Yan and *SFS*'s anonymous readers. One reader in particular raised several questions of considerable interest, and I hope I have begun to address them in this draft. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

2. See Asimov's introduction to *The Best of Stanley G. Weinbaum* (vii-xii).

3. For a good literary history of Mars, see Crossley.

4. Lao She [Shu Qingchun], *Maocheng ji* [The City of Cats]. Passages quoted here are from the translation by William A. Lyell as *Cat Country* (Lyell 1970). The translation "Cat Country" is used for *Maocheng ji* because it is familiar to Anglophone readers. Pinyin transliteration is used throughout, except personal names whose bearers prefer something else. Regrettably, it is not possible to include Chinese characters here.

5. For example, they echo traditional Chinese beliefs in the efficacy of divination, and use it to determine auspicious times for journeys (Lyell 87).

6. For the treatment of virtuous widows in traditional China, see Raphals, *Sharing the Light*.

7. For biographical information about Lao She, see Vohra, and for details of his years in London, see Witchard.

8. Lao She, "Wo zenyang xie 'Lao Zhang zhexue'" [How Did I Write *The Philosophy of Lao Zhang?*]. For an account in English, see Vohra (19-29).

9. Lao She, "Wo zenyang xie 'Zhao Ziyue'" [How Did I Write *Zhao Ziyue?*]. See also Vohra (19-29).

10. Lao She, "Wo zenyang xie 'Er Ma'" [How Did I Write *The Two Mas?*]. See also Vohra (38-49) and Witchard.

11. According to the *Lü shi chunqiu jiao shi* [Springs and Autumns of Master Lü] of Lü Buwei (291?-235 BCE), during the reign of Duke Jing of Song (in 480 BCE), Mars (Ying huo) lodged in the lunar lodge Heart (corresponding to the star Antares in Scorpio). The Duke was frightened and summoned the astronomer Zi Wei to interpret the portent. He replied that Mars is the executioner of Heaven, and Heart corresponds to and rules the territory of Song (Lü Buwei [ch. 6, sect. 4]: 347-48. I thank an anonymous reviewer for calling "Mars in the Heart" to my attention.

12. The *Liexian zhuan* is attributed to the great Han dynasty textual exegete Liu Xiang (c.79-8 BCE). For a brief discussion, see Company 40-41, 291-306. There is no full translation in English.

13. *Journey to the West* is attributed to Wu Cheng'en (ca. 1500-1582). Anthony C. Yu has translated *Xiyou ji* in full (1977-1983), and also in abridged translation (2006).

14. For translation, see Lin.

15. On *zhiguai*, see Campamy, especially 21-27.

16. *The Water Margin* (also translated as *Outlaws of the Marsh* and *All Men Are Brothers*) is attributed to Shi Nai'an (ca. 1296-1372) and tells the story of a hundred "righteous outlaws" who gather an army at Mount Liang to resist the policies of the government. They are eventually granted amnesty and sent out on campaigns to resist invaders and suppress rebels.

17. It was initially serialized in the newspaper *Nanfang Bao* and written under the name Lao Shaonian [Old Youth]. In 1908 it was printed as an illustrated book by Shanghai gailiang xiaoshuo she [Shanghai Reform Fiction Press], under the pen-name Wofo Shanren. See Wang, "The Late Qing's Other Utopias."

18. *Shitou ji* [Story of the Stone] is an alternative title of *Honglou meng* [Dream of the Red Chamber], one China's four great vernacular novels. It was written by Cao Xueqin (1715 or 1724-1763 or 1764) in the mid-eighteenth century and first published in 1791. For translation, see Hawkes and Minford. For a study of the novel, see Yu, *Rereading the Stone*.

19. The anonymous author wrote under the name of Huangjiang Diaosou (Old Fisherman of the Secluded River). It was published in the magazine *Xiuxiang xiaoshuo* [Illustrated Stories].

20. It should be noted that Wang's "science fantasy" is distinct from the two widely used contemporary terms for science fiction: *kexue huanxiang* ("science fantasy") and its abbreviated form, *kehuan xiaoshuo*. These terms date from the founding of the People's Republic. The original term used by Lu Xun, Mao Dun, and other early translators of science fiction into Chinese was *kexue xiaoshuo* [science fiction] (see Huss). The name was changed in the 1950s to reflect Russian understandings of science fiction that were introduced at that time.

21. Zhao 460. Shen Congwen (1902-1988) was the pen name of the May Fourth writer Shen Yuehuan. He initially trained for a military career and began writing fiction in 1922. He taught Chinese literature at several universities. His best novel is considered to be *Chang He* [The Long River], written during the Sino-Japanese War. *Chundeng ji* [Lamp of Spring] and *Heifeng ji* [Black Phoenix] are his most important collections of short stories.

22. While this seems to be damnation by faint praise, the focus of Le Guin's essay is feminism, not alterity.

23. It is worth asking whether Lao She's cat people might have inspired Cordwainer Smith's cat-human hybrids. It has been argued that Cordwainer Smith's Underpeople are the people of China, for whom he held a lifelong regard (Elms 264-83; Raphals, "Limits" 142-56). Smith made liberal use of Chinese literary techniques and allusions (see McGuirk), and both his and Lao She's cat people draw on the *zhiguai* genre (Raphals, "Limits"). One portrayal is positive, the other negative, but both may have drawn on the same literary genre in very different ways. But Lao She seems an unlikely influence for Smith. Lao She's cat people are dehumanized; his major culprits are the foreign invasions of the nineteenth century and the indigenous warlords of the twentieth. Cordwainer Smith portrays his cat people (and other Underpeople) as heroic revolutionaries. In short, it is most probable that the two sets of cat people have entirely different origins.

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ABSTRACT

This article considers several contexts for the treatment of the themes of alterity and alien contact in Lao She's *Maocheng ji* [Cat Country], a work that straddles cultures and raises important questions for scholars of both science fiction and Chinese literature. It examines how *Cat Country* fits— or does not—into the history of science fiction and also into the development of twentieth-century Chinese literature. Finally, it compares the treatment of alien contact and alterity in *Maocheng ji* and Stanley G. Weinbaum's "A Martian Odyssey."