MITSUYOSHI NUMANO (Tokyo, Japan)

ASPECTS OF POST-UTOPIAN IMAGINATION:
THE CASES OF BRODSKY, PERTRUSHEVSKAIA,
MAKANIN, AND P'ETSUKH

The demise of a utopia in reality

Twentieth-century Russian literature has given birth to a variety of anti-utopian novels, one example of which is *We* by Evgenii Zamiatin. As a backdrop to the rise of such anti-utopian literature, the Soviet Union, as a utopia in reality provided an ideal target for parody. It was because the Soviet system was still intact that opposition through anti-utopian imagination was possible. However, with the commencement of *perestroika* in the mid-1980s, the supposedly solid system began to crumble. At the same time, in the field of literature, various restrictions were relaxed, and gave way to an increasing use of non-realist techniques, which were proscribed in the previous period of Socialist Realism. This change led to the creation of a qualitatively new utopian/anti-utopian novel. This "newness" was not only an issue of technique. Rather, faced with the decisive fall of the object of parody, namely, the utopia in reality, Russian society was left unable to dream about either a utopia or an anti-utopia and entered the "post-utopian era." This shift in world-view is thought to have contributed greatly to the rise of a new type of literature. The goal of this article is to discuss this new trend in literature through an analysis of specific examples.

**Brodsky: Marbles**

The original version of the play *Marbles* in the Russian language was completed in 1982, and was published by the American publisher, Ardis. The English translation was published in 1989. However, the conception of the work can be traced back to an earlier period, as a primitive form of *Marbles* is already evident in the epic poem "After our era," written in the Soviet Union in 1970.

*Marbles* takes the form of a dialogue between two prisoners imprisoned in a "tower". Considering that this work was begun in the Soviet Union, the reader can imagine that allusions to totalitarianism are embedded in this work. In fact, in his autobiographical essay *Less than One*, Josif Brodsky reveals an excellent definition of prison based on his own experience: "The formula for prison is a lack of space counterbalanced by a sur-
plus of time” (p. 23). In Marbles, one of the characters, Publius, makes the same statement (pp. 21-22). Taking such factors into consideration, it cannot be denied that the personal experience of the poet’s clash with the Soviet system underlies the idea behind Marbles. Drawing an analogy between the Roman Empire and “the Soviet Empire,” the “tower” as a prison can be seen as a metaphor for Soviet society. It is also possible to view the escape through art as connected with the writer’s personal experience. However, it should not be forgotten that this work is made unique by the power of poetic logic in a dimension that transcends personal experience or social reality.

The Roman Empire, surrounded by a classical ambiance, provides the backdrop for Marbles. However, the actual temporal setting is “the second century after our era.” Brodsky referred to this play as a “double anachronism.” This label must come out of a consideration of the unique setting which moves in both directions, past and future (or history and utopia). It is not only its temporality, but almost all aspects of this play that are presented as complementary and as binary opposites. Thus there is the educated Tullius and barbarian Rubullis; freedom and constraint; the swan and its other self; up and down. All of these elements face each other as reflections in the mirror, the present.

The twentieth century has seen the birth of several classic anti-utopian novels, such as Orwell’s 1984, which serve as warnings about the future. If, within this line of anti-utopian novels, Marbles can be seen as claiming a unique position, it may be due to the quality of duality inherent in the structure of this work. Its key is in the dual nature of the temporal setting, and the anachronism as taken in its original meaning. In Brodsky’s work, the complementary elements “past” and “present” form a complete circle, and the “present” stands at a dead-end, trapped within this circle. It is this “dead-end” that is Brodsky’s conception of utopia. This concept of utopia as a “dead-end,” where no further progress is possible, should already be familiar to Brodsky readers.

One contradiction brought about by this three dimensional dead-end is that the concept of utopia merges with anti-utopia and thus the two become inseparable. And the concept utopia = anti-utopia is realized in the form of an “empire”. In Marbles, it is given concrete form through a thoroughly enlarged blueprint of the Roman Empire. When the space reaches its limit and can no longer be expanded, the only possibility left for the empire is to transcend space and “merge with time.” This is why the true Roman Tullius attempts to become one with time through sleep.

However, to Brodsky, the “empire” is the Roman Empire, which gave birth to the classical poets he admires, and at the same time it is his home country, the Soviet Union, and the U.S. which has “adopted” him as a son.