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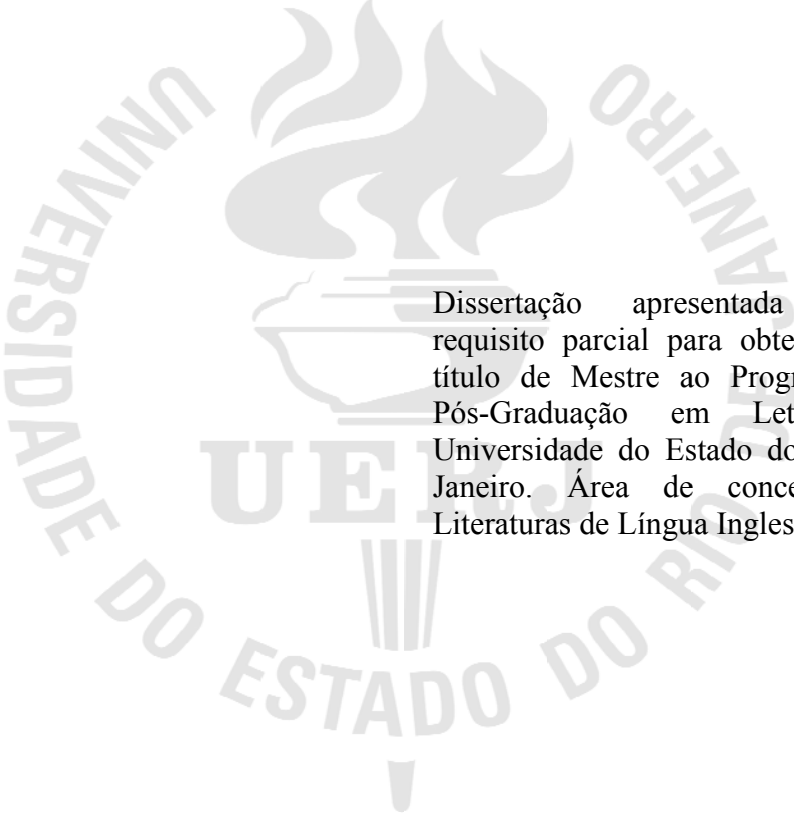
**Ex-centric heroes, twisted genres and reality-warping discourses:
fantasy and science fiction deconstructed in the works of Angela
Carter and China Miéville**

Rio de Janeiro

2013

Pedro Gomes Machado Vieira

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Dissertação apresentada como requisito parcial para obtenção do título de Mestre ao Programa de Pós-Graduação em Letras da Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro. Área de concentração: Literaturas de Língua Inglesa

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Assinatura

Data

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To all the Freaks out there.
All the best Freaks are here.

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The Wheel of Time turns, and Ages come and pass, leaving memories that become legend. Legend fades to myth, and even myth is long forgotten when the Age that gave it birth comes again. In one Age, called the Third Age by some, an Age yet to come, and Age long past, a wind rose in the Mountains of Mist. The wind was not the beginning. There are neither beginnings nor endings to the turning of The Wheel of Time. But it was *a* beginning.

Robert Jordan (1948 – 2007)

RESUMO

VIEIRA, Pedro Gomes Machado. *Ex-centric heroes, twisted genres and reality-warping discourses: fantasy and science fiction deconstructed in the works of Angela Carter and China Miéville*. 2013. 85f. Dissertação (Mestrado em Literaturas de Língua Inglesa) – Instituto de Letras, Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro, Rio de Janeiro, 2013.

Este trabalho tem como objetivo investigar pontos de convergência nas obras de dois autores britânicos, Angela Carter (1940-1992) e China Miéville (1972-). Os romances a serem estudados são *Nights at the circus* (1984) e *The infernal desire machines of Doctor Hoffman* (1972), de Angela Carter, e *Perdido Street Station* (2000) e *The city & the city* (2009), de China Miéville, e, como ponto de partida, ambos demonstram elos representativos com a ficção de gênero, evidenciados pelas obras escolhidas. Ao esmiuçar paralelos entre os romances, busca-se em especial dissecar as interseções temáticas e estilísticas, bem como as divergências e contradições que despertem interesse. Entre os temas investigados está a alteridade e o hibridismo – ambos autores fazem uso de personagens ‘ex-cêntricos’ e usam o hibridismo de modo a acentuar a Alteridade reservada ao Outro. Também será examinada a abordagem dos autores à ficção de gênero e o tratamento reservado aos tropos e clichês da Ficção Científica e da Fantasia. Por fim, a pesquisa observará o conceito que ambos compartilham de que discursos podem não ser uma mera reflexão da realidade, mas também criar e moldar o que tomamos por real. A todos os temas são aplicadas a teoria e crítica do pós-modernismo, além do material específico que lida com a ficção especulativa, Fantasia e Ficção Científica.

Palavras-chave: Angela Carter. China Miéville. Ficção Científica. Fantasia. Pós-modernismo.

ABSTRACT

This research aims at exploring shared themes in works from two British authors, Angela Carter (1940-1992) and China Miéville (1972-). The novels chosen are *Nights at the circus* (1984) and *The infernal desire machines of Doctor Hoffman* (1972), from Angela Carter, and *Perdido Street Station* (2000) and *The city & the city* (2009), from China Miéville. As a starting point, both authors exhibit strong links with genre fiction, expressed by the chosen works. In investigating parallels between the novels the focus is going to remain on revising thematic and stylistic intersections, as well as divergences and contradictions. Among explored themes, Alterity and Hybridity are used by both authors in portraying 'ex-centric' characters, Hybridity being used in order to emphasize the Alterity distinctive of the Other. The approach both authors direct towards genre fiction and how they deal with tropes and clichés of Science Fiction and Fantasy is also going to be examined. Finally, the research is going to deal with the concept both authors share that discourses might not be a mere reflection of reality but instead they might create and shape what we accept as real. All themes are going to be studied under the lens of postmodern theory and critic, as well as specific criticism on Speculative Fiction, Fantasy and Science Fiction.

Keywords: Angela Carter. China Miéville. Science Fiction. Fantasy. Postmodernism.

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INTRODUCTION – SURRENDER TO THE WEIRD

The imagination is like any other part of the body; it can be healthy and strong, or it can be broken, or diseased, and it can even become amputated. Science fiction is the Olympics Games of the imaginatively fit.

Adam Roberts (*Yellow Blue Tibia*, 2009)

When I actually tried to read ‘*Excession*’, embarrassment was swiftly replaced by trauma ... (...) I didn’t even understand the blurb on the back of the book (...) The urge to weep tears of frustration was already upon me even before I read the short prologue, (...) By the time I got to the first chapter, which is entitled ‘Outside Context Problem’ and begins ‘(*GCU Grey Area* signal sequence file #n428857/119),’ I was crying so hard that I could no longer see the page in front of my face, at which point I abandoned the entire ill-conceived experiment altogether. I haven’t felt so stupid since I stopped attending physics lessons aged fourteen.

Nick Hornby, on why he abandoned *Excession* (1998), a space opera by Ian M. Banks (*Housekeeping vs. Dirt*, 2006)

It has been said, cynically, that the Golden Age of Science Fiction is 14.

Peter Nicholls (*The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*, 1994)

In May 2011, the British Library hosted an exhibition dedicated to Science Fiction. “Out of This World”, as it was appropriately named, aimed to “challenge visitors’ perceptions of the genre and explore its relationship with science”. Among genre landmarks – as a first edition *Frankenstein* – and some startling curiosities – like the Brönte sisters’ imaginary worlds, a place of reverence was destined for Angela Carter’s manuscript for *The infernal desire machines of Dr. Hoffman* (1972). No wonder her name was mentioned during the exhibition’s opening speech, delivered by one of the most prominent and awarded authors of the British Science Fiction field, China Miéville. He cheered the “delightfully cheeky act of reverse inclusion” of genre authors that were not associated with SF or Fantasy literature due to being “claimed by the mainstream”

and pointed out that in the exhibition they were chiefly reclaimed by the Science Fiction genre, and, mentioning Angela Carter, Miéville then jokes “I’m not sure whether we are going to have them back yet” (MIÉVILLE, 2011, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RSTOtOIdsmo>).

China Miéville was born in 1972. He holds a Ph.D. in International Relations from the London School of Economics and has a particularly prolific academic production, dealing with Marxism (his Ph.D. thesis, *Between Equal Rights: A Marxist Theory of International Law*, was published in 2005), and with links between Science Fiction and Marxism (he was one of the editors of the anthology *Red Planets: Marxism and Science Fiction*, published in 2009). Since Miéville’s literary debut with *King Rat* (1998), the author has been held accountable – along with many others – as one of the writers responsible for the new breath of air the SF and Fantasy genres are currently experiencing. Miéville has won several of the genre oriented awards – to the point that it has been jokily suggested that the Arthur C. Clarke Award should be renamed C. Miéville Award if he keeps winning it (LEA, 2012, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2012/mar/26/arthur-c-clarke-award-china-mieville>). His prolific work, so diverse as to include a secondary world fantasy (*The Bas Lag Trilogy*, 2000-2004), a detective story in a weird scenario (*The city & the city*, 2009) or a language oriented space opera (*Embassytown*, 2011), his academic background and radical Marxist militancy make him stand out among his fellow peers.

In the wild territory of the SF *fandom*, Miéville has already achieved cult status and is slowly crawling the wormhole towards the mainstream sphere. As he remarked in the Out of this World speech, the mainstream (theorists and critics alike) is eager to claim whoever happens to call their interest, but always with the condition that their genre links would be erased – or at least conventionally blurred – in order to detach them from the lower or most popular art forms. However, this mentality has been changing, as postmodern thought does not feel any constrain in including this same blurring of genres as one of its narrative devices and the high and low/pop culture *mashup* as typical postmodern practice.

Angela Carter (1940-1992), as the British Library has already acknowledged, has taken the reverse gateway, brought from the serious halls of mainstream academia through the wardrobe that leads into the colorful Narnia of genre fiction. Naturally, many critics had already spotted this trend. In her essay “The Dangerous Edge”, critic Elaine Jordan considers Angela Carter a remarkable genre-bending or genre-blurring author. Jordan claims that Carter’s

speculative fictions “work through specific linguistic play which is allusive, parodic and creative”, acknowledging the literary quality of Carter’s speculative texts (JORDAN, 1995, p. 210). As critic Roz Kaveney points out in his article “New New World Dreams”, in several of her novels and short stories Carter “most clearly uses the tropes of SF and genre fantasy”. Going further, Kaveney claims that Carter expressed her “admiration for New Wave SF and for two of the major writers who came out of it: J. G. Ballard and Michael Moorcock” (KAVENAY, 1995, p. 173).

Michael Moorcock (1939 -), a multiple awarded writer with works ranging from literary fiction and alternate history to pulp sword & sorcery, named by *The Times* in 2008 one of the 50 greatest British writers since 1945, is one of the links Carter and Miéville proudly share. While Carter penned the introduction to *Death is no obstacle* (1991), a compilation of Moorcock’s interviews on the craft of writing, calling him “omnivorously well-read” and getting astonished with Moorcock’s claim of working “fifteen thousand words a day” (CARTER, 1991, <http://www.savoy.abel.co.uk/HTML/deathint.html>), Miéville echoes Carter, when, also while writing an introduction, this one for *Wizards & wild romance* (2004), a collection of Moorcock’s essays on Fantasy literature, he asks in comic despair “how can Moorcock possibly writes all the books he writes, when he also reads all the books he obviously reads? How?” (MOORCOCK, 2004, p. 11).

Of course their admiration stretches beyond the tragic hero *Elric* creator’s fertile production. In a recent compilation, *The weird* (2011), it is Moorcock the one writing an foreword while the collection features both Angela Carter and China Miéville, as if some cycle was closing – the good ‘n old snake biting its tail. Ann and Jeff Vandermeer, the writers responsible for organizing *The weird*, were also responsible for a previous anthology – *The new weird* (2008), which, more than an anthology, was a manifesto, a declaration of intents from several authors sharing the same ideas, ideas and intents responsible for generating the hybrid subgenre that would become known as the New Weird.

However, it is interesting to ponder why a mainstream writer loved by the academia such as Angela Carter would be in an anthology of weird fiction, full of ghouls and tentacled beasts, since this is something that does not happen by chance. Jeff Vandermeer pens the introduction and he makes a stab in defining The Weird – not exactly as a genre, but as a sensation:

Because the weird often exists in the interstices, because it can occupy different territories simultaneously, an impulse exists among the more rigid taxonomists to find The Weird suspect, to

argue it should not, cannot be, separated out from other traditions. Because The Weird is as much a *sensation* as it is a mode of writing, the most keenly attuned amongst us will say ‘I know it when I see it’, by which they mean ‘I know it when I *feel* it’ – and this, too, the more rigorous of categorizing taxidermists will take to mean The Weird does not exist when, in fact, this is one of the more compelling arguments for its existence. (VANDERMEER; VANDERMEER, 2011, p. xvi)

Ann and Jeff Vandermeer assembled a heterogeneous cast composed of genre best-sellers from the Horror, Fantasy and Science Fiction fields, such as George R. R. Martin, Neil Gaiman and Stephen King; awarded literary fiction authors such as Michael Chabon, Haruki Murakami and Joyce Carol Oates; canonical writers the likes of Jorge Luis Borges, Julio Cortázar and Franz Kafka; along with some precursors of the genre fiction as we know it, namely H. P. Lovecraft and Algernon Blackwood. Jeff Vandermeer, in his tentative definition, tried to picture The Weird as drawing its influence and also touching with its tentacles many literary movements, trends and currents throughout history:

Influences on The Weird in the twentieth century, streams of fiction that fed into its watershed, included many traditions: surrealism, symbolism, Decadent Literature, The New Wave, and the more esoteric strains of the Gothic. None of these influencers truly defined The Weird, but, assimilated into the aquifer along with Lovecraftian and Kafkaesque approaches, changed the composition of this form of fiction forever. (VANDERMEER; VANDERMEER, 2011, p. xvi)

Such a list already shows connections as some of Angela Carter’s outspoken influences lies in some of the said traditions: surrealism, symbolism, The New Wave and the Gothic.

It is widely acknowledged that Miéville’s 2000 novel, *Perdido Street Station*, set the landmark for the New Weird. This new genre is, according to Ann and Jeff Vandermeer, as registered in their own ‘manifesto’: “a type of urban, secondary-world fiction that subverts romanticized ideas about place found in traditional fantasy, largely by choosing realistic, complex real-world models as the jumping off point for creation of settings that may combine elements of both science fiction and fantasy.” (VANDERMEER; VANDERMEER, 2008, p. xvi). Angela Carter was not an active New Weird influence, although Jeff Vandermeer acknowledges his admiration for her surrealist works in the website The Modern World (dedicated to 20th century experimental literature), calling her one of “those who should influence the new generations of the Surreal and the fantastic” (VANDERMEER, 2001, <http://www.themodernword.com/scriptorium/carter.html>). However, in terms of influence, the New Weird admits it is hugely in debt towards the New Wave writers – which were also an influence for Angela Carter.

In his own anthology, Vandermeer also proclaimed the death of the New Weird – “New Weird is dead. Long live the Next Weird” (VANDERMEER; VANDERMEER, 2008, p. xviii), and since then even Miéville, the once poster boy for the movement, has started describing himself as a ‘Weird Fiction’ writer. Genres may be as fickle as market labels, and discarded once they are not convenient anymore, but the ideas pertaining to the New Weird were already absorbed by the magic cauldron of genre fiction, in especial its inclination to defy the traditional Fantasy and Science Fiction canonical conventions. “This speaks to the nature of art: as soon as something becomes popular or familiar, the true revolution moves elsewhere”, Vandermeer admits (VANDERMEER; VANDERMEER, 2008, p. xvi). Some participants of the online forum where most of the discussion surrounding the conception of the New Weird took place were never associated ‘new weirdists’, but ideas and perspectives of their fellow debaters have influenced their fiction – for instance the gritty low Fantasy of Joe Abercrombie and his *The First Law* series (2006 - 2012) or the dark Lovecraftian space operas of the *Revelation Space* universe (2000 - 2007), an award winning series by Alastair Reynolds.

Be it Science or Literary Fiction, Weird or Fantasy, Angela Carter’s web of dreams reached a whole new generation of genre writers – awarded writers like Miéville and Jeff Vandermeer – and, like her own “infernal machines of Doctor Hoffman”, this healthy new course has touched their works and so definitely influenced how these new generation of Fantasy and SF authors echo – consciously or not – one of the most famous of Carter’s mottos: “I’m in the demythologizing business”, an extremely quoted line from “Notes from the front line” (1983). The deconstruction of culturally imposed gender roles and the embracing of Otherness is recurrent in their work, and China Miéville is very straightforward when, in an internet interview, he stressed the political trend he finds so distinctive in SF: “I do think politics is particularly pointed in Science Fiction, because Science Fiction is predicted on alterity, and alterity is an intrinsically political concept” (PENNY, 2010, www.morningstaronline.co.uk/index.php/news/content/view/full/95488).

In Carter’s and Miéville’s fiction, there is the common concern for speculation regarding alterity and identity, as characters struggle against their imposed identities while trying to reinvent themselves, like the winged acrobat Fevvers from Carter’s *Nights at the circus* (1984) and the winged garuda Yagharek from Miéville’s *Perdido Street Station* (2000). Both of them cope with their own choices and the consequences arising from them. There are freakish

scientists trying to mold reality, thus recreating science as a field and even Science Fiction as a genre. In Carter's *The infernal desire machines of Doctor Hoffman* (1972), the title's Doctor tries to institute a regime of dreams and sets imagination running wild against what he conceives as the dictatorship of material reality, and, in the same *Perdido Street Station*, the main character, scientist Isaac Dan der Gimnebulin, strives to discover a theory that should mold reality but instead unleashes an evil that feeds on dreams and devours imagination. Desiderio, main character of *Doctor Hoffman*, is a government agent capable of an acute perception of reality and unreality – he can discern the real from the dreams manipulated by Hoffman, although this notion will be challenged on the course of his quest. On the other hand, inspector Tyador Borlú, from Miéville's weird noir *The city and the city* (2009), is supposed to investigate a murder while distinguishing the reality of his native city of Beszél from the unreality of its twin city, Ul Qoma, having to unsee everything pertaining to it as they both share the same physical space. Again, this notion will be challenged as he follows clues that lead him to question which perspective is responsible for determining his “reality”.

In the following chapters, I intend to investigate how these connections arise on their works. The four long narratives chosen were, by China Miéville, New Weird landmark *Perdido Street Station* – a important turning point for both the Science Fiction and the Fantasy genres – and *The city & the city* – a novel that, besides winning all genre-related awards, has given rise to the discussion of why genre fiction would not be nominated for “literary fiction” awards, when its title failed to appear in the Man Booker Prize longlist. From Angela Carter, the novels chosen are both strongly identified with genre fiction, deserving to be quoted in the *Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* and the *Encyclopedia of Fantasy* alike. *Nights at the circus* is frequently described as a magical realist novel, although it is located in this foggy territory where it could be a Fantasy or – if we are in the mood for an even more complicated taxonomy – a Slipstream novel. *The Infernal desire machines of Doctor Hoffman* is a surrealist Science Fictional tale, with a lot of its imagery pointing to a strong affinity with the likes of surrealist authors from the 1970's New Wave of British SF – J. G. Ballard and Michael Moorcock, specially.

The investigation will take into account several issues important to contemporary literary theory. Pertaining to alterity and identity, the question of the Other in genre fiction is going to be investigated in the way it is reflected by the two winged characters from *Nights at the circus* and *Perdido Street Station*, whether there is any possible analogy in the dilemmas both characters

undergo as ‘freaks’ or ex-centrics. Miéville said Science Fiction is predicted on alterity and critic Adam Roberts states that all the “various definitions of SF have in common (...) a sense of SF as in some central sense about the encounter with difference” (ROBERTS, 2002, p. 28), something corroborated by author and critic Justina Robson: “the basic notions of the Self and Other lie at the heart of every alien encounter” (BROOKE, 2012, p. 26). Even in the Fantasy field, the same inclination has already been pointed out, as Jim Casey writes in *The Cambridge Companion to Fantasy Fiction* (2012) that “More broadly, marginalized narrative groups have greater representation in postmodern fantasy. Othered voices have always spoken in fantasy through the masks of elves, dwarves or dragons” (JAMES; MENDLESOHN, 2012, p. 118). The theme of alterity is very dear to Carter, in especial gender-biased preconceptions of identity, even if she never expressed it through aliens, elves or dragons. Carter’s metaphors are more subtle and not at all heavy-handed, while Miéville usually prefers the radically opposite path:

So the difference between a fantasy novel and a rather heavy-handed magic realist novel is that in the magic realist novel, the dragon represents whatever it may be—hope, despair—while in the fantasy novel it represents whatever it may be *and* it's also a giant fucking scaly lizard. (CHATFIELD, 2012, <http://boingboing.net/2012/05/31/an-interview-with-china-mievil.html>)

It is also a point of relevance to investigate postmodern narrative strategies applied to Fantasy and SF narratives, and especially matters of genre and all the dubious taxonomy that surrounds Speculative Fiction. As we stretch the boundaries of genre definitions, both *The infernal machines of Doctor Hoffman* and *Perdido Street Station* may be considered SF texts, dabbling with genre conventions by applying the familiar postmodern motion of installing and subverting. The science in these narratives is rather less ‘scientific’ (or, as any average Science Fiction fan would say, less ‘hard’) than the traditional SF narrative, and it is interesting to examine how both authors deal with the science portion of their fiction – usually more associated with the surrealist, weird and fantastic.

These postmodern perspectives lead to a remarking genre-bending (or blurring) process, in which genre frontiers do not appear to be very clear and usual postmodern strategies like parody and intertextuality are commonly found. Those practices abound in both authors’ works, from Carter’s magical realist masterpiece built around Shakespeare intertexts, *Wise Children* (1991), to Miéville’s retelling of *Moby Dick* (1851) exchanging whales and ships for giant mutant moles and trains, *Railsea* (2012). In the novels whose content we are going to analyze, even though there are no parodies as literal as those aforementioned, there is plenty of opportunity to

find postmodernist strategies especially in the dealings with genre oriented conventions approached under the guise of parody, for example.

There is also the undeniable dialogue with the aesthetics of pulp novels. Even though “in literary criticism ‘pulp’ is often taken as synonym for ‘stylistically crude’” (CLUTE; NICHOLLS, 1994, p. 980), the themes and modes recycled by most of well-known SF and Fantasy clichés can be traced to the pulp aesthetic, lie the mad scientist or the detective procedural narrative. In order to do some justice to pulp writers, it is relevant to note that among those stories (but definitely not in most of them) there could be regularly found some virtues such as “good narrative pacing”, as well as “colour, inventiveness, clarity of image, and occasional sharp observation”, Clute and Nicholls point out. In Science Fiction, most authors remembered from the years known as “The Golden Age” (1938-1946) – namely Isaac Asimov, Robert Heinlein, Arthur C. Clarke, Ray Bradbury and many others – have egressed from the SF magazine tradition that helped to cement some of the tropes and themes abused and depleted back in the day, which are still being channeled by bad SF and Fantasy today, sometimes as if they have been conceived yesterday, resulting in, as Nicholls observes, the “mechanical reworking of the Golden Age themes by hack writers, whose increasing numbers have partly obscured the steady improvement in the upper echelons of the genre” (CLUTE; NICHOLLS, 1994, p. 506). It is a concern in Miéville’s and Carter’s fiction to establish a dialogue with those tropes and use them consciously of their ‘nature’, working the cliché with a parodic self-awareness of its pulp, old-fashioned and even depleted content, be it the mad scientists in *Doctor Hoffman* and *Nights at the circus*, the step-by-step detective procedure of *The city & the city* or the *Dungeons & Dragons* quest structure in *Perdido Street Station*.

Both authors also display sharp questioning about the validity of those discourses that intend to flaunt hard evidences on describing reality and truth. Miéville’s *The city & the city* is a great example on how discourses can shape known reality, tracing frontiers and creating psychological blindfolds which are usually rather difficult to remove. In *The infernal desire machines of Doctor Hoffman*, the said machines are instruments used to mold reality by means of ideas – desires made into revenants through imagination and then set to run amok among people in such way that the distinction from mirages and ‘real’ become an impossibility. Post-structuralist notions are embodied in those narratives, where a clash takes place between the

accepted knowledge of the concrete and the supposed fiction of the abstract, they both get intertwined and then fall apart.

The contemporary Science Fiction and Fantasy genres, as seen by most of the mainstream, are strongly identified with their Hollywood counterparts, which are, with a few exceptions, a gross simplification of the tropes being worked by genre writers nowadays, sterilized of most of the issues SF is interested in dealing with and used as a vehicle for showcasing special effects and action oriented flicks.

There is, however, another side of genre where creativity is not interested in achieving gross revenue by means of stripping off content in favor of shallow metaphors and 3D glasses – “I don't think my job is to try to give readers what they want”, Miéville answered to a recent *Guardian* interview, “I think my job is to try to make readers want what I give.” (SKELLIESCAR, 2012, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/childrens-books-site/2012/sep/20/china-mieville-interview>). This is the main issue Michael Moorcock and most of the New Weird writers had with the traditional Fantasy genre, in its most common guise of the Tolkienian ‘epic’ or ‘high’ Fantasy, “the prose of the nursery room”, according to Michael Moorcock (MOORCOCK, 2004, p. 124).

So we are going to take the less traveled road and investigate the genre fiction that usually escapes the mainstream. It will not be a ride without its challenges, not smooth and easy and definitely not a stroll in the park. We will face dream draining creatures and reality bending machines, collectives of clockwork automata and sadistic nobility, but the journey will ultimately pay off. Miéville is still a relatively young author – called by *The Guardian* a “Science Fiction legend in the making” (CROWN, 2011, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/booksblog/2011/oct/17/science-fiction-china-mieville>) – nevertheless his fiction has much to offer, even for an already-made-legend like Angela Carter.

1 WINGED OTHERNESS: HYBRIDS AND ALTERITY IN ANGELA CARTER'S *NIGHTS AT THE CIRCUS* AND CHINA MIÉVILLE'S *PERDIDO STREET STATION*

All fantasy is political, even – perhaps specially – when it thinks it is not.

Mark Bould and Sherryl Vint (*The Cambridge Companion to Fantasy Literature*, 2012)

Conan stared aghast; the image had the body of a man, naked, and green in color; but the head was one of nightmare and madness. Too large for the human body, it had no attributes of humanity. Conan stared at the wide flaring ears, the curling proboscis, on either side of which stood white tusks tipped with round golden balls. The eyes were closed, as if in sleep.

Robert E. Howard (“The Tower of the Elephant”, 1933)

First time I landed I broke both my legs. I kind just assumed if I was flying, I was invulnerable too. Which is, um, not actually that bright. But you know... they sometimes go together and yeah, then I was freaked out for a *while*, just freaked by the whole concept. It was just *unnatural*. But when I got good at it, when I *got it*, I mean... *Flying*. God. When you are flying, in a very literal sense the world goes away. It makes everything smaller, and sort of *okay*, too.

Eddie Tancredi, codename “Wing” (*Astonishing X-Men #3*, 2004, by Joss Whedon and John Cassaday)

You really want to know what being a X-Man feels like? Just be a smart bookish boy of color in a contemporary U.S. ghetto. Mamma mia! Like having wings or a pair of tentacles growing out of your chest.

Junot Diaz (*The brief and wondrous life of Oscar Wao*, 2002)

Fantasy is a literary genre that breeds hybrids. The cheapest sword & sorcery pulp paperback will not be a fully *pulpy* achievement without winged apes or the odd anthropomorphic elephant – reference to two of the most famous “Conan, the Barbarian” short

stories, by pulp master Robert E. Howard (1906-1936), “The Queen of the Black Coast” (1934) and “The Tower of the Elephant” (1933). It is the easiest way to conceive monsters: you need only to pick and choose two (or more) animals and mix them together, regardless of logic or common sense. The concept of hybridity is also closely linked with alterity and although many writers dabbling in the genre may not give these links any credit, others are eager to explore connections and expand the horizons of Fantasy writing as tools for this kind of investigation, without losing sight of Fantasy main purpose: to have fun with monsters. Literary writers do the reverse approach; the concept comes before the tool, in spite of the similar results. There may be differences in the methods, but there are also striking points in common, as it happens in such different novels as *Nights at the circus* (1984) and *Perdido Street Station* (2000).

Yagharek is not the protagonist in China Miéville’s *Perdido Street Station*, although he is a supporting character that acts as narrative device for setting the plot in motion, the first conflict that snowballs into the grand crisis. A born garuda – a species of birdlike humanoids, the name itself was taken by Miéville from the Hindu mythology – Yagharek searches for scientist Isaac Grimnebulin. He had his wings severed as a punishment for a hideous crime – the crime is a well-kept secret until the end of the novel – and he wants to fly again. As a garuda, Yagharek has unmistakable birdlike features and feathered skin, and so he finds himself forced to wear a cloak, covering fake (and useless) prop wings tied to his back, in order to look like a common garuda to human bystanders and fellow garudas. His identity, defined by his flying ability, was severed along with the wings. His hybridity was forcefully taken and he can’t fit in anymore.

Fevvers, the winged acrobat from Angela Carter’s *Nights at the Circus*, has several roles thrust upon her, and she continually refuses to incorporate them. She aims higher, she aims towards a kind of utopian world in which she would not be bound to a concept defined by her grotesque nature and gender. Unlike Yagharek, she is not member of a ‘species’ that sets her apart from fellow humans – she is a woman, and her condition as a woman is tied to the roles she is allowed to choose. She defies that condition, and reinvents herself.

In the influent “The Laugh of the Medusa”, theorist Hélène Cixous wrote that "Flying is a woman’s gesture - flying in language and making it fly. ... dislocating things and values, breaking them up, emptying structures, and turning propriety upside down" (CISOUX, 1976, p. 887), which is a quote that perfectly fits Fevvers’ physical and metaphorical wings. Miéville does not depletes the gesture from the same femininity, as its meaning remains essentially the same, even

if not applicable to a unique woman. Pop culture has already framed the flying gesture in many contexts. In Wim Wenders' *Wings of desire* (1987), a failed trapezist falls in love with an angel – the movie attaches new meanings for the material and symbolic dangerous of ‘falling’, an interesting overlapping (probably incidental) with Fevvers’ own story. In recent young adult literature, a trend of fallen angels (*Fallen*, 2009), guardian angels (*Hush Hush*, 2009) and winged prince-charming types stormed bookshops over the world following the ‘sparkling vampires’ craze and then got their feathers plucked and disappeared as if it had never happened. In the super heroes universe, flying has been one of the most popular superpowers up to date, and the Marvel Universe has its share of winged characters, even a winged ‘Angel’ (created by Stan Lee and Jack Kirby in 1963) – you must concede that there must be some appeal for a character whose only “power” is flapping wings, among others with indestructible metal claws, energy laser beams or magnetic telekinesis. Interestingly, in a reminder of Yagharek’s own painful drama, this same character killed himself, stricken with grief when his wings were amputated by villains in a dramatic 1987 story. He got better later, though (the concept of death in super hero comics is rather ephemeral).

Winged pop culture aside, Yagharek and Fevvers are embarking on a journey since the beginning and their journeys are striking similar. In Yagharek’s judgement, he will be “himself” again once he can reclaim back the skies. Hybridity is often associated with the fractured subject spotted on postmodern and postcolonial novels, but Yagharek, besides being a hybrid, is a maimed one, he cannot come to terms with his condition while it was inflicted on him as a punishment. His ‘familiar’ hybridity was replaced by one that sets him apart among his own people – the garuda – and makes him a freak among other races, even in the multicultural metropolis of New Crobuzon, where a wingless garuda attracts curiosity from the common bystander.

Fevvers’ quest is one of subversion. Sarah Gamble wrote: “to the extent that value is contested in the production of images of women in this novel, it is contested socially” (GAMBLE, 2001, p. 149). Fevvers grows from posing as static reproduction of a pre-established idealized image of woman (the Winged Victory), towards being posed, herself, as a freak (in Madame Schreck’s freakshow), and being free from it she then becomes the aerialist who will be known as a producer of spectacle and not the spectacle itself. She has a more ambitious level to climb after it, where there is no need for women’s perceived image to define themselves, she

looks forward to the day when “all woman will have wings, the same as I” (CARTER, 1984, p. 285).¹

China Miéville chiefly agrees with the social contestation in Fevver’s quest, as it echoes his own thoughts on alterity and Science Fiction: “I do think politics is particularly pointed in science fiction, because science fiction is predicted on alterity, and alterity is an intrinsically political concept”. (PENNY, 2010, www.morningstaronline.co.uk/index.php/news/content/view/full/95488). Critic Adam Roberts also sees that Science Fiction (SF) is “in some central sense about the encounter with difference” and he stretches this definition by stating that this encounter is articulated through, more usually, “a material embodiment of alterity” (ROBERTS, 2002, p. 28). Of course *Nights at the circus* would never fit in SF as a genre (although *Perdido Street Station* could and would), but Yagharek and Fevvers display this feathered feature in common, their material alterity. This is in consonance with Lance Olsen’s assertion in his study on postmodern fantasy: “the language of the fantastic text takes the figurative literally, it refuses to take itself as poetry, which uses the figurative figuratively (...) Instead of taking the word as metaphor it takes the word as equation.” (OLSEN, 1987, p. 21). This definition is best applied to Speculative Fiction in general, but with evident links to Roberts’ idea.

And the “word as equation” as Olsen puts it is often used in the political and social contest, as pointed by Miéville and Gamble. In *The Cambridge companion to fantasy literature* (2012), authors Mark Bould and Sherryl Vint wrote that “all fantasy is political, even – perhaps specially – when it thinks it is not”, and then, they quote Rosemary Jackson’s seminal *Fantasy: the literature of subversion* (1981), emphasizing that her study:

established the association between fantasy literature and resistance to the dominant social order, arguing that fantasy: ‘characteristically attempts to compensate for a lack resulting from cultural constraints: it is a literature of desire, which seeks that which is experienced as absence and loss’ (JAMES and MENDLESOHN: 2012, p. 102)

In a further quote from Jackson, the authors explain the Lacanian terms Jackson uses in defining her views: “the Symbolic (the law, the signifier, the subjectivity) constrains and is disturbed by the Imaginary (delusion, the signified, the Other), exhuming ‘all that needs to

¹ All subsequent quotes from *Nights at the circus* are going to be referenced by page number alone.

remain hidden if the world is to be comfortably ‘known’” (JAMES; MENDLESOHN, 2012, p. 102).

Both Fevvers and Yagharek will endure a kind of rite of passage, if they want this exhumation process to succeed. In *The encyclopedia of fantasy* (1997), rite of passage is defined as having a common underlying movement “from bondage towards enablement, freedom, responsibility” (CLUTE; GRANT, 1997, p. 813). In Fevvers quest, she will reinvent herself as the New Woman (allowing for Jack Walser to become her New Man) and the novel concludes with her burst of laughter – as she takes Jack as her lover and realizes she had fooled him on thinking she had been a virgin all the time. This laughter is described in such a way that it underlies a nearly transcendental achievement:

The spiraling tornado of Fevvers’ laughter began to twist and shudder across the entire globe, as if a spontaneous response to the giant comedy that endlessly unfolded beneath it, until everything that lived and breathed, everywhere, was laughing. (CARTER, 1984, p. 295).

Sarah Gamble notes that “both [Paulina] Palmer and [Aidan] Day arrive at similar conclusions: that the novel ends by envisaging a utopian order within which women are no longer confined to male-oriented stereotypes” and she quotes Palmer on the carnivalistic nature of such act: “as well as irreverently mocking the existing political order, it is socially and psychically liberating”, and Palmer brings on Bakhtin’s discussion on the subversive potential of laughter as “the defeat of power (...) it liberates not only from external censorship but, first of all, from the great interior censor” (GAMBLE, 2001, p. 147).

Yagharek’s rite, if somewhat more painful, is not less radical. Subsequently after the novel’s main conflict resolution – the dream eating slake-moths being defeated – the focus goes back to Yagharek. After all, it was Isaac’s research, while trying to devise a way to make him fly again, that endangered the city by unleashing beasts from another dimension. Isaac is visited by another garuda that finally details him the terrible crime committed by Yagharek which led his wings to be severed. Kar’uchai came all the way from Cimek, Garuda’s native land, in order to plead for Isaac not to help Yagharek fly again, or it would *undo* justice. Yagharek was accused of “choice-theft in the second degree, with utter disrespect” (MIÉVILLE, 2000, p. 607), which Kar’uchai then tries to explain on terms that would make sense for Isaac:

It is the only crime we have, Grimneb’lin (...) To take the choice of another... to forget their concrete reality, to abstract them, to forget (...) that actions have consequences. What is community but a means to... for all we individuals to have... our *choices*. (MIÉVILLE, 2000, p. 607)²

² All subsequent quotes from *Perdido Street Station* are going to be referenced by page number alone.

Annoyed by the philosophical speculation, Issac hard pressed the garuda for a straightforward rendition and Kar'uchai finally explained, dispassionately: "You would call it rape" (p. 608).

So, unlike Fevvers, whose "crime" had been only to be born a winged woman in the land of wingless males, Yagharek had his identity severed due to a despicable act he committed. Interestingly to be noticed, when Yagharek introduces himself to Isaac he translates his name and title as "Too Too Abstract Individual Yagharek Not To Be Respected" (p. 39), which then is counterpoised by Kar'uchai own introduction: "Concrete Individual Kar'uchai Very Very Respected" (p. 606). The supposed concrete nature of identity is a rational and humanist-centered notion that does not fit in the postmodern subject, itself aware of its fluidity and decentered nature.

However, during that conversation Isaac notes that the garuda culture is not so easily analog to humans. Kar'uchai was herself the one victim of the choice-theft crime (Isaac hadn't even noticed that she was a female, having so little experience with garudas). In response to Isaac's shocked disbelief, she states:

You cannot translate to your jurisprudence (...) I was not *violated* or *ravaged*, Grimneb'lin. I'm not *abused* or *defiled*... or *ravished* or *spoiled*. You would call his actions rape, but I do not: that tells me nothing. *He stole my choice*. [Emphasis as in the original] (MIÉVILLE, 2000, p. 609)

Isaac decides he does not have the tools to judge Yagharek's crime. However, he also realizes that he cannot continue his flight research (which was almost ready) and flees, leaving a farewell note and carrying away his crisis engine that would remedy Yagharek's flightless condition. This remedy would have acted as a patch to Yagharek's fractured identity – making him feel a "concrete individual" again, but nonetheless a whole new type of individual where the word 'concrete' should not be exactly appropriate, even if not before other garuda's eyes. So Yagharek is excluded the option of an easy way out. Having access to Isaac's 'cure' would be an artificial solution to revert what had become a fractured identity he was not being able to articulate, an supposed static "concrete" one. However, Yagharek essential postmodern condition would not support that kind of false balsam.

Forever expelled and exiled from his community, a pariah, Yagharek finally learns that his identity is a restless puzzle that needs articulation, not an improvised glue, his path was one he would not be able to retrace back. So Yagharek comes to terms with his new self in a painful way, ripping off his feathers and embracing his new condition: "I'm not the earthbound garuda

anymore. That one is dead. This is a new life. I am not a half-thing, a failed neither-nor”, he says (p. 623), echoing a remark by theorist Stuart Hall concerning the nature of postmodern individuality: “Identities are never completed, never finished, (...) they are always as subjectivity itself, in process. (...) Identity is always in the process of formation.” (HALL, 1997, p. 47).

The metaphors implied by the titles “concrete individual” or “abstract individual” point out towards a rupture of the stable Cartesian subject, well traced and defined towards the puzzled self Yagharek must adopt. Hall wrote, on the implications of this articulation between self and Other, that

Identity means, or connotes, the process of identification, of saying that this here is the same as that, or we are the same together, in this respect. (...) [the] structure of identification is always constructed through ambivalence. Always constructed through splitting. Splitting between that which one is and that which is the other. (...) This is the Other that belongs inside one. This is the Other that one can only know from the place from which one stands. This is the self as it is inscribed in the gaze of the Other. (HALL, 1997, p. 47-48).

Yagharek is enduring this kind of ‘splitting’ as exemplified by Hall. Margaret Atwood also agrees with this kind of tension, and, now specifically concerning the Other on Science Fiction, she wrote that “if you can image – or imagine – yourself, you can image – or imagine – a being not-yourself; and you can imagine how such a being may see the world, a world that includes you. You can see yourself from the outside” (ATWOOD, 2011, p. 21).

Yagharek does not change the world through laughter, as Fevvers, but his transmutation sounds akin to the one suffered by Jack Walser, the former skeptic journalist hired to unmask the “Fevvers hoax” which is turned into Fevvers’ husband and, in the wake of the 20th Century, the “New Man”: “Precipitated in ignorance and bliss into the next century, there, after it was over, Walser took himself apart and put himself together again.” (p. 294), much like Yagharek. Aidan Day remarks that “The cancelling of the traditional patriarchal icon of male dominance is necessary to emblematised this new relationship [between Walser and Fevvers / man and woman]” (GAMBLE, 2001, p. 148). Yagharek, by his people standards “only” a choice-thief, has still committed rape, the utmost material patriarchal violence conceived by men as male dominance – and he chooses to flail himself to achieve a kind of redemption, even though already having been punished. If Walser violence against women had a metaphorical – iconic – meaning, a reflection of the patriarchal society he lived on, Yagharek committed actual violence and as such had to suffer a similar redemption – literally “took himself apart”, beginning by the amputated wings and culminating in ripping off his feathers, in order to “put himself together again” by the end of

the novel: “I tried to break my beak, but I could not. I stand before the building in my new flesh” (p. 622).

Angela Carter and China Miéville also share, concerning their character’s design and development, a very distinct postmodern trait as described by Linda Hutcheon, which is the focusing on what she named the *ex-centrics* (HUTCHEON, 1988, p. 179). Postmodernism, Hutcheon remarks, challenges the notion of centered self and centered representation. Carter turns Fevvers into a symbol of the roles she is imposed due to her unusual nature, and by doing that she explores and denaturalize the traditional gender roles. Fevvers is, at the same time, *Leda and the swan* incarnated, the Cupid, the Winged Victory, the angel in every men’s dream, but she refuses any easy way out and declines these comfortable offers, because she has another plan, a plan where she gets to choose it independently of her gender or feathers. Lorna Sage writes: “What Carter does is give Fevvers the mobility, particularity, weight, and humour of a character, and so give her back her gender” (SAGE, 2007, p. 48).

Linden Peach sees the novel as an “extended metaphor – the Winged Victory come to life – and both literally and metaphorically a flight of fancy” (PEACH, 1998, p. 134), however, at the same time, when Fevvers embodies the Winged Victory she – by definition – subverts her alter ego from the Greek myth – Leda – since in the myth (and all art that portrays it, including Yeats’ poem) Leda submits herself to the ‘embrace’ of the Swan (actually a shapeshifted Zeus, who thought that seducing women through zoophilia was somehow desirable). By the end of the novel, when Fevvers assumes a dominant position and is Walser that submits himself to her, she inverts these traditional roles – since “nature had equipped her only for the ‘woman on top’ position” (p. 292). Peach examines this contrast further:

As the embodiment of freedom the winged Fevvers stands in contrast to Walser. Among the clowns of the circus whom he joins in order to observe Fevvers, he becomes ‘a human chicken’ – a chicken being significantly a bird without flight. (PEACH, 1998, p.134)

Carter details the way Walser “crows”, “flaps his arms” and run around, truly embodying his newly acquired chicken skin (even if only an artificial one). In such manner, even his writing vanishes, as Peach points out “Walser loses the ability to write because his writing is dependent (...) upon his masculinised view of the world” (PEACH, 1998, p. 133). Of course this whole transformation is a symbolic one – indeed Walser suffers a ‘fall’, but unlike the fallen angels of romantic young adult chick-lit, where they usually choose to accept ‘falling’ in order to fulfill the dreams of some naïve damsel’s ideal romance on Earth, Walser ‘falls’ as his gender biased

conceptions are undermined by Fevvers. However, he will not be ‘grounded’ forever, as Fevvers utopia is rather distinct from being grounded with him – or with any man whatsoever. Even though being responsible for shattering Walser’s old-fashioned conceptions of womanhood, she also helps him to take flight again – but now it is she that will be on top and guide the takeoff.

In a similar way Miéville introduces Yagharek as a symbol, fashioned after a Hindu divinity that symbolizes impetuosity and strength, invoking our mercy for having lost its wings like a tragic Icarus from Greek mythology, he eludes readers expectations – as much as his friend Isaac’s – when it is revealed that he was punished for rape and is not searching redemption, but a way to undo its punishment. Yagharek is a figure that blends mythologies – Hindu, Greek – as much as Fevvers is – Greek, Christian – and they both end their journey being demythologized, a business that Miéville and Carter boldly share.

The main characters’ hybrid nature is also an interesting starting point to place them apart from the center – on the margins. However, there is a difference on how it is conducted, a difference that has the genre in its core. In *Fantasy Fiction: An Introduction*, Lucie Armitte establishes borders between genre fantasy and the literary fantastic. Drawing from Todorov’s views, she states that while genre fantasy “deals in enclosed worlds” and “implies complicity” from readers, the so called literary fantastic “deals in disruptive impulses” and “actively seeks out reader hesitancy” (ARMITTE, 2005, p. 7).

As most of Miéville fiction (the possible exception is *The city and the city*), *Perdido Street Station* is clearly fashioned as genre Fantasy, even if we consider all the Science Fiction and Horror elements that are mixed together. Even though being granted the Arthur C. Clarke Award, traditionally dedicated to Science Fiction, Farah Mendlesohn, in *The rhetorics of fantasy*, calls it a “fully immersive fantasy” (MENDLESOHN, 2008, p. 63). *Nights at the circus*, on the other hand, seems more inclined to the literary fantastic, as since the very beginning the reader shares Walser’s hesitancy, by the means of his skepticism while trying to discover if Fevvers is really a farce everyone is falling for. Later, this hesitancy is replaced by wonder, when the fantastic starts erupting – and then the novel tends to the magical realism, a point where many critics agree concerning Carter’s work, as Lorna Sage wrote:

The label ‘magical realist’ was freely applied to Carter throughout her career, and was one she was happy to accept (...) What her adoption of the magical realist mode essentially offers Carter is a way of engaging with the world outside the text in a critical way (GAMBLE, 2001, p. 74).

So, the hybridity in Fevvers manifests itself with more severity and is looked upon more uncomfortably, no surprise she is paraded in a freak show or ends up in a circus. In *Perdido*, Yagharek is just another hybrid in the fauna that inhabits New Crobuzon (he comes from Cymek, his native land in the desert, but there are even “urban Garudas” living in the city). Yagharek is a freak due to his crime; his acts brought him the consequence that turned him into the “landbound Garuda” or else his nature would be nothing more than “natural”, the normal and the standard for his people. Unlike Yagharek, what Fevvers is trying to remedy is not her condition, she is trying to create new roles other than the ones she is supposed to play. Yagharek is the essential role player, though – he tries to reclaim his role during most of the novel, until he realizes the impossibility and absurdity of the quest he is chasing.

However this interstitial situation in which Yagharek appears to be locked for most of the novel is one of the main subjects in *Perdido*. “Everything is always becoming something else in *Perdido Street Station*”, wrote Alexander C. Irvine in *The Cambridge companion to Fantasy Literature* (JAMES; MENDLESOHN, 2012, p. 208), and this motto touch all strata of the narrative: the gangster Motley, who commissions a statue of himself for the Khepri sculptress Lin, summarizes it: “Transition. The point where one thing becomes another. It is what it makes you, the city, the world, what they are. And that is the theme I’m interested in. The zone where the disparate becomes part of the one. The hybrid zone” (p. 37). Motley enumerates examples of the many races bearing a “mongrel physiognomy” (p. 38), including the insectlike Khepri, and when Motley reveals himself, his own body is a patchwork of disparately joined “pieces”, with eyes rolling “from obscure niches”, “antlers and protusions of bone”, “a cloven hoof”, alien tendons tethered to alien bones and where “Scales gleamed. Fins quivered. Wings fluttered brokenly. Insect claws folded and unfolded.” (p. 38) In New Crobuzon, this is called Remaking, usually a punishment for law violators where the government infringes these bio-modifications on convicts either to inscribe their punishments into their bodies or to force them to perform a specific task.

The concept of hybridity is an important matter in postcolonial studies, scholar Vijay Agnew claims that “Hybridity raises questions about voice, representation and perspective” (AGNEW, 2008, p. 13). He is not referring to Science Fiction or Fantasy, naturally, however the same concept that works for postcolonial subjects may be applied to the literal hybridity of Fantasy fiction, the figurative taken literally as aforementioned.

Stuart Hall also delved into questions of alterity and identity in a context far from genre fiction, however it is clearly possible to find points of contact between his social and cultural investigation and the imaginative literature of writers the like of Carter and Miéville. Hall wrote, on the discourse of identities:

It gives us sense of depth, out there, and in there. It is spatially organized. Much of our discourse of the inside and the outside, of the self and the other, of the individual and society, of the subject and the other, are grounded in that particular logic of identity. And it help us, I would say, to sleep well at night. (HALL, 1997, p. 43)

Definitely, neither Carter nor Miéville are interested in helping us sleep well at night. Hall is describing here a stable old logic of the Cartesian subject, a concept that has been demolished and is considered as extinct as the dodo bird – or as having always been as fictional as the unicorns and dragons of fantasy imagination. Hall concludes: “That logic of identity is, for good or ill, finished. (...) It’s at an end in the first instance because of some of the great de-centerings of modern thought” (p. 43).

All these questions are present in both *Perdido* and *Nights at the circus*, in different strata of each novel but specially in Fevvers and Yagharek’s journeys. The way both authors make use of hybridity may be very different – Miéville embodies it in his scenario and makes it rather the rule more than the exception, while Carter makes literal hybridity stands out through Fevvers, subtly not excluding herself from pinpointing figurative hybridity through other characters and situations. However different their way of writing hybridity may appear (which also may differs a lot from most postcolonial writers Agnew was probably alluding to), they both hit the same goal, which are the questions they raise and the expectances subverted.

Another factor that contributes in both novels to lend weight to the characters’ situation and resolution is the scenario where each narrative is conducted. *Nights at the circus*, echoing the traditional magical realist novel, takes place in our world (or a version of it), where the fantastic aspect is heavily counterbalanced by the underlying political questions faced by the characters, which were inherent to that time and place and which are still being discussed today. Lorna Sage pointedly remarks that

Its plot takes us to the very edge of history, to peer over into a culture not yet colonized by our time-scheme, ‘in that final little breathing-space before history *as such* extended its tentacles to grasp the entire globe’ (NC 265). Now you see it, now you don’t: there is no timelessness left, and that is at once a grievous loss, and a reminder (...) that *everything* is in history now, the thing to do is to add in the outlaws and the ex-gods and the animals and the symbols and the freaks and the fools we edit out from the real, by which means we sustain an imaginary lying kingdom of changelessness. (SAGE, 2007, p. 49)

In the eve of a new century, the narrative spreads itself from London towards Saint Petersburg and beyond Siberia. From the so called ‘civilization’ where the pretense of history is generated to the wilderness of Siberia where a female utopian community rose from the ashes of Countess P’s asylum, timelessness, as Sage puts it, is no longer possible once everything – even the nasty undesired little things – have been committed to history. Thus, the “imaginary kingdom of changelessness” ruins, as, not unlike overall status in New Crobuzon, a continual state of quasi crisis becomes the norm and is the consequence of a continual process of self questioning.

It is interesting how Carter’s proposal of leveling the “imaginary kingdom of changelessness” fits in the New Weird manifesto that *Perdido Street Station* influenced so much. The subgenre defines itself as intending to “subvert the romanticized ideas of place found in traditional fantasy” and claims to be “acutely aware of the modern world” (VANDERMEER; VANDERMEER, 2008, p. xvi). As such, *Perdido* is heavily oriented to establish change as a viable alternative. It rebels against the Fantasy tradition that used to preach the opposite, that used to be, as Miéville called *The lord of the rings*, “a conservative hymn to order and reason - to the status quo”, in his essay “Tolkien: Middle Earth meets Middle England” (MIÉVILLE, 2002, <http://www.socialistreview.org.uk/article.php?articlenumber=7813>). Irvine remarks how there is no mention of a Old Crobuzon or a Crobuzon – there is only New Crobuzon, what have happened before in that space “survives only as monuments empty of meaning”, much like this backward Fantasy tradition the New Weird seeks to undermine (JAMES; MENDLESOHN, 2012, p. 210).

From the social aspects of the political revolution that is being plotted by the intellectual class (personified by Derkhan, editor of the subversive magazine *Runagate Rampant*) and underlying many aspects of the novel, it reaches its apotheosis in Yagharek’s ultimate transformation:

it is guilty, mutilated, despised and heroic Yagharek alone who transforms himself to become a true citizen of New Crobuzon. The city is a place where all things are contingent (...) Yagharek, himself Remade, is fitted to New Crobuzon not just by his sin but by his twinned ambition to atone (...) and to assume responsibility for his own forgiveness (...). New Crobuzon is where these people go who still believe they can transform themselves; New Crobuzon is where those people leave when belief in transformation is broken. (JAMES; MENDLESOHN, 2012, p. 209-210).

A painful atonement such like Yagharek’s or even a mockingly radical reinvention such as Fevver’s is absent in traditional Fantasy. As Michael Moorcock, comparing *The lord of the rings* to *Winnie-the-Pooh* (1926) in his humorously insightful essay ‘Epic Pooh’, first published in 1970, writes: “the sort of prose most often identified with “high” fantasy is the prose of the nursery-room. It is a lullaby, it is meant to soothe and console. (...) It coddles, it makes friends

with you (...) It is soft” (MOORCOCK: 2004, p. 124). Adam Roberts adds to this assertion when writing, in a review of Patrick Rothfuss’ best selling Fantasy epic *The name of the wind* (2007), that “Cosiness is a good quality in sweaters. It is not a merit in books.” (ROBERTS, 2007, http://www.strangehorizons.com/reviews/2007/07/the_name_of_the.shtml). To steer away from this kind of mentality on Fantasy is Miéville’s (and his fellow New *Weirdists*) agenda, and it for sure echoes Carter’s thought on what speculative fiction is (or should be), as she answered a 1994 interview:

Speculative fiction really means that, the fiction of speculation, the fiction of asking "what if?" It's a system of continuing inquiry. (...) If you were half way good at writing fiction, you'd end up asking yourself and asking the reader actually much more complicated questions about what we expect from human relationships and what we expect from gender. (KATSAVOS, 1994, <http://www.dalkeyarchive.com/book/?fa=customcontent&GCOI=15647100621780&extrasfile=A09F7835-B0D0-B086-B6050CC6F168CDAE.html>)

So, Fevvers and Yagharek are both bound to change and reinvent themselves, if the first will fashion the new woman of the 20th century, the second turns into the citizen of a post-human, post-capitalist, post-history and ever on the brink of chaos reality. They leave behind an old world of prejudices and custom to embrace identities that fit in the world they shall live for now on. In an assertion not intended to make reference to genre fiction, but that fits our character’s dilemmas nonetheless, Stuart Hall mentions the fragmentation of the modern individual as an inevitable process, which thus configures itself into a real “crisis” that, as such, must be addressed in a broader context:

This so-called “crisis of identity” is seen as part of a wider process of change which is dislocating the central structures and processes of modern societies and undermining the frameworks which gave individuals stable anchorage in the social world (HALL, 2007, p. 596).

The resolution of this crisis state is, of course, a utopian one, as the state of crisis – much like Isaac’s research – is its natural condition, anchorage is no longer a viable possibility. Utopia is in the menu for Carter in *Nights at the circus*, as Lizzie clearly states that “it’s not the human soul that must be forged in the anvil of history, but the anvil itself must be changed” (p. 240). And that’s mostly what Fevvers is aiming to do concerning her “identity crisis”, as Linden Peach notes that “Fevvers carefully evades all attempts by Walser to try to fix her identity and, in doing so, she not only challenges male definitions of woman but, as Michael (1994) argues, notions of truth and reality (p. 497)” (PEACH, 1998, p. 133).

When *Perdido*, as aforementioned, points its steam powered cannons against the Fantasy traditions (or, in special, against the “Tolkienists”, as Miéville once named them), he ends,

perhaps not entirely conscious, using a widespread postmodern device as ammunition, the parody, also one of the weapons of choice in Angela Carter's arsenal. Linda Hutcheon enumerates some parodic echoes in *Nights at the circus*:

The novel's parodic echoes of *Pericles*, *Hamlet*, and *Gulliver's Travels* all function as do those of Yeats' poetry [*Leda and the Swam*] when describing a whorehouse full of bizarre women as this 'lumber room of femininity, this rag-and-bone shop of the heart' (69): they are all ironic feminizations of traditional or canonic male representations of the so-called generic human – 'Man'. This is the kind of politics of representation that parody calls to our attention. (HUTCHEON, 1989, p. 98).

Fevvers' own representation is in itself a parody of patriarchal representations of women, which is endorsed by many characters during the narrative – like the mad scientist Rosencreutz, who wants to "drain" her femininity – until it is denaturalized. The whole Bas Lag world (where *Perdido* takes place) is a parody of traditional Fantasy settings, in itself it is the Tolkienist nightmare – Sauron had won and this Sauron is the personification of a different essence of "Evil", an ultra capitalist industrialist multinational corporation. In these sense even "Evil" is deconstructed and recontextualized with a contemporary political twist. Bas Lag, following a very popular trend in Fantasy worldbuilding, displays several humanoid races, which are based on Asian and African mythology (Hindu garuda, Egyptian khepri, Russian vodyanoi), unlike the elves, dwarves, goblins and trolls of European folklore, so dear to Tolkien and his legion of copycats. "Postmodern parody is both deconstructively critical and constructively creative, paradoxically making us aware of both the limits and the powers of representation – in any medium" (HUTCHEON, 1989, p. 98), writes Linda Hutcheon. China Miéville is profoundly aware of the genres in which he dabbles, so his *modus operandi* can be considered in consonance with Hutcheon's motto of install to subvert as one of postmodernism essentials, "parody is doubly coded in political terms: it both legitimizes and subverts that which it parodies" (HUTCHEON, 1989, p. 101).

It is an interesting curiosity to note that Carter's *Passion of new Eve* (1977) and *Blood chamber* (1979) had been published by a traditional Fantasy publisher in UK, Gollancz (nowadays a label of Orion Books), responsible for publishing popular genre authors like George R. R. Martin and Patrick Rothfuss, in the Fantasy field, Alastair Reynolds and Adam Roberts, in Science Fiction, and the popular vampire novels from Charlaine Harris.

In another instance, Angela Carter and China Miéville both colour their texts with realist-like tinges, as in Miéville's description of New Crobuzon that opens *Perdido*,

The city reeked. But today was market day down in Aspic Hole, and the pungent slick of dung-smell and rot tha rolled over New Crobuzon was, in these streets, for these hours, improved with paprika and fresh tomato, hot oil and fish and cinnamon, cured meat, banana and onion. (p. 7)

or in Carter's detailed rendering of Fevver's room in the theatre she had just performed, not by chance seen through the analytical eyes of Walser, still the young skeptical journalist,

A large pair of frilly drawers, evidently fallen where they had light-heartedly been tossed, draped some object, clock or marble bust or funerary urn, anything was possible since it was obscured completely. A redoubtable corset of the kind called an Iron Maiden poked out of the empty coalscuttle (...) The room, in all, was a mistresspiece of exquisitely feminine squalor, sufficient, in its homely way to intimidate a young man who had led a less sheltered life than this one. (p. 9)

Linda Hutcheon also wrote about how postmodern ironic parody is able to use "the conventions of realism against themselves in order to foreground the complexity of representation and its implied politics" (HUTHEON, 1989, p. 99), a trend that is found along both narratives and also resonates with Adam Roberts claim on Science Fiction and realism: "the attention to detail and the density of the described reality in many SF texts mean that, very often, they read like realist novels: or perhaps a better phrase would be pseudo-realist" (ROBERTS, 2002, p. 18). There is this kind of pseudo-realism at work in both novels, functioning as a red herring for the reader's perception while enhancing the text's parodic qualities.

Besides being symbols and embodying parodic traits, Yagharek and Fevvers are also central to another postmodern narrative strategy which is the blurring of genres. Not only the New Weird, but most of the best Fantasy and Science Fiction, shows some affinity with genre blurring, along with ruining the supposed polarization between high/low art. *Nights at the circus* has been called a carnivalesque novel by many critics and, and it goes beyond the obvious reference – most of it take places in a circus and most of the characters are artists. Critic Paulina Palmer wrote: "to cite the Russian critic Mikhail Bakhtin, a medley of 'paradoxically reconstructed quotation'. This medley unites the serious art and the comic, the high and the low. It subverts any single, unified utterance, in typical carnivalistic manner" (PALMER, 1987, p. 197). Also quoting Palmer essay's Sarah Gamble remarks that the "carnivalistic (...) is not a particular kind of genre but a 'flexible form of artistic vision'" (GAMBLE, 2001, p. 140). The treatment served by the means of a carnivalistic perspective is in consonance with the deconstructional urge, in terms of genre conventions, social structures, male-dominated

institutions and myth, that works in a similar manner in both narratives. And this urge has its core in the nature of these two winged characters and the metaphors they embody and literalize.

Another generic mode associated with Fevvers' journey comes from the eighteenth century, the picaresque, which was purposely used by Carter, a fictional device where, in her words, "people have adventures in order to find themselves in places where they can discuss philosophical concepts without distractions" (GAMBLE, 2001, p. 143). Aidan Day claims that the picaresque in the novel

is not invoked to be parodied or to be relativised as a narrative device. It is invoked straight, as it were, because Carter is using the device to explore issues and to say something about those issues in a way that she herself believes it. (GAMBLE, 2001, p. 143-144)

Although it may be stretching it too far calling *Perdido Street Station* picaresque, it shares some similarities with this device used by Carter, at least in the way both authors use it, especially in the episodic nature of both novels. The picaresque absence of a 'higher' plot divides the narrative in episodes, as if the journey of the pícaro has to be comprised of different adventures. Unlike in *Nights at the circus*, Miéville has a higher plot at work (a group of heroes trying to save their city from brain-washing creatures) and a myriad of side plots (including Yagharek's dilemma), but the way it is engendered is through adventures, in an almost episodic way, much like Carter's novel. Miéville inspiration, however, has a more modern source than the eighteenth century narrative mode Carter chose. He seems to have structured his novel as if in a Role Playing Game, a sequence of adventures, with a party of 'adventurers', that changes while characters get killed or join the group (although the core remains the same to the end, Isaac, Derkhan and Yagharek). Miéville may have done it on purpose, as he has already admitted being a RPG fan and former Dungeons & Dragons player. Interestingly, a 2007 issue of *The Dragon Magazine* – the Dungeons & Dragons official publication – featured a forty page article adapting the scenario of *Perdido Street Station* for D&D game rules, including a detailed map of the world of Bas-Lag that had never even been published in the novels.

All in all, both novels' structures were not naively chosen, of course. The torrent of adventures characters in both novels experience is a way to make them develop and "grow" – unlike in a traditional picaresque novel, but curiously much more similar to what happens in a Dungeons & Dragons game campaign, where each 'adventure' is worth 'experience' for your character, in order to 'level up'. This development sets the scenario so both authors can discuss the themes they believe, but maintaining an entertainment façade. As a matter of fact, regardless

of the many layers both authors intend to assemble, they also value the entertainment factor above all. Carter once remarked that “From *The magic toyshop* [1981] onwards I’ve tried to keep an entertainment surface to the novels, so that you don’t have to read them as a system of signification if you don’t want to.” (GAMBLE, 2001, p. 138) and Miéville similarly declared, in an 2005 interview for *The Believer* magazine:

When I write my novels, I’m not writing them to make political points. I’m writing them because I passionately love monsters [...]. But, because I come at this with a political perspective, the world that I’m creating is embedded with many of the concerns that I have. But I never let them get in the way of the monsters.

(ANDERS, 2005, http://www.believermag.com/issues/200504/?read=interview_mieville)

Monsters aside, both novels have their political anchors, represented by two strong women with radical political opinions, Lizzie and Derkhan. According to Fevvers, Lizzie would never make a good prostitute in Ma Nelson house (where they first met) because of

her habit of lecturing the clients on the white slave trade, the rights and wrongs of women, universal suffrage, as well as the Irish question, the Indian question, republicanism, anti-clericalism, syndicalism and the abolition of the House of Lords. (p. 292)

Lizzie is the character Carter uses to ground Fevvers’ tale in historical context, making the novel, according to Aidan Day, a “fantasy whose symbolic meaning can be recovered in rational historical terms” (GAMBLE, 2001, p. 147).

On the other hand, in *Perdido*, Derkhan Blue day is an art critic that secretly also writes for the *Runagate Rampant*, an “illegal, radical, news-sheet” (p. 71). Although *Perdido* is a secondary world fantasy (meaning it does not takes place in ‘our’ world, as we know it), she plays a similar role as Fevvers’ Lizzie, providing a political background for the novel. According to Lin, Isaac “channeled his diffuse, undirected, pointed social discontent into his discussions with Derkhan” (p. 71), and we can follow how Derkhan helps Isaac do it. However, this could be framed as one of the novel’s side plots as it is not a central point as Lizzie and Fevver’s relation is.

In the beginning of the novel, Derkhan is writing an article on the Remade, criminals whose punishment is to have their bodies altered in a way it suits their crime or in a way they can repay their debt to society, the body made ‘abnormal’ by the institutions of power is a frequent theme in the three novels that take place in Bas Lag (in the third installment, *Iron Council* (2004), it becomes the central theme as the Remade fashion something similar to an organized revolution). The grotesque body has always been a site of resistance, as Mary Russo claims,

The classical body is transcendent and monumental, closed, static, self-contained, symmetrical, and sleek; it is identified with the “high” or official culture of the Renaissance and later with the

rationalism, individualism, and normalizing aspirations of the bourgeoisie. The grotesque body is open, protruding, irregular, secreting, multiple, and changing; it is identified with non-official “low” culture or the carnivalesque, and with social transformation. (RUSSO, 1994, p.8)

Russo also remarks that Fevvers joins the female grotesque to the aerial sublime in her circus act, her negotiating of the role she plays as artist and woman grants her a “supernatural identity” that transcends both, due to the suspension of disbelief made possible through her performance (GAMBLE, 2001, p. 151). The grotesque in the *Bas Lag* novels has a clear function for Miéville and it works similarly. Not only in Yagharek’s alienation and dilemma or in the socially created bodies of the Remade, New Crobuzon, as a city, exhales the same ‘otherness’. In an interview for the *Gothic Studies* journal, Miéville said: “Allow yourself the ‘sense of wonder’ (...) I think we might need to rehabilitate that notion and the surrender it implies, thinking about it in terms of the Sublime, of alterity and alienation” and then he concludes, drawing some inspiration from the famous Francisco Goya lithograph, that “that kind of wonder at otherness might even constitute an internal rebuke to a certain triumphalist vulgar (capitalist) ‘Enlightenment’ – *The Dream of Reason*, after all, brings forth monsters” (MIÉVILLE, 2008, p.67-68).

And these monsters, besides their obvious pointed teeth, claws, scaled skin and the like, serve a different purpose other than menace our heroes and scare readers as the traditional pulp creatures. They embody this alterity in ways only *Speculative Literature* is able to do, and, even when it is not done consciously, it hits a soft spot the contemporary world seldom acknowledges. If, as Miéville claimed, the *Dream of Reason* brought us monsters, it is not our place to slay them, but – as literature from the likes of Carter and Miéville has already shown us – to accept or, faithful to what the *New Weird* preaches, to surrender to them. Certainly we could still have things to learn from these winged creatures, insect like monsters and weird fauna that instill inhabits those corners of ancient maps, those uncharted territories marked by a cautionary “Here Be Dragons”.

2 FICTIONAL, FANTASTIC AND SURREALIST SCIENCE AS GENRE AND SCIENTISTS GO MAD IN WORKS OF ANGELA CARTER'S *THE INFERNAL DESIRE MACHINES OF DOCTOR HOFFMAN* AND CHINA MIÉVILLE'S *PERDIDO STREET STATION*

Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic.
Arthur C. Clarke's Third Law

If you want to do evil, science provides the most powerful weapons to do evil; but equally, if you want to do good, science puts into your hands the most powerful tools to do so. The trick is to want the right things, then science will provide you with the most effective methods of achieving them.
Richard Dawkins (The Richard Dimbleby Lecture: Science, Delusion and the Appetite for Wonder, 1996)

Writers, you see, daily inflict the most dreadful suffering upon the characters they create, and science fiction writers are worse than any other sort in this respect. A realist writer might break his protagonist's leg, or kill his fiancée; but a science fiction writer will immolate whole planets, and whilst doing so he will be more concerned with the placement of commas than with the screams of the dying.
Adam Roberts (*Yellow Blue Tibia*, 2009)

"You destroyed three-quarters of a solar system!"
"Five-sixths, but it's not an exact science."
"Rodney, can you give your ego a rest for one second?!"
Doctor Weir to Doctor Mckay (Stargate Atlantis, Season 2, 2005)

From Hollywood flicks to pulp novels, pop culture has always expressed its fascination with scientists. The stereotypes are well-known, when a scientist is not interested in world domination, let's say, trying to burn countries with a death ray or something equally dramatic, he or she may be presented as a socially awkward science-obsessed type fulfilling a minor – but essential – plot role to help our heroes win the day.

In *The Cambridge companion to Science Fiction*, author and critic Gwyneth Jones acknowledges this common trend: “it is true that SF relies, like the other popular fiction genres, on a set of stock figures, recognizable and emblematic as the characters of pantomime or the *Commedia dell’Arte*” (JAMES; MENDLESOHN, 2003, p. 171). She, however, also recognizes that SF is also able to consciously subvert these same tropes: “the ‘mad scientist’ is not a bogeyman or a cartoon figure. He may be satisfying as a fictional character, but he also represents an idea, a discussion about the nature of responsibility, a topic for debate.” (JAMES; MENDLESOHN, 2003, p. 172). When dealing with scientists, science and Science Fiction genre in the works of Angela Carter and China Miéville, we can fully identify how Jones’ remark perfectly suits characters as complex as Dr. Hoffman and Isaac Dan Der Grimnebullin.

On the world domination corner, Angela Carter presents us with Dr. Hoffman, from *The infernal desire machines of Dr. Hoffman* (1972). However, she replaces the proverbial death ray with a very unusual kind of weapon, a metaphysic twist reveals the “real” world as “malleable clay” whose purpose is only to “exist as a medium in which we execute our desires” (CARTER, 2010, p. 34)³. And fashioned as one of the best villains in the Science Fiction (SF) genre, Hoffman believes he is truly aiming for the best, his goal is to achieve “absolute authority to establish a regime of total liberation” (p. 36), liberation of senses, of labels, of desires. In most matters, Hoffman is the typical deranged scientist from pulp paperbacks, from the army of henchmen and the Teutonic heritage, to the seductive daughter and the castle where he keeps the embalmed corpse of his dead wife.

On the opposite corner, our contestant is Isaac Dan der Grimnbullin, from China Miéville’s *Perdido Street Station* (2000). Isaac does not want to take over the world, he just wants to prove a point, namely to find evidence that would confirm his own pet theory – a theory so improbable that got him expelled from the university and shamed him in all academic circles. His own “Moving Unified Field Theory” is designed to supposedly “taking things to the point of crisis” (MIÉVILLE, 2003, p. 147)⁴ and trying to manipulate the potential energy that turns into “crisis”. He sincerely believes that, if able to do that, he would be dealing with “forces and energy that could *totally* change... everything” (p. 148) – much like the “malleable clay” of

³ All subsequent quotations from *The infernal desire machines of Doctor Hoffman* are going to be indicated by page numbers only.

⁴ All subsequent quotations from *Perdido Street Station* are going to be indicated by page numbers only.

reality as perceived by Dr. Hoffman. Isaac is not the world domination type of guy, he is, however, a scientist that does not fit the professor-in-a-lab-coat role, and, along with the obsession with the research he is undertaking, he is considered a rather eccentric type.

John Clute and Peter Nicholls, authors of *The encyclopedia of science fiction*, added an entry on “Imaginary Sciences”, foregrounding them as an important trope of the SF genre. Enumerating well-known recurring examples – like antigravity, faster-than-light drives or time travel – and specific ‘canonical’ fictional lore – like Isaac Asimov’s Psychohistory and Positronics and Ursula K. Le Guin’s Therolinguistics – they wrote that “the game – it is indeed a game – is to produce as plausible a rationalization for the impossible as the author’s artistry will allow” and concludes “their aim was simply to rationalize the surrealist central images of their story” (CLUTE; NICHOLLS, 1994, p. 614).

Consonant to the considerations of Clute and Nicholls about imaginary sciences in SF, Sarah Gamble writes, on the rationalization of Carter’s imagery in *Hoffman*, that the “dissolving of boundaries between the synthetic and the authentic aligns Hoffman’s world-view with postmodern ideas about representations and reality” (GAMBLE, 2001, p. 75). The critic also states that underlying Hoffman’s pulp villain façade there is a legit postmodern attempt to distrust and defy the master narratives, as proposed by Lyotard. Sarah Gamble writes: “Such master narratives as time, truth, identity and historical causation are systematically, deliberately, mangled in *Hoffman*, and although the ending sees them restored, it is not to their former state” (GAMBLE, 2001, p. 73).

In terms of imaginary sciences, Miéville is particularly interested in creating fictional disciplines – which often mix science, folklore, myth and wild speculation – in order to compose a sturdier background for his worldbuilding. So, we find Dopplurbanology (*The city and the city*, 2009); Krakenlore, Mnemophylaxy and Londonmancing (*Kraken*, 2010), Exoterre Linguistics and Accelerated Contact Linguistics (*Embassytown*, 2011) or iron-rail theology and ferroviology (*Railsea*, 2012). The way Miéville uses academic jargon to create neologisms is also a manner – akin to Carter’s theorization – of defying master narratives by composing alternate disciplines, with all the sound and formal demeanor of accepted academic knowledge. In *Perdido Street Station*, there are Bio-Thaumaturgy, Chymistry, Xentropology, Moving Unified Field Theory, among others. Interestingly, while characterizing postmodern representation, Linda Hutcheon explains writers adopting such practice: “an overtly theoretical component has become a notable

aspect of postmodern art, (...) The postmodern artist is no longer the inarticulate, silent, alienated creator of the romantic/modern tradition” (HUTCHEON, 1989, p. 19). Therefore, referring back to Lyotard’s *grands récits*, both writers employ these aspects, emphasizing concepts of postmodern art, in special its propensity towards encouraging “the discrediting of grand narratives and the retextualization of history and reality so that overarching metanarratives, or *grand récits*, become replaced by micronarratives and multiple narratives”, an inclination found in Fantasy literature, as recognized by Jim Casey (JAMES; MENDLESOHN, 2012, p. 117).

Both Carter and Miéville seem more interested in the poetics of science jargon than in strictly following the rules for leading, as SF writer Gary Gibson names it, “an imaginative journey *through a lens of plausibility*” [emphasis as in the original] (BROOKE, 2012, p. 9) that would put them together in Hard Science Fiction shelves. Both of them have professed their admiration for authors of the New Wave of British SF from the 1960s, a generation “who focused much more on literary experimentation, characterization and exploration of different states of mind” (BROOKE, 2012, p. 5).

When scholar and SF writer Adam Roberts compares SF to realist novels, stating that

The attention to detail and the density of the described reality in many SF texts mean that, very often, they read like realist novels; or perhaps a better phrase would be pseudo-realist. But the crucial point is that science fiction *reconfigures symbolism for our materialist age*. [emphasis as in the original] (ROBERTS, 2002, p.18)

he is, in fact, describing an approach to Speculative Fiction that may be richly applied to Carter’s and Miéville’s take on SF. The way the city of New Crobuzon is described in *Perdido* is reminiscent of a Dickensian London-like metropolis, and Miéville strives to detail the political and economical structures that keeps the city functioning. Desiderio’s, the main character in *Hoffman*, undertakes a quest that is enriched by the diverse cast of character he meets – from river Indians to a circus – and Carter’s attention to fleshing out these supporting actors, even as she describes the social underpinnings of a society of centaurs, reads much like a realist – or pseudo-realist – approach.

In his influent *Critical Theory and Science Fiction* (2000), Marxist critic Carl Freedman identifies an obligatory and inherent exchange between what we usually name realism and SF:

[T]here is probably no text that is a perfect and pure embodiment of science fiction (no text [...] in which science fiction is the *only* generic tendency operative) but also no text in which the science fiction tendency is altogether absent. Indeed, it might be argued that this tendency is the precondition for the constitution of fictionality – and even representation – itself. For the constitution of an alternative world is the very definition of fiction: owing to the character of representation as a nontransparent process that necessarily involves not only similarity but *difference* between representation and the “referent” of the latter, an irreducible degree of alterity

and estrangement bound to obtain even in the case of most “realistic” fiction imaginable. (FREEDMAN, 2000, p. 20-21)

When arguing on how Fantasy would articulate realist representation, theorist Farah Mendlesohn also observed similar points of contact in both genres, usually regarded with almost manichaeistic opposition:

Mimesis is the art of persuading the reader to forget the mediation of language. Irony of mimesis does not necessarily mean that we are assumed to be *in* the world (although this is one technique), but that we must share the assumptions of the world as much as a contemporary reader of Jane Austen shared the assumptions she presented in *Pride and Prejudice*. (MENDLESOHN, 2008, p.59)

Naturally, this is the basic principle of reading any fiction whatsoever. However, the Fantasy (or Speculative, for use of a broader designation) writer deals with a whole “secondary world” – a term coined by J. R. R. Tolkien in his seminal essay “On Fairy Tales” (1939) that “can be defined as an autonomous world or venue which is not bound to mundane reality [...], which is impossible according to common sense and which is self coherent as a venue for the story (CLUTE; GRANT, 1999, p. 847)” – and as such he or she must tread in a rougher terrain in order to present the reader with a fantastic outcome disguised in its outer ‘shell’ as a fully concrete and believable scenario. Thus, mastering the realist techniques is the best way to convey this sensation and as such render the Regency England of Jane Austen as believable as the decadent, baroque steamlit nightmare of New Crobuzon.

Jim Casey also spots this relation between realism and fantasy, as fantasy rejects realist limitations but does not show restrictions in employing its said tropes, displaying, as a matter of fact, a real postmodern trend towards installing and subversion (JAMES; MENDLESOHN, 2012, p. 115). He also identifies more postmodernist tendencies in relation to Fantasy’s approach on modernism, as “fantastic works may feature modernist techniques such as stream of consciousness, parallax (different narrative points of view) or metafictional experimentation, but they rarely embrace modernism’s avid rejection of tradition”. As a genre built around myth and fairy tale influences, this assertion sounds natural. And then, therefore, Casey concludes:

Modernism has been described as elitist; modernist novels often reject intelligible plots and modern poetry can be surreal or incomprehensible. Fantasy (even recent fantasy) often bears an affinity to the symbolic, hierarchical and formally conjunctive bases of modernism, but fantasy has almost always been considered popular literature, a “low” art form concerned with play and desire. In this way, fantasy is itself postmodern. [...] fantasy, by its very nature, challenges the dominant political and conceptual ideologies in a manner similar to that of postmodernism. (JAMES; MENDLESOHN, 2012, p. 115).

It is interesting to consider the definition of Genre Science Fiction according to the *Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* by John Clute and Peter Nicholls. They state that “by this term [Genre SF] (...) we mean sf that is either labeled science fiction or instantly recognized by its readership as belonging to that category – or (usually) both” (CLUTE; NICHOLLS, 1993, p. 483). If we assume this definition literally, neither novel would be considered Genre SF at first glance. The fantasy elements mingled with science fiction would already be enough to confuse the target readership. Naturally this is precisely the idea behind the New Weird label, to subvert genre reader’s expectations, which is fully attained in *Perdido* and also it is Carter’s goal as writer, independently of genre, which is also achieved in *Hoffman*. Also, when the *Encyclopedia* follows on further details about Genre SF, it asserts that “any author of genre sf is conscious of working within a genre with certain habits of thought, certain “conventions” – some might even say “rules” – of storytelling” (CLUTE; NICHOLLS, p. 1993, p. 438). Writer Samuel R. Delany coined the term ‘protocols’ in order to refer to those conventions that make up the canon. Clue and Nicholls comments on writers disregarding said protocols:

works of fiction which use sf themes in seeming ignorance or contempt of the protocols – often works of so called mainstream writers of sf – frequently go unread by those immersed in the genre sf; and, if they are read, tend to be treated as invasive and alien... and incompetent. (CLUTE; NICHOLLS, p. 1993, p.438)

Angela Carter is considered a mainstream writer, but her mastery of the SF protocols as devised by Delany was enough to earn her a following within the genre walls, even surpassing this possessive mentality with which the genre ‘gang’ regards their science fiction. But also Carter would not go on “without adopting either the protection or the stigma of a genre label” (CLUTE; NICHOLLS, p. 1993, p. 768) as it happens with many mainstream writers that tackles on SF (and which is a source of resentment by the genre community), she would frequently use the term Speculative Fiction, also known as the ultimate ‘umbrella term’ that encompass all imaginative genres without any prejudice. And, for Carter’s fiction, it fulfills the role recognized by Gary K. Wolfe in his *Critical Terms for Science Fiction and Fantasy* (1986), once it is “useful precisely *because* it allows the blurring of boundaries, which in turn permits a greater auctorial freedom from genre constrains and ‘rules’” (CLUTE; NICHOLLS, 1993, p. 1145), a place wherein Carter would be very comfortable to be shelved.

Carter was also constant referred as a magical realist, a label that would not fit *Hoffman* easily. Farah Mendlesohn wrote “These [magical realist novels] are set in a much clearer

facsimile of the “real” world. They are not meant to act as genre texts” (MENDLESOHN, 2008, p. 107). Although Carter builds her narrative in a somewhat vague version of our world – in a unspecified Latin American country, maybe even as a tribute to its magical realist counterparts -, her facsimile is so faded that it lacks the concrete roots of such novels like Gabriel Garcia Marquez’s *One hundred years of solitude* (1967) or Isabel Allende’s *House of spirits* (1982). Another remark by Mendlesohn emphasizes even more the distance between *Hoffman* and the magical realism, when she states that “magical realism is written precisely without irony; it is written with the sense of a fading belief” (MENDLESOHN, 2008, p. 110). This is exactly what Carter’s novel is not about, as Hoffman’s machines materializes desires and beliefs and set them running wild across reality. There is no gradual “fading” sense in Hoffman, but a series of abrupt clashes and difficult resolutions.

Miéville also firmly sets his feet within genre, although he often describes himself as writing “Weird Fiction”, which is probably his personal umbrella term, as his fiction following *Perdido Street Station* displays characteristics of many genres alike.

Such a multi-genred offspring may be the creature resulting of this genre experience. However, far from Frankenstein’s monster, our creature is not a set of bits and pieces stitched together to shape an unwanted misfit. The stitches combining all these sawed off limbs are not entirely clear, as editor and critic Gary K. Wolfe noted in his *Evaporating genres: essays on fantastic literature* (2011):

‘Fantasy is evaporating. I don’t mean that it is disappearing altogether – quite the opposite – but it’s growing more diffuse, leaching out into the air around it, imparting a strange smell to the literary atmosphere, probably even getting into our clothes’ [...] the borders were growing more diffuse, not only among genres themselves but between the whole notion of genre fiction and literary fiction. (WOLFE, 2011, p. viii)

Regarding the different definitions for Science Fiction – and excluding for a moment those based on readership and market labels as quoted from the *Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* or those easy ways out such as “it is what we point when we see it” (a statement once claimed by SF writer Damon Knight (ROBERTS, 2002, p. 6)) – it is also important to mention theorist Darko Suvin’s work in the SF field, with his seminal *Metamorphosis of Science Fiction* (1979), a particularly influent study, especially in the Marxist tradition. Critic Adam Roberts summed up Suvin’s concept of the *novum*:

It seems that this ‘point of difference’, the thing or things that differentiate the world portrayed in science fiction from the world we recognize around us, is the crucial separator between science fiction and other forms of imaginative or fantastic literature. The critic Darko Suvin has usefully

coined the term ‘novum’, the Latin for ‘new’ or ‘new thing’, to refer to this point of difference’ (the plural is ‘nova’). (ROBERTS, 2002, p. 6)

Roberts then explains this idea. A SF text should be thoroughly construed around a novum, such as H. G. Wells’ *The time machine* (1895) or Terry Pratchett’s and Stephen Baxter’s dimension hopping device from *The long Earth* (2012). Usually the SF narrative will be grounded around a number of interrelated nova – as the traditional SF TV series and all their futuristic gadgets. Roberts stresses that “this ‘novum’ must not be supernatural, but need not necessarily be a piece of technology” (p. 7). It could be the different model of genre from Ursula K. Le Guin’s *The left hand of darkness* (1969). “These nova are grounded in a discourse of possibility, which is usually science or technology, and which renders the difference a *material* rather than just a conceptual or imaginative one” (p. 7), Roberts explains, pointing out Kafka’s *Metamorphosis* (1915) inexplicable premise as unsuitable of fitting in this definition.

Supported by this concept, Suvin composed the following definition for SF: “a literary genre whose necessary and sufficient conditions are presence and interaction of estrangement and cognition and whose main formal device is an imaginative framework alternative to the author’s empirical environment” (SUVIN, 1979, p. 8-9). The said “main formal device” is the novum or nova. The term ‘estrangement’, as Adam Roberts remarks, is more usually rendered in English-language criticism as ‘alienation’, “it refers to that element of SF that we recognize as different, that ‘estranges’ us from the familiar and everyday”, while cognition “refers to that aspect of SF that prompts us to try to and understand, to comprehend the alien landscape of a given SF book, film or story” (ROBERTS, 2002, p. 8).

However, Suvin emphasizes that the cognitive aspect should reflect the “constraints of science” (p. 8), which, as Roberts rebukes, would set a restriction that excludes most of what we know as Science Fiction, even Hard SF, as there are many popular genre tropes that science already dismissed as literally impossible: faster-than-light travel, for instance, a recurrent element in many celebrated SF tales. In defense of Suvin definition, Robert recontextualize this idea, remarking that science in SF is frequently pseudo-scientific, a “device outside the boundaries of science that is none the less rationalized in the style of scientific discourse” (p. 8). Interestingly, *The desire machines of Dr. Hoffman* could fit in this more loose version of Suvin’s definition, as the novum – Hoffman’s pseudo-scientific eroto-machines – plays the role of the ‘estranging’ element, sparking all manner of fantastic events therefore. Even if the tribe of centaurs, for instance, is not prone to proper “rationalization” all these fantasy elements fall into

the consequences of reality being warped by desires gone wild, thanks to Hoffman's "novum". In the case of *Perdido Street Station*, however, it is difficult to isolate a set of nova that would be responsible for estrangement, as the whole novel (and the whole background world building) is grounded in estrangement, albeit not a careless estrangement. Miéville incites the reader cognitive responses indirectly, not in contrast with estrangement, but working alongside it, by the means of the rather familiar set of social, political and racial issues introduced in the weird scenario he built. However, *Perdido* would still not fit even in a less radical version of Suvin's definition – it would still fall in the Fantasy or Sword & Sorcery genre, a genre that was not among Suvin's favourites.

In the anthology Miéville edited with Mark Bould, *Red Planets: Marxism and Science Fiction* (2009), he pens a chapter commenting about Darko Suvin's theories. Miéville discloses his grudge against the approach Suvin, in his works on SF, reserved to the Fantasy genre. Suvin argued that "SF and fantasy are and must remain not only radically distinct but hierarchically related" (BOULD; MIÉVILLE, 2009, p. 231). In other words, Fantasy would have all the estrangement dealt without any cognitive logic, as Miéville quotes from Suvin's work, using Suvin's own derogative sounding words about the Fantasy genre:

though it also 'estranges', it is 'committed to the imposition of anti-cognitive laws', is a 'sub-literature of mystification', 'proto-Fascist', anti-rationalist, anti-modern, 'overt ideology plus Freud erotic patterns'. Suvin acknowledges that the boundaries between SF and Fantasy are often blurred, at the levels of creation, reception and marketing, but he sees this not only as 'rampantly sociopathological', but a 'terrible contamination'. (BOULD; MIÉVILLE, 2009, p. 231-232)

The actual problem with this dismiss of the Fantasy genre is that, according to Miéville, it is an approach that influenced many studies that dealt with genre fiction, namely Fredric Jameson's, for whom Fantasy "lacks SF's 'epistemological gravity' as 'technically reactionary'" and Carl Freedman that emphasized that "supposedly cognition-less Fantasy can offer at best 'irrationalist estrangement'" (BOULD; MIÉVILLE, 2009, p. 232). Miéville also quotes the aforementioned passages from Adam Roberts, as they share the same opinions on Suvin's radical views, emphasizing the scientific discourse, rather than scientific verisimilitude, as the cognitive opposition to estrangement. Miéville also praises the reformulated Suvinism devised by Carl Freedman in his *Critical Theory and Science Fiction* (2000), where he elaborates what should be the "cognitive effect" of SF text:

The crucial issue for generic discrimination is not an epistemological judgment external to the text itself on the rationality or irrationality of the latter's imaginings, but rather ... the attitude of *the text itself* to the kind of estrangements being performed, (FREEDMAN, 2000, p. 18)

As good as a theoretical exit that may sounds – there is a kind of common-sense in genre readers’ responses towards faster-than-light travel and fire-breathing dragons, even if physicists assure us that both are equally impossible – Miéville still finds some trouble: “‘the text itself’, of course, has no attitude to the kind of estrangements it performs, nor indeed to anything else. [...] it does nothing, in fact, but sits there.”, and he concludes: “the text does not exist in an a-sociological vacuum [...] and must be considered in terms of social structure and mediation, questions of human social agency vis-à-vis and relations to the text are inevitable and central” (BOULD; MIÉVILLE, 2009, p. 235).

Thus, Miéville sees an ideological component in the cognitive nature as pointed out by Suvin and Freedman, since the science based ‘cognitive effect’ they claim as a mandatory experience is derived from an external authority:

To the extent that SF claims to be based on ‘science’, and indeed on what is deemed ‘rationality’, it is based on capitalist modernity’s ideologically projected self-justification: not some abstract/ideal ‘science’, but capitalist science’s bullshit about itself. [...] [T]he ‘rationalism’ that capitalism has traditionally had on offer is highly partial and ideological. (BOULD; MIÉVILLE, 2009, p. 240-241)

Following such a harsh rebuke, Miéville seems to bring back Damon Knight’s definition that was previously set aside: “In ideology, charisma and authority become autotelic – that is their point. In mediated microcosm, this is how SF can easily and with some justification end up being defined as that which is written by a SF writer” (p. 241-242).

Of course Miéville’s agenda is to attack Marxist SF critics that shun the Fantasy genre on the grounds of its ‘ideological estrangement’, in opposition of a SF that bears a supposed ‘cognitive awareness’ based on an ideologically loaded rationalism. He then proclaims Marxist theory to walk towards Fantasy and not away from it, as a means to investigate the alterity as estrangement that is shared across the genre field.

Almost sounding as if it is not entirely by chance, critic Linden Peach affirms that “In *The infernal desire machines of Doctor Hoffman*, the centre of gravity is shifting again; on this occasion away from the rigid hierarchies and classifications of the rationalism in which Desiderio has been educated” (PEACH, 1998, p. 105). Carter’s protagonist antagonizes the rationalist post-Enlightenment myth of reason associated with progress and civilization by means of a kind of radical skepticism, something that sounds similar to what Miéville preaches should be applied to

Marxist critic towards Science Fiction criticism, in order for genre Fantasy finally be accepted as deserving of scrutiny and not scorn.

On the other hand, Angela Carter never dwelled much on all these genre dilemmas, but without overt theorization she proposes the most elegant way out, from a 1994 interview:

Well, I have had some following in science fiction. [...] It seemed to me, after reading these writers a lot [the British New Wave of the sixties, especially J. G. Ballard and Michael Moorcock], that they were writing about ideas, and that was basically what I was trying to do. Speculative fiction really means that, the fiction of speculation, the fiction of asking "what if?" It's a system of continuing inquiry. In a way all fiction starts off with "what if," but some "what ifs" are more specific. One kind of novel starts off with "What if I found out that my mother has an affair with a man that I thought was my uncle?" That's presupposing a different kind of novel from the one that starts off with "What if I found out my boyfriend had just changed sex?" If you read the *New York Times Book Review* a lot, you soon come to the conclusion that our culture takes more seriously the first kind of fiction, which is a shame in some ways. By the second "what if" you would actually end up asking much more penetrating questions. If you were half way good at writing fiction, you'd end up asking yourself and asking the reader actually much more complicated questions about what we expect from human relationships and what we expect from gender. (KATSAVOS, 1994, <http://www.dalkeyarchive.com/book/?fa=customcontent&GCOI=15647100621780&extrasfile=A09F7835-B0D0-B086-B6050CC6F168CDAE.html>)

Carter's own "cognitive estrangement" sums up in a "system of continuing inquiry". She means the reader-writer-text relation as part of the same process of asking questions derivative of former questions, while never feeling really satisfied with the answers.

Also, in *In other worlds: SF and the human imagination*, Margaret Atwood makes her own pun at the never ending genre discussion with as much humor: "looks like science fiction, has the tastes of science fiction – it IS science fiction!", only to add in the next paragraph: "Or more or less. Or kind of." (ATWOOD, 2011, p. 3)

Mikhail Bakhtin argues that "Genre is reborn and renewed at every new stage in the development of literature and in every individual work of a given genre" as generic features are "socially contextual constructs rather than components of an abstract, synchronic system" (MAKARYK, 1993, p. 84). Miéville and Carter overlay the "synchronic system" (by the means of appropriation of the generic tropes) with the social context wherein they are inserted, once generic tropes cannot, as Bakhtin claims, stand by themselves in an abstract context, they are resignified by the author's contextual background. This renewal extrapolates genre boundaries and is crucial in achieving new standards of genre writing, especially in a postmodern framework.

An essential postmodern trait, the blurring of genres is ever present in both narratives, being in the core of the New Weird as a subgenre and generally – but not necessarily – within the

boundaries of the Speculative Fiction umbrella label. Theorist Marjorie Perloff affirms that “postmodern genre is thus characterized by its appropriation of other genres, both high and popular, by its longing for a both/and situation rather than one of either/or” (PERLOFF, 1988, p. 8). Therefore, Ralph Cohen remarkably concludes that “postmodern writing blurs genres, transgresses them, or unfixes boundaries that conceal domination or authority” (PERLOFF, 1988, p.11), an assertion fully confirmed if applied to both *Perdido* and *Hoffman* and the ways both novels relate with genre.

As a matter of fact, despite making use of SF tropes, Carter and Miéville are more identified with the Fantasy genre and it reflects on the portraying of their own mad scientists, both characters dabbling with a kind of science that – in strict ways – could be more identified with magic, although it is always relevant to invoke Arthur C. Clarke’s well known Third Law “any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic” (1973), which author Gary Gibson explains:

The statement acknowledges that there are still things beyond our current knowledge but which, with the application of intelligence and reason, might one day become quantifiable and therefore knowable – however mysterious they might seem on first encounter. (BROOKE, 2012, p. 6)

Moreover, the way both scientists deal with their science is closely related to their role as characters and how they fit in the universe devised by their creators.

Linda Hutcheon, also while characterizing postmodern representation, coined the term “ex-centric” in order to characterize “those relegated to the fringes of dominant culture (...) who have made us aware of the politics of all – not just postmodern – representations” (HUTCHEON, 1989, p. 17). Those are characters that represent these kinds of border tensions proper to postmodern thought – and times – between systems of meaning, discourses, genres, high and mass culture, among others. While, in *Hoffman*, Desiderio is the character forced to articulate those tensions and is able to remain on the border, retaining (most of the time) a phlegmatic perspective, “Boredom was my first reaction to incipient delirium” (p. 11), Dr. Hoffman is the one that creates and weaves those tensions against Desiderio’s people and ultimately against him. Hoffman is an ex-centric character to an extreme degree; he is on the fringe of the dominant discourses and uses his fringe science in order to subvert the discourse that molds reality. Sarah Gamble argues that:

Doctor Hoffman, then, attempts a subversion of narrative, on the grounds that narrative is itself ideological in form, even before we begin to consider its content; in other words, that narrative attempts to bind together and naturalise the disunited subject and that this attempt is made at the service of specific societal interests. (GAMBLE, 2001, p. 80)

Alike the narrative in *Hoffman*, the doctor's master plan for *undoing* reality, while compromised with deconstruction of naturalized discourses, serves his own vile and selfish interests, even if travestied as a "good cause": "I could not see how he could have got that notion of liberation inside his skull. I was sure he only wanted power." (p. 250), Desiderio assures.

Also in the fringe of discourses – and practicing some fringe science – is Isaac Grimnebullin. He is not trying to take over the world – actually his world is such a dystopic mess that it is not really worth the trouble – but neither is he the misanthropic lab coat type that quietly helps the gallant hero save the day – though sometimes the day is worth saving, even if you live in a dystopic mess. And Isaac finds himself doing precisely that. He is middle-aged, dark-skinned, bald, fat – not a standard fantasy hero in any way – and the lover of Lin, an artist and female of the insect-like species of the "khepri", a relationship better kept hidden due to its freakish nature by all standard society judgment. An ex-centric to the core, Isaac's research seeks something Hoffman has already achieved: a way to mold reality according to one's will. He does not justify his aims with the familiar scientist-villain cliché, his interests lie in the science achievement, but if his research had not horribly backfired, he could well have become another Hoffman. And while Hoffman's insurrection against the establishment is undertaken with "a virus which causes a cancer of the mind, so that cells of imagination run wild" (p. 17), Isaac's research backfires releasing a swarm of "slake-moths" in the city – interdimensional beasts that feed on imagination and leave their prey as empty mindless living corpses after sucking their dreams raw. They are going to face very different tasks along their personal quests.

In fact, "quests" are a very important – and common – element in modern genre fantasy and as much as they may seem different, the definition brought up by the *Encyclopedia of Fantasy* fits amazingly:

Quests are sequential, suspenseful, event and goal oriented; they normally reach a conclusion; [...] those who oppose the successful conclusion of a quest [...] can often be understood as mere symbols of opposition; and quests require an identifiable protagonist [...] plus, usually, an accumulating mass of companions to strengthen and complicate the action. (CLUTE; GRANT, 1999, p. 796)

This is a blueprint and *The lord of the rings* (1954-5) – not Homer's *Odyssey*, which could be considered the earliest quest fantasy in Western literature – may be the one to blame for "Today Tolkien-cloned Fantasy [that] has become a bookshop category, like Mysteries and Romances" (MOORCOCK, 2004, p. 175). As much as both narratives may seem to fit in the 'default' fantasy

quest, this first glance is deceiving, as their goals differ astray from the legion of Tolkien clones, and their quests are way more ‘interior’ ones than the usual magic ring tossing in the pits of Mount Doom.

The fact that both scientists’ struggle with – or against – dreams is a central point in the novels. Isaac has to fight against the seemingly unstoppable dream-eating moths, while Hoffman uses dreams, desires and the unconscious to alter reality. “*Doctor Hoffman* is a novel ‘of’ as well as ‘about’ the Surrealist imagination!” (GAMBLE, 2001, p. 81), and *Perdido*, while a little more concerned with abiding by genre tropes and reflecting Miéville’s own political sense, also pays homage to the surrealists in the kind of imagery it summons to construct its scenario and characters.

As I have already pointed out in the previous chapter, the motto argued by Alexander C. Irvine in *The Cambridge companion to Fantasy Literature* (JAMES; MENDLESOHN, 2012, p. 208) touches all strata of Miéville’s narrative, and it is not different concerning its relation to science, genre and fiction: “Everything is always becoming something else in *Perdido Street Station*”, after all, that is the core point of crisis energy as discovered by Isaac. Irvine goes further on arguing that

The idea of crisis energy reflects through the entire construction of *Perdido Street Station*, which pushes the ordinary *topoi* of genre until they reach point of crisis, where they are in conflict with themselves. What emerges is a new kind of fantasy – fantasy held in a shape to which it is unaccustomed. (JAMES; MENDLESOHN, 2012, p. 209).

Isaac’s crisis field reaches metalinguistic dimensions when applied to Fantasy and Science Fiction genre-wise. If we consider the New Weird agenda concerning the genre field and Miéville’s own political orientation, we can assume his consciousness of the latent power in genre fiction and so *Perdido Street Station* would be his undertaking on bringing genre to the point of crisis, forcing it to face its own *topoi* and channeling the potential that would spring up from subverting genre’s nature.

In the science field, however, *Hoffman* wins the Most Surreal prize. The evil doctor’s objectives are fulfilled by channeling sexual energy, and to this end “he employs lovers who voluntarily spend all their time copulating in ‘love pens’, the energy they release being immediately collected and transformed into fuel” (GAMBLE, 2001, p.81). Carter also creates her own energy source: “Eroto-energy” (p. 246), an energy renewable by desire. This sets Hoffman’s science farther away from the “lens of plausibility” of Hard SF and further into the Surrealism, although Desiderio, in defeating the Doctor, actively chooses reason as the only way out against

this surrealist chaos: “Our only weapon in the fight is inflexible rationalism and, since we brought reason into battle, already the clocks have agreed to tell us the same time once more” (p. 246), said the propaganda broadcast from the city besieged by Hoffman army of mirages.

Miéville also does not venture through Hard SF, but he replaces Surrealism with good and old swearing: “It’s fucking complicated crisis math, old son.” (p. 205) says Isaac, while trying to explain his methods. Miéville, however, comes up with an abstract alternate physics, and he feasts on science jargon to lend it verisimilitude:

The thing is, what we should be able to do is change the form of the object into one where the tapping of its crisis Field actually increases its crisis state. In other words, the crisis field grows *by virtue of being siphoned off.*” Isaac beamed at Yagharek, his mouth open. “D’you see what I’m talking about? *Perpetual fucking motion!* If we can stabilize the process, you’ve just got an endless feedback loop, which means a permanent font of energy! [Emphasis as in the original] (MIEVILLE, 2001, p. 205)

There is still rationalization involved, which sets Miéville’s imaginary physics distant from the “Reverse the polarity of the neutron flow!” (from a 2007 *Doctor Who* episode) type of pseudo-science babble. All in all, Miéville seems more comfortable placing his alternate academia within the SF genre tropes, while Angela Carter, clearly dialoguing with psychological and postmodern theories, adopts all SF tropes she needs and subverts them to fit her own ideas. As Sarah Gamble wrote, Carter’s explanations sound like “a postmodern theorist going on about the depthlessness of the signs, the depthlessness of the representations that constitute the world and which make untenable any idea of autonomous, objective reality” (GAMBLE, 2001, p. 76):

you must never forget that the Doctor’s philosophy is not so much transcendental as incidental. It utilizes all the incidents that ripple the depthless surfaces of, you understand, the sensual world... we will live on as many layers of consciousness as we can, all at the same time. After the Doctor liberates us, that is. (p. 114)

As a matter of fact, Science Fiction’s postmodern calling was also spotted and investigated by other theorists. In *The Cambridge companion to Fantasy literature* (2012), Jim Casey reminds us that “[Brian] McHale argues that ‘Science Fiction, like postmodern fiction, is governed by the ontological dominant. Indeed, it is perhaps *the* ontological genre *par excellence*’” (JAMES; MENDLESOHN, 2012, p. 118). Then the author summons what Jean Baudrillard and Umberto Eco call ‘hyperreality’, usually defined as “the generation by models of a real without origin or reality”, to explain concepts of authors as sophisticated as Philip K. Dick or cyberpunks such as Bruce Sterling and William Gibson, that were absorbed by pop culture and translated for the mass media in such popular movies like *Blade Runner* (1983), *The Matrix*

(1999) or the television series *Babylon 5* (1995). However, it is a quote from Baudrillard that best echoes Hoffman's 'Science Fantasy' powers: "the real is produced from miniaturized units, from matrices, memory banks and command modules – and with these it can be reproduced an indefinite number of times" (JAMES; MENDLESOHN, 2012, p. 119). Carter literalizes this concept in the peep show episode, when Desiderio discovers that Hoffman's former mentor kept a box of 'magic samples':

Each one of these box contained, as I expected, the models (...) A universality of figures of men, women, beasts, drawing rooms, auto-da-fés and scenes of every conceivable type was contained in these boxes, none of which were bigger than my thumb. (p. 108)

These figures – that, as Desiderio points out, seem very much like toys – are, according to the peep show proprietor, "symbolic constituents of representations of the basic constituents of the universe. If they are properly arranged, all possible situations in the world and every possible mutation of those situations can be represented." (p. 109). In other words, the sets of samples could be described, using a pun with Baudrillard's terms, as a 'hyperreality generator'. In Lorna Sage's reading of *Hoffman*, she remarks Carter's need to *theorize* (her emphasis) and how it is a novel "full of ideas, *armed* with them" (SAGE, 2007, p. 35), also her emphasis. Sage grasped exactly how Hoffman wages war against reality: armed with a hyperreality machine assembled according to Baudrillard's blueprint of theories.

The term 'Science Fantasy' is a rather interesting hybrid subgenre label that used to be applied as "a bastard genre, blending elements of sf and Fantasy; usually colourful and often bizarre", known to use magic, gods and demons, heroes, mythology and supernatural creatures "often in a quasirationalized form" (CLUTE; NICHOLLS, 1993, p. 1061). This definition immediately rings a bell concerning both *Perdido* and *Hoffman* (the former, with its rationalized crisis energy physics, and the later with Hoffman's eroto-energy powered reality warping machines). Even though being a subgenre that has been used to refer to famous writers such as Marion Zimmer-Bradley, Anne McCaffrey or Roger Zelazny, it happens to have fallen in disuse, lacking marketable appeal in favor of more trendy and less old-fashionable labels. As a matter of fact, this is pretty much common in the genre field, as labels are nothing more than what their namesake imply, Wolfe affirmed that

The fantastic genres of horror, science fiction, and fantasy have been unstable literary isotopes virtually since their evolution into identifiable narrative modes – or at least into identifiable market categories – a process that began a century or more ago and is still going. Although at times they have seemed in such bondage to formula and convention that they were in danger of fossilization [...] (WOLFE, 2011, p. 3).

Fossilization, as pointed out by Wolfe, is a danger every genre (or subgenre) should be aware of and it may be responsible for its extinction – or evolution into something else, as ‘Science Fantasy’s demise as a subgenre corroborates, even if purely for market reasons.

In *Rhetorics of fantasy*, Farah Mendlesohn investigates the fantasy canon by means of a taxonomy based on “mode” templates. She calls *Perdido* a fully “immersive fantasy”, in other words, “a fantasy set in a world so that it functions on all levels as a complete world. (...) impervious to external influence” (MENDLESOHN, 2008, p. 59). Due to Miéville’s rationalizing she also argues that “It was also a science fiction novel, because the concern of the main characters (...) is with the way the world works and the construction of the scientific rules that will allow the world to be worked” (MENDLESOHN, 2008, p. 65). Although addressing Angela Carter only briefly, if we consider the taxonomy in *Rhetorics of fantasy*, *Hoffman* would not fit in the “immersive fantasy” category and, as a matter of fact, would not be easily pigeonholed. Mendlesohn uses the slipstream fiction term, “a term invented by Bruce Sterling to refer to work that feels like science fiction but isn’t marketed as such” (MENDLESOHN, 2008, p. 228) to approach “such English language writers as Jeanette Winterson, Andrew Greig and Angela Carter”. She, then, defines: “Slipstream is usually understood as hovering on the edge of the codes of science fiction and fantasy, combining them with the codes of the mimetic world to produce something else” (p. 228). And indeed it is a very appropriate depiction of *Hoffman*, a metaphysical science theory able to shape the mimetic reality turning it in a fantasy world of dreams and desires. Of course this definition is rather vague, Clute and Nicholls claim that it seems apt “as a description of commercial piggybacking” and is derogatory when used to describe the whole range of mainstream non-genre SF (CLUTE; NICHOLLS, 1993, p. 1117). Indeed, as Mendlesohn herself remarks, it depends a lot on reader expectation and his or her awareness of the said ‘codes of the mimetic world’.

Different as they already are, both novels also finish in a very different tone for our scientist characters. *Hoffman* finally faces his final showdown against his nemesis (but also almost son-in-law) Desiderio. The readers are already aware of the aftermath, since the narrative is told by an old Desiderio as a compilation of memories of the “Great War”. In the end, the Doctor’s motives, if somewhat shady along the journey, reveal themselves in the best pulp villain fashion, as the Doctor himself receives the hero in his castle and tells his plans, while trying to lure him to join his cause. “He is the great patriarchal Forbidder turned Permitter, the one who

sets the libido ‘free’ (SAGE, 2007, p. 34), writes Lorna Sage. The Doctor explains “the secretions of fulfilled desire are processed to procure an essence which has not yet pullulated into germinal form”, a “biochemical metasoup” (p. 250). And Desiderio concludes “So *that* was the Doctor’s version of the cogito. I DESIRE THEREFORE I EXIST. Yet he seemed to me a man without desires” [Emphasis as in the original] (p. 252). In a “final battle” scene worth of a Monty Python sketch, Desiderio kills the Doctor while the enraged villain lunged at him in a wheelchair. And, then, not very hero-likely, he stabs Albertina – his former lover, as she remained loyal to her dead father. After the reality machines were smashed, then “time had begun again” (p. 263), as if a reset reality button was pressed as soon as the Doctor died.

In *Perdido Street Station*, a catastrophic battle takes place while Isaac’s party of heroes face the slake-moths and win by poisoning them with a freakish meddle of extradimensional (the Weaver) and sentient automaton (The Construct Council) brain waves linked through his crisis engine, which ends proving that his own crisis theory works. However, saving the day has not spared Isaac of a sour victory. He ends having to flee the city, persecuted by the government militia, the Construct Council’s automatons and the city mafia. Also, his lover, Lin, is lobotomized by the slake-moths and he discovers that one of his companions, Yagharek, is wanted as a rapist in his native city.

Not at all a joyride for both our scientists. Perhaps if Isaac could employ some of Hoffman’s eroto-energy to feed the slake-moth’s hunger for dreams and desires, no one would need to get lobotomized. And equally if Hoffman had his own crisis engine he would be able to fulfill everyone’s desire without tapping into Desiderio’s love for his own daughter. All in all, there are reasons why scientists choose how to conduct their researches and what their science aims to signify, and Isaac and Hoffman, although sharing some idiosyncrasies, are in opposite corners of the ring.

And, well, it probably wouldn’t have worked, right?

3 THE WORLD SHAPED BY DISCOURSES, OR DOCTOR HOFFMAN'S GUIDE FOR UNSEEING *THE CITY & THE CITY*

Who would want to believe that they never met again, never fulfilled their love? Who would want to believe that, except in the service of the bleakest realism? I couldn't do it to them. (...) When I am dead, and the Marshalls are dead, and the novel is finally published, we will only exist as my inventions.

Ian Mcewan (*Atonement*, 2001)

Fair enough: anyone who believes that the laws of physics are mere social conventions is invited to try transgressing those conventions from the windows of my apartment. I live on the twenty-first floor.

Alan Sokal (Francis Wheen, *How mumbo jumbo conquered the world*, 2004)

It's not denial. I'm just very selective about the reality I accept.

Calvin (Bill Watterson, *The indispensable Calvin and Hobbes*, 1992)

In *The infernal desire machines of Doctor Hoffman*, Angela Carter describes Desiderio's greatest asset as boredom. In the main character's own words: "Boredom was my first reaction to incipient delirium" (CARTER, 2010, p. 11)⁵. Desiderio's phlegmatic instance towards the mirages that assaulted the city earned him a key position in the Ministry of Determination, and the same apathy was a determining factor that singled him out for being chosen to the mission that ended the war against Hoffman for good. Desiderio's skepticism through boredom – or in fact his indifference to accept and interpret signs – is his most interesting character trait, especially as it begins to be challenged by his relationship with Hoffman's daughter and by the many mishaps he suffers until the conclusion of his quest.

In China Miéville's 2009 novel *The city & the city*, a singular situation occur, where the acceptance and interpretation of signs plays a foremost role in a day to day basis for two different

⁵ All subsequent quotations from *The infernal desire machines of Doctor Hoffman* are going to be referenced by page number only.

coexisting societies. This novel leaves aside the secondary world of Bas Lag (where *Perdido Street Station*, *The scar* and *Iron council* were located) and takes place in a version of our real world, more precisely in the post-Soviet Eastern Europe. However, unlike the fictional country where Carter locates *The infernal desire machines of Doctor Hoffman* - “a dissolving city in South America” (SAGE, 2007, p. 33) – Miéville locates *The city & the city* in a pair of fictional city-states that he strives to sketch as very concrete locations, the cities of Beszel and Ul Qoma. The peculiarity here is that both cities occupy the same physical space.

Such urban overlapping should not be exactly a novelty in Fantasy fiction, as it is quite common to find stories of real cities co-existing with its ‘magic’ or ‘fantastic’ counterparts. Neil Gaiman’s *Neverwhere* (1996) is an example of the famed trope of the ‘magical’ underground London, a trope that has been explored by our own China Miéville in *Un Lun Dun* (2007) and, to a lesser extent, in *King Rat* (1998) and *Kraken* (2010). In *Rethorics of fantasy*, Farah Mendlesohn comments:

In Neil Gaiman’s *Neverwhere* (1996) or China Miéville’s *King Rat* (1998) (...) a fantastic London underlies the London we know. What prevents these from being wainscot stories is that (1) access to them is intermittent and privileged, a function always of someone leaving and intruding into the mundane world; and (2) the worlds can exist in the same spaces at one and the same time, so that scenes in *Neverwhere* in the underground stations do not take place in the nooks and crannies but in a parallel world that overlays the mundane world. (MENDLESOHN, 2008, p. 151)

This parallel world logic does not apply to *Hoffman* – which presents a rather mundane scenario being ‘intruded’ by the fantastic element – and also does not fit *The city & the city*. The city’s frontiers in Miéville’s novel are physical (as they can be mapped) and semiotical, not fantastical or in some other sense ‘magical’.

Writing on the Urban Fantasy subgenre in *The Cambridge Companion to Fantasy Literature*, Alexander C. Irvine registers two kinds of urban environment in Fantasy, “those in which *urban* is a descriptor applied to *fantasy* and those in which *fantasy* modifies *urban*” (JAMES; MENDLESOHN, 2012, p. 200). It is somehow easy to spot the trend if we choose almost binary-like opposites, as in *Neverwhere* (an almost-real city where fantastic events happen) and *Perdido Street Station* (a fantastic city in itself, where the mundane and the fantastic are somehow ordinary). Even though the urban landscape plays a prominent part in *The city and the city*, it is also difficult to pigeonhole the novel inside a genre such as Urban Fantasy. As we are going to investigate, the fantastical element (in the Todorovian sense) is, to some extent,

present, although the fantasy “descriptor”, as Irvine puts it, is a rather dubious one – and can even be ruled out for good.

Beszel and Ul Qoma occupy the same topological space. Citizens of the cities are well trained to avoid chunks of the neighboring city with the exception of the ‘crosshatched’ areas, where intersection is permitted. However, the physical intersection does not imply an actual one and the social conventions indoctrinated in the people lead them not to simply ‘ignore’ the existence of the neighbor citizens and topological features, but actually towards a process of abstracting – a complex process of unseeing and unhearing that culminates not in mundane ‘ignoring’ but in unthinking the Other. The novel’s narrator tries to explain this concept with examples:

There are places not crosshatched but where Beszel is interrupted by a thin part of Ul Qoma. As kids we would assiduously unsee Ul Qoma, as our parents and teachers had relentlessly trained us (the ostentation with which we and our Ul Qoman contemporaries used to unnotice each other when we were grosstopically close was impressive). We used to throw stones across the alterity, walk a long way around in Beszel and pick them up again, debate whether we had done wrong. (MIÉVILLE, 2011, p. 86)⁶

In order to legally cross the border, a citizen was forced to go to Copula Hall, a building in the “navel between the cities” and proceed with all bureaucratic paper work that would allow him to cross, even if, materially, he would not have travelled a mile. And once “arriving” at his destination, on the other ‘side’, all the unseeing process would be applied towards his place of origin, while he would finally “acknowledge” his neighbor city. Again, Miéville clarifies this concept, as the protagonist from Beszel didactically explains for the leisure of American visitors:

If someone needed to go to a house physically next door to their own in the neighbouring city, it was in different road in an unfriendly power. That is what foreigners rarely understand. A Beszel dweller cannot walk a few paces next door into an alter house without breach. But pass through Copula Hall and she or he might leave Beszel and at the end of the hall come back to exactly (corporeally) where they had just been, but in another country, a tourist, a marveling visitor, to a street that shared the latitude-longitude of their own address, a street they had never visited before, whose architecture they had always unseen, to the Ul Qoman house sitting next to and a whole city away from their own building, invisible there now they had come through, all the way across the Breach, back home. (p. 86)

As such, a citizen from one of these societies has to learn from the cradle an array of semiotic markers which would constitute the metaphysical ‘frontiers’ between both cities and whereupon the discipline of unseeing can be based. This demented exaggerated real-life border

⁶ All subsequent quotations from *The city & the city* are going to be referenced by page number only.

condition was compared to Jerusalem, Cold War Berlin or contemporary Belfast. Miéville's answer to an internet interview, concerning this point, is enlightening:

My intent with *The City and The City* was to derive something hyperbolic and fictional through an exaggeration of the logic of borders, rather than to invent my own magical logic of how borders could be. It was an extrapolation of really quite everyday, quite quotidian, juridical and social aspects of nation-state borders: I combined that with a politicized social filtering, and extrapolated out and exaggerated further on a sociologically plausible basis, eventually taking it to a ridiculous extreme. (MANAUGH, 2011, <http://bldgblog.blogspot.com.br/2011/03/unsolving-city-interview-with-china.html>)

As reality can also be astonishing (and sometimes amazingly weird), Miéville wasn't aware, at this time, of the existence of the Belgian town of Baarle-Hertog, an enclave that overlaps the Dutch town of Baarle-Nassau. The spatial organization of both towns is strikingly similar to Beszel-UI Qoma. It consists of 24 separate parcels of Belgian land in Dutch territory, also with Dutch chunks inside Belgian parcels and so on. Fortunately, the citizens are not supposed to enforce social conventions of unseeing their neighbors or forced to register paperwork to cross the street, but, however, they must watch their mobile phones for expensive roaming bills and are forced to change tables at restaurants as the Dutch regulations state that their establishments have to close earlier than the Belgian counterparts.⁷

Interestingly, it can be argued that *The City* is a novel to which Tzvetan Todorov's concept of the Fantastic could be applied. Miéville is able to create a reader hesitancy, as Lucie Armitt argues, concerning Todorov's literary fantastic concept:

The reader is required to continually adjudicate between two equally possible interpretations of the fictional material, one psychological and one supernatural. The space of the fantastic inhabits the duration of that hesitancy, for once the reader plumps for one interpretation over another, Todorov's sense of the fantastical is lost and genre takes over. (ARMITT, 2005, p. 174-175)

In the first portion of *The City*, the reader is unable to perceive if there is some kind of supernatural scenario (as in Gaiman's *Neverwhere*, for instance) enveloping the hardboiled detective mystery that is starting to unveil, as Miéville, through his first person narrator, does not reveal any world-building detail until it is mandatory for the plot development. Even though Miéville's decoy works ingeniously for a while in creating this fantastic sense of hesitancy mentioned by Todorov, it also does not fit all Todorov's structural rules, since the character narrator does not share the reader's hesitancy, as, according to Todorov, "the first-person narrator (along with the implied reader) is kept in the dark, ignoring if his or her surroundings are a fruit

⁷ More info on the towns of Baarle-Nassau and Baarle-Hertog can be found on the web at <http://ontology.buffalo.edu/smith/baarle.htm> and <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Baarle-Hertog>.

of imagination or not”⁸ (TODOROV, 2008, p. 151). Tyador Borlú, the protagonist of *The City*, is a native of Beszel and he is not “kept in the dark”, he knows everything about what “surrounds him”; he is the one character who shares the intricate politics of both cities with the reader as soon as the plot demands, ending the literary fantastic hesitance and plunging the narrative into the genre Todorov would call fantastic uncanny: the laws of reality remain intact and there is a rational explanation, even if a very peculiar one (TODOROV, 2010, p. 48).

What current literary genre theory calls Fantasy (which Todorov would name ‘marvelous’) is not exactly what is at work in *The city*. While we could argue, about *The infernal desire machines of Doctor Hoffman*, whether it should be called Science Fiction or Fantasy, and settle with Speculative Fiction, *The city & the city*, while highly speculative, would not fit straightforwardly in the Fantasy genre category, in spite of having been awarded most of the genre specific prizes (for both Fantasy and Science Fiction) in the year it was published.

The point in common both novels share is the way the real is construed and subordinated by discourses. In *Hoffman* it is a machine that is responsible for materializing dreams and desires and shaping reality in such manner that most people get ‘lost’ in it, as Desiderio affirms, “I survived because I could not surrender to the flux of mirages. I could not merge and blend with them; I could not abnegate my reality and lose myself for ever as others did, blasted to non-being by the ferocious artillery of unreason.” (p. 4). The skeptic Desiderio uses reason to read signs critically and grounds his ‘self’ in what he judges ‘real’.

In the previous chapter, it was argued that Hoffman’s box of samples and his logic of deconstructing reality echoes Jean Baudrillard’s concept of hyperreality, “Fantasy becomes easier to (hyper)realize when dinosaurs, trolls and giant gorillas appear almost more real than their human counterparts” (JAMES; MENDLESOHN, 2012, p. 119). Desiderio’s stand against Hoffman’s power is, in Baudrillard’s terms, exactly his resistance against hyperrealizing. Even though Hoffman’s “hyperreality generator” would affect his city and most of its people, he would stay “bored”, as the whole situation did not have any appeal to him. As he says, “I found it boring for none of the characters engaged my sympathy, even if I admired them, and all the situation appeared the false engineering of an inefficient phantasiist” (p. 21). The logic of hyperreality - “the generation by models of a real without origin or reality” – was not enough for him. As he

⁸ In the Portuguese translation it reads “o narrador personagem (e o leitor implícito) é mantido em dúvida, ignorando se o que o cerca é ou não efeito da imaginação”.

explains, “Because, out of my discontent, I made my own definitions and these definitions happened to correspond to those that happened to be true. And so I made a journey through space and time (...)” (p. 5). Of course, Desiderio’s personal logic will backfire as what “happens to be true” is dramatically subjective and, being seduced by Hoffman’s daughter, Albertina, Desiderio reality is slowly invaded by the engineering of the said “phantasist”.

In *The city*, the logic of ‘unseeing’ is an inversion of the hyperrealizing (or else it might be the capability of hyperrealizing something *away*): “In the mirror of the car I saw Mr. Geary [an American tourist] watch a passing truck. I unsaw it because it was in Ul Qoma.” (p. 94). Concerning J. G. Ballard’s 1973 novel *Crash*, Baudrillard remarked that:

Reality, as an internally coherent and limited universe, begins to hemorrhage when its limits are stretched to infinity. The conquest of space, following the conquest of the planet, promotes either the de-realizing of human space, or the reversion of it into a simulated hyperreality. (BAUDRILLARD, 1991, <http://www.depauw.edu/sfs/backissues/55/ baudrillard55art.htm>)

As a matter of fact, we could understand the social convention of unseeing as a tool for “derealizing of human space”, once citizens of Beszel and Ul Qoma are bound to constantly articulate a struggle with an urban space where they must interact, though in a way that the landscape remains unseen or ‘unthought of’. This tool provides the ability to render the space metaphysically unconceived or derealized, even if it is materially right there. On the other hand, *Hoffman* presents an attempt to sink reality in a simulated other, a literal hemorrhage as hyperreality tries to take over and gorge upon what was human space. So, we might say that both conjectures traced by Baudrillard on the stretching of reality to ‘infinity’ are contemplated in these two novels.

Further on, Baudrillard argues that both these processes are bound together, especially concerning more recent Science Fiction texts, as the “real” is day by day becoming more “science-fictional”, the simulation will be dressed as real,

The process will be rather the reverse: to put in place "decentered" situations, models of simulation, and then to strive to give them the colors of the real, the banal, the lived; to reinvent the real as fiction, precisely because the real has disappeared from our lives. A hallucination of the real, of the lived, of the everyday—but reconstituted, sometimes even unto its most disconcertingly unusual details, recreated like an animal park or a botanical garden, presented with transparent precision, but totally lacking substance, having been derealized and hyperrealized. (BAUDRILLARD, 1991, <http://www.depauw.edu/sfs/backissues/55/ baudrillard55art.htm>)

This process is more akin to Doctor Hoffman’s world domination plan – or with Carter’s use of postmodern theorization in the layers underlying her narrative – as the reconstitution of the real as near-truth hallucination is Hoffman’s *modus operandi* – and again we can recollect the set

of miniatures that would comprise the basis of his reality- warping machines, reality being hyperrealized from the tiniest pieces, as it was argued in the previous chapter, the real produced “from miniaturized units, from matrices, memory banks and command modules – and with these it can be reproduced an indefinite number of times” (JAMES; MENDLESOHN, 2012, p. 119). Naturally, this was an issue Carter was interested in investigating, as she has previously stated, as quoted in the critical introduction to the 2010 edition of *Hoffman*: “I’ve got nothing against realism. (...) But there is realism and realism. I mean, the questions that I ask myself, I think they are very much to do with reality” (p. ix).

Miéville’s affirmation concerning the genesis of *The city* also resonates with Baudrillard’s ideas of “reinventing the real as fiction”:

I wanted to make them both feel combined and uneven and real and full-blooded. I spent a long time working on the cities and trying to make them feel plausible and half-remembered, as if they were uneasily not quite familiar rather than radically strange. (MANAUGH, 2011, <http://bldgblog.blogspot.com.br/2011/03/unsolving-city-interview-with-china.html>)

Both *The infernal desire machines of Doctor Hoffman* and *The city & the city* are also – in a more ‘mundane’ level – novels inherently connected with the pulp genre. Of course it can be argued that all genre-oriented literature can be traced to some or other pulp root, but there are novels that flaunt their *pulpness* without constraints. *Hoffman*’s roots have been pointed out in the previous chapters – the villain Doctor is a straightforward template of a mad scientist from a Science Fiction magazine, with twisted good intentions, a beautiful daughter and so on. *The city*, although not Science Fiction pulp, is a standard crime-procedural mystery novel, grounded in the noir genre tradition: an American archeology student is found dead in Beszel and detective Tyador Borlú is forced to work in cooperation with the Ul Qoma police once it is discovered that the student was residing in Ul Qoma.

Another genre-twisting element in *The city* is Breach – a secret police that monitors the act of “breaching”, illegally crossing from one city to another or even acknowledging the existence of anything geographically foreign is considered breach, and everyone caught breaching is “taken away” by the Breach police. For a brief Todorovian hiatus, the reader hesitates about Breach, since it is portrayed as a omnipotent faceless divine-like power of law enforcement – and, in this case the narrator shares the reader hesitancy as for most of the novel he also regards Breach as divine-like.

However, Breach derives its “powers” from the psychological blind spots left by the enforced social conventions both cities adopt. As its agents lurk among the interstices, being unseen by both sides of the semiotic frontier, they are able to work invisibly and thus appear as something supernatural. So, their powers are a by-product of a certain discourse adopted and unchallenged by both cities’ people. If we consider Jean-François Lyotard’s concept of grand narratives, we can acknowledge an oppressive master narrative being woven in this case, one that dictates the sociological framework where both cities are placed. Breach is a literal power – a discourse materialized – oriented to enforce the master narrative that rules over the Belzel and Ul Qoma societies. Most citizens are not even aware they are being ‘ruled’ by it and thus they assign omnipotent powers to Breach – their agents are even called ‘avatars’, as if personifications of some divine power. According to Lyotard, the fundamentals of the postmodern condition lie in:

The collapse of legitimization based on grand historical schemes (*les grands récits*). The debate that crystallized around the theme of the end of the grands récits perhaps points to the philosophical core of Lyotard’s work: the problem of the kind of legitimacy that theory can have when it is not based on a priori principles or on progressive, holistic history. (MAKARYK, 1993, p. 414)

In the microcosm occupied by Belzel and Ul Qoma there is only one overarching metanarrative and it is Breach, the organization that embodies all social and semiotic meanings assembling the two cities dynamics. However, the novel portrays its moment of collapsing and the fragility – or fictionality – of the discourse whereupon it is based. The whole plot concerns the invasion of a foreign mega corporation interested in smuggling out of the cities a set of ancient artifacts which are being dug out of the cities’ archeological sites. The said artifacts are also a source of uncertainty, they are remains from the pre-Cleavage era (before both cities split): “We had all heard rumours about Precursor artefacts. Their questionable physics. Their properties. They want to see what’s true (p. 325).” This is another fantastic element in the Todorovian sense, as it is not known if these rumours are true (indeed, by the end of the novel this is not plainly answered, but most leads indicate they are only rumours). The corporation, however, defies Breach (and its master narrative) in order to try and unveil this mystery, sending a clandestine Research & Development mission – which culminates in the assassination of the American student and in the involvement of detective Borlú and the Breach avatars in the case. By the end of the novel, the corporation agent performs his obligatory final defiance discourse:

‘I’m neither Besz nor Ul Qoman,’ Croft said. He spoke in English, though he clearly understood us. ‘I’m neither interested in nor scared of you. I’m leaving. “Breach”’ He shook his head. ‘Freak show. You think anyone beyond these odd little cities cares about you? *They* may bankroll you and do what you say, ask no questions, they may need to be scared of you, but no one else does.’ (...) ‘What do you think would happen if you provoked my government? It’s funny enough, the idea of either Beszel or Ul Qoma going to war against a real country. Let alone you, Breach.’ (p. 342-343)

As seen through the eyes of Borlú, the fragile involucrum that maintains this order in place is pierced and crumbles. The end of this metanarrative would once and for all change both cities forever (something that was already sought out by a number of extremist unionist groups from both cities). Borlú, however, sticks to his duty, and works together with Breach (while also breaching). By the end, there is no way back to his old life, as what was “seen” could not be “made unseen” again. Breach avatar, Ashil, explains how this works:

“It’s not just us keeping them apart. It’s everyone in Beszel and everyone in Ul Qoma. Every minute, every day. We’re only the last ditch: it’s everyone in the cities who does most of the work. It works because you don’t blink. That’s why unseeing and unsensing are so vital. No one can admit it doesn’t work. So if you don’t admit it, it does. But if you breach, even if it’s not your fault, for more than the shortest time... you can’t come back from that. (...) You’ll never unsee again”. (370-371)

The novel ends with Borlú choosing to become a Breach avatar, and leaving both Beszel and Ul Qoma forever, as soon as the status quo is reestablished. This is also another common genre trope, and the same thing happens in Neil Gaiman’s *Neverwhere*, for instance, as the protagonist chooses to stay in the magical underground London rather than going back to his old ‘real’ life. Nevertheless, there is also a hint that Breach cannot keep playing bogeyman forever – “I’m *policzai*, god damn it, this is what I do. You’re good at being bogeymen but you’re shit at this” (p. 324) – as the Breach avatar accepts Borlú and admits that “Times are changing” (p. 372).

In *The infernal desire machines of Doctor Hoffman* there is the same cycle of defying that causes the bringing down of the metanarratives and then the reestablishing of a kind of status quo, a status similar to the previous order but also different. Critic Clare Hanson spots the same trend and explains:

Deconstruction is linked with that questioning of the ‘grand narratives’ of Western thought that Jean-François Lyotard identifies as *the* characteristic of postmodern condition; it thus shades into unmasking or ‘delegitimation’ of the dominant narratives of patriarchy and imperialism. To deconstruct is to oppose or contest these narratives, and Carter’s later work is often thought of as ‘deconstructive’ in this sense. (GAMBLE, 2001, p. 178-179)

Hoffman displays an attack that is more generally aimed at the post-Enlightenment myth of reason, the rationalist ultimate truth that materializes in the ‘real’ – a discourse the mad scientist is pleased to mow down. The core of the novel’s struggle is, indeed, a battle between

conceptions assumed as ‘legit’ and the Hoffman’s desire to delegitimize them. Gamble goes as far as calling the novel, in reference to this aspect, a historiographic metafiction, when she writes that “it [*Hoffman*] engages with the world of the ‘real’ more radically than any of Carter’s novels have so far done. In this sense, it particularly corresponds to Linda Hutcheon’s definition of historiographic metafiction” (GAMBLE, 2001, p. 73), which immediately brings up to mind Hutcheon’s definition of this postmodern genre in her influential *A poetics of postmodernism: history, theory, fiction* (1988), which regards historiographic metafiction as a genre that:

Refutes the natural or common-sense methods of distinguishing between historical fact and fiction. It refuses the view that only history has a truth claim, both by questioning the ground of that claim in historiography and by asserting that both history and fiction are discourses, human constructs, signifying systems, and both derive their major claim to truth and identity. (HUTCHEON, 1988, p. 93)

This very definition can be thoughtfully complemented by an assertion by Hutcheon in *The politics of postmodernism* (1989), “what historiographic metafiction suggests is a recognition of a central responsibility of the historian and the novelist alike: their responsibility as makers of meaning through representation” (HUTCHEON, 1989, p. 87). In the case of *Hoffman*, this is yet another label we can add to the ones already discussed (Science Fiction, Fantasy, Surrealist Fiction, Speculative Fiction and so on) and although clearly not a perfect fit in the historiographic metafiction genre (such as Margaret Atwood’s *Alias Grace*, for instance), this label adds a new extra spice to thicken the broth.

However, in the sense Gamble addresses the manner *Hoffman* relates to the historiographic metafiction label, the novel might fit in the genre while also reflecting Carter’s own beliefs about writing, because, after all, as a novelist, she was entirely aware of the responsibilities Hutcheon refers to. The binary polarization between fact (real) and fiction (imagination) is portrayed – in the beginning of the narrative – as a straightforward black-and-white relation, with the Minister of Determination as the implacable judge. However, as Desiderio embarks on his journey, the borders become blurred to the extent that suddenly they are not visible at all and for a while Desiderio does not even care. By the end of the novel, Desiderio has travelled from one extremity to the other and his judgment is not impaired by prejudices anymore. When the status quo is reestablished, it is ‘marred’ forever as Desiderio, during his journey home, notes: “And so I identified at last the flavor of my daily bread; it was and would be that of regret. Not, you understand, of remorse; only of regret, that insatiable regret with which we acknowledge that the impossible is, per se, impossible.” (p. 264).

History is also regarded as unreliable in *The city*, especially concerning the cities and the ‘split’:

If split there was. That beginning was a shadow in history, an unknown — records effaced and vanished for a century either side. Anything could have happened. From that historically brief quite opaque moment came the chaos of our material history, an anarchy of chronology, of mismatched remnants that delighted and horrified investigators. All we know is nomads on the steppes, then those black-box centuries of urban instigation (...) then history comes back and there are Beszel and Ul Qoma. Was it schism or conjoining? (p. 61-62)

And as a matter of fact, history and fiction are intertwined in the ‘fairytales’ that surround the cities’ mythology. The most prominent part of it is the third city of Orciny – not by accident the intended research subject of Mahalia Geary, the American archeologist whose murder triggered the whole crisis:

As if that were not mystery enough and as if two crosshatched countries were insufficient, bards invented that third, the pretend-existing Orciny. On top floors, in ignorable Roman-style town-houses, in the first wattle-and-daub dwellings, taking up the intricately conjoined and disjointed spaces allotted it in the split or coagulation of the tribes, the tiny third city Orciny ensconced, secreted between the two brasher city-states. A community of imaginary overlords, exiles perhaps, in most stories machinating and making things so, ruling with a subtle and absolute grip. Orciny was where the Illuminati lived. That sort of thing. (p. 62)

Orciny would be a secret city lying in the interstices, whole places and an entire population regularly unseen by citizens in Beszel and Ul Qoma. The psychological blind spots allowed by the indoctrination in the discipline of unseeing would open the gaps occupied by Orciny and its citizens. The artifices as such alleged by those that support the Orciny theory (a kind of conspiracy theory) are strikingly similar to those strategies employed by Breach to remain incognito and feign an omnipotent and supernatural aura. Some theories would even argue that Breach and Orciny are permanently at war and Beszel and Ul Qoma are just their battleground.

As it is peculiar of Miévielle, in *The city & the city* there are also characters portraying the academia (likewise in *Perdido Street Station* and *Embassytown*, for example). Aside from Mahalia Geary, we meet her advisor and some fellow researchers and also the professor who wrote the ‘guide’ on Orciny – a disgraced academic that has never been taken seriously since he decided to consider the Orciny theory something more than a fairytale. Professor Nancy, Mahalia’s PhD advisor, was surprised by Mahalia’s interest in her work, since she was more of a “theory type”. When Borlú asks the professor about Mahalia’s supposed connections with Orciny, Nancy answers:

‘I mean that if she were studying Orciny, and there might be excellent reasons to do so, she’d be doing her doctorate in Folklore or Anthropology or maybe Comp Lit. Granted, the edges of disciplines are getting vague. Also that Mahalia is one of a number of young archeologists more interested in Foucault and Baudrillard than in Gordon Childe or in trowels.’ (p. 106)

Gordon Childe (1892-1957) was an Australian-born British archeologist who believed in a comparative and materialist approach to culture, a Marxist in his theoretical perspectives and an archeologist in the traditional ‘hands on’ sense. Foucault and Baudrillard, of course, are important names that influenced the New Historicism, challenging the totalizing biases of traditional academia and the compartmentalization of disciplines, displaying concern with the intertextuality of ‘official’ knowledge and previously ignored discourses as well as considering documents and methods excluded from traditional literary and aesthetic study (MAKARYK, 1993, p. 124). Professor Nancy is not the “theory type”, as she states clearly that “I’m an artefact scholar. My more philosophically oriented colleagues would... well, I wouldn’t trust many of them to brush the dirt off an amphora” (p. 110).

This clashing of traditions is a theme in both novels. As Sarah Gamble points out, “In *Dr Hoffman* it is unreality that Desiderio describes as overwhelming the inhabitants of the city once Hoffman starts his siege, an unreality that the Minister (of Determination) tries to distinguish from reality but which Hoffman refuses to allow to be distinguished” (GAMBLE, 2001, p. 74). While Aidan Day describes Hoffman as “a species of archpostmodernist”, he also maintains that “Desiderio represents reject of the ultimate implications of a postmodern world-view” (GAMBLE, 2001, p. 74).

In Miéville’s scenario, the traditional academic knowledge does not recognizes the marginal discourse of myth as a legit one. This is clear in Prof. Nancy’s claim that “No one reputable would supervise a Bowdenite PhD” (p. 110). Prof. Nancy is here referring to David Bowden, author of *Between the city and the city*, the infamous paper on Orciny. However, Miéville leaves a tinge of doubt in the background that enforces the conspiracy, as it is clear that anything happening in a metaphysically shared city overseen by a supernatural secret police should not be startling or wondrous enough. Conspiracy and paranoia are both common traces of dystopic scenarios. In *Dark horizons*, Raffaella Baccolini and Tom Moylan write on critical dystopias and argue that they:

Allow both readers and protagonists to hope by resisting closure: the ambiguous, open endings of these novels maintain the utopian impulse within the work. In fact, by rejecting the traditional subjugation of the individual at the end of the novel, the critical dystopia opens a space of contestation and opposition for those collective “ex-centric” subjects whose class, gender, race, sexuality, and other positions are not empowered by hegemonic rule. (BACCOLINI; MOYLAN, 2003, p. 7)

This is a way out granted to detective Borlú as his invitation to join Breach is an open-ended, though ambiguous way out. Borlú's life as an avatar should render him a marginal subject – unseen by society in all senses – but it also turns him part of the authoritarian system that enforces the status quo, a twisted establishment in which he cannot be acknowledged as subject. Despite of this ironic ambiguity, the words of avatar Ashil echo that “times are changing” and mildly contest the established order, hinting towards a more optimistic future. Something that may or may not happen, and the reader is left wondering. This utopian impulse Baccolini and Moylan envisioned is, however, not a drive towards an utopian society in the traditional sense, but a desire to create a better world, as Edward James quoted John W. Campbell, writing to Eric Frank Russell: “‘The one thing that science-fictioneers have in common is a genuine and deep desire to create a better world.’ There is no contradiction there. ‘A better world’ is not the same as ‘an ideal world’” (JAMES; MENDLESOHN, 2003, p. 222). James argument makes an excellent point when he writes that most genre writers actively avoid utopias:

Most classic utopias fall far short of the standards expected of a novelist. Characterization is often non-existent: the protagonists merely fulfil their necessary roles, as visitor-listener, as utopian-lecturer or as token female. Large amounts of the utopian ‘novel’ can be taken up with what sf writers have called ‘info-dump’, where one character painstakingly explains the details of his world. The plot development is perfunctory: once the visitor has arrived, he is shown or merely told about one aspect of the society after another. By definition, there is no conflict in utopia; for a writer in popular fiction, brought up to believe that conflict is the essence of a plot, this is a problem. An achieved utopia may offer no fictional excitement; but the perpetual and unending struggle for a better world offers plenty of plot opportunities. (JAMES; MENDLESOHN, 2003, p. 222).

This is rather the case of classical Science Fiction novels that begin as utopias (and with great amounts of info-dumping) only to reveal how flawed the described society is – as such classics like Arthur C. Clarke's *The city and the stars* (1956) and *Childhood's end* (1953) and even recent young-adult Science fictional best-sellers like the *Uglies* trilogy (2005-2007) by Scott Westerfield. A classic line from a *Star Trek* episode from 1967 has Captain Kirk claiming: “Maybe we weren't made for Paradise, maybe we were meant to fight our way through . . . Maybe we can't stroll to the sound of the lute – we must march to the sound of drums” (JAMES; MENDLESOHN, 2003, p. 222).

The city & the city does not approach utopia and may not be a typical dystopia, but there are some traditional dystopian elements in the scenario, and they are not very difficult to be found. One of them is the portraying of “an alienated character's refusal” (BACCOLINI; MOYLAN, 2003, p. 7). In the novel, there are several characters who flirt with the kind of alienation that would lead to a suspension of disbelief towards the hegemonic order – believers in

the Orciny conspiracy like Mahalia Geary and David Bowden, for instance. The protagonist's alienation process is very gradual and he comes to accept the situation and to adapt to it. A real shock in terms of alienation is only truly portrayed when Mahalia's parents visit Ul Qoma in order to claim her body. Common American citizens, tourists in that mess of a city, they can't help but feeling estranged from that reality. Borlú describes their situation:

The Gearys both wore visitor's marks in Besz colours, but (...) they had no tourist training, no appreciation of the local politics of boundaries. (...) the dangerous of their breaching were high. (...)

Had the Gearys been regular tourists, they would have had to undergo mandatory training and passed the not-unstringent entrance exam, both its theoretical and practical role-play elements, to qualify for their visas. They would know, at least in outline, key signifiers of architecture, clothing, alphabet and manner, outlaw colours and gestures, obligatory details – and, depending on their Besz teacher, the supposed distinctions in national physiognomies – distinguishing Beszel and Ul Qoma and their citizens. They would know a little tiny bit (not that we local citizens knew much more) about Breach. Crucially, they would know enough to avoid obvious breaches of their own.

After a two-week or however-long-it-was course, no one thought visitors would have metabolized the deep prediscursive instinct for our borders that Besz and Ul Qomans have, to have picked up real rudiments of unseeing. But we did insist that they acted as if they had. We, and the authorities of Ul Qoma, expected strict overt decorum, interacting with, and indeed obviously noticing, our crosshatched neighbouring, city-state not at all. (p. 92-93)

The Gearys end up being expelled from the cities by Breach, due to their inconvenient meddling with the investigation. It is interesting to note some similarities with the cognitive estrangement principle as a Science Fiction pillar suggested by Fredric Jameson and Darko Suvin. In *The Cambridge companion to science fiction* (2003), theorist Istvan Csicsery-Ronay Jr. points out that:

In his most influential essay in sf theory, 'Progress versus Utopia' (1982), Jameson argued that science fictions are fantastic displacements of the present's ideological contradictions into the future; at best, major reflective works of sf can make us aware that we are unable to imagine any utopian transformations. (JAMES; MENDLESOHN, 2003, p. 121)

The city & the city may not be a straightforward science fiction text, although it is a narrative that evokes a reader response characteristic of SF, even in its portions that flirt with dystopian horizons. Taking this statement by Jameson into account, *The city* may be a conjunction of fantastical displacements, a physical and also an ideological one, where border tensions and an aversion against the Other entail a dystopian social order that dictates behavior and relations.

The infernal desire machines of Doctor Hoffman, on the other hand, is not a dystopia – even if some fantastical displacement and cognitive alienation may occur. Desiderio struggles against his own cognitive responses throughout the novel, and sometimes it even sounds as if he

is attempting to metabolize “the real rudiments of unseeing” as tourists in Beszel or Ul Qoma. Desiderio explains:

I myself decided the revenants were objects – perhaps personified ideas – which could think but did not exist. This seemed the only hypothesis which might explain my own case for I acknowledge them – I *saw* them; they screamed and whickered at me – and yet I did not believe in them. (p. 12)

Desiderio’s power of abstraction resides in his skepticism. He assumes it is perfectly possible to disbelieve ideas and so he decides to consider the “revenants” personified ideas and, as long as he doesn’t believe them, he is able to *unsee* – even if acknowledging them. He is even able to imagine his own “borders” by unseeing the ones Hoffman’s revenants summoned by tampering with space and time: “Past time occupied the city for whole days together, sometimes, so that the streets of a hundred years before were superimposed on nowadays streets and I made my way to the Bureau only by memory” (p. 16).

The concept of personified ideas echoes the meme concept, a popular and widespread term in the internet era, coined by Richard Dawkins in 1976 (actually four years after *Hoffman* was published). Philosopher Daniel Dennet explains, quoting *The Oxford English Dictionary* so as to define it, “an element of culture that may be considered to be passed on by non-genetic means”. Dennet adds to this definition, arguing that “we may conveniently settle on it as a general term for any culturally based replicator – if such there are” (DENNET, 2006, p. 345). In Carter’s novel, the replicator is actually sexually based (by means of Hoffman’s eroto-energy machines), but the results are generally the same, as the ideas personified are cultural products being materialized and spread out.

However, the problem with skepticism – at least in Desiderio’s case – is that you have to review your opinion once enough evidence has been collected to challenge your previous standpoints and that’s what happens to Desiderio when he starts being haunted (and indeed seduced) by Albertina, Hoffman’s daughter. In this sense he finally realizes that ideas may not be a mere reflection of reality, but ideas may actually create or shape reality. Sarah Gamble points out, regarding the Minister of Determination rules and regulations to distinguish reality from unreality, that:

The distinction is so involved in constituting reality that it is invalid to separate the authentically real from the constructed. In Hoffman’s world-view we are inside the postmodern ‘awareness’, as Hans Bertens puts it, ‘that representations create rather than reflect reality’. (GAMBLE, 2001, p. 75)

Gamble also quotes David Punter, when he calls attention to the term ‘persistence of vision’, repeated several times along the novel. He calls attention to two different and related meanings associated with this expression. In the first place, he suggests the ‘ambiguous persistence’, represented by Doctor Hoffman himself, “which achieves the alchemical transmutations of desire into material manifestation and thus threatens those limits of the conceivable which Desiderio ends up defending (GAMBLE, 2001, p. 77). But secondly, “it is persistence of vision which maintains our illusion of continuity in the world, which moulds our discrete presents into a coherent narrative” (GAMBLE, 2001, p. 77). We may even speculate that unseeing might be a kind of persistence of vision, since in order to *unsee* it is mandatory to *see* first – and it is a process oriented towards a rearranging of reality shaping a comprehensible continuity for those subjects indoctrinated to follow it. The main difference in both processes is that in *Hoffman* the process is an unconscious routine, even though minutely systematical, as it is an external influence that deceives the senses into shaping this ‘continuity’, something Desiderio was apparently immune to in the beginning of the narrative. In *The city* the process is a learned doctrine turned unconscious through brainwashing and enforced by the dystopic environment which is created to support it and which is also due to it.

Even the Determination Police in *Hoffman* is somewhat akin to Breach in *The city*. *Hoffman*’s police have the duty of enforcing the “reality status”, checking “probability ratings”, and arresting people that fail to comply with it. They have to resource to the “methods of a medieval witch-hunter” (p. 18), like trials by fire, and they also look “as if they had been recruited wholesale from a Jewish nightmare” (p. 18). Their omniscient “power” is more similar to that of an actual secret police in a dictatorial regime than to the supernatural boogeyman reputation flaunted by Breach. Both organizations, however, have similar duties of enforcing a pre-established status quo, supervising and rectifying any damages that endanger the ‘reality’ that employs them. In *Hoffman*, the surrealist dangers are concrete materializations of an external force seeking to undermine the establishment, something similar to *The city*’s dangers, which are no less external, namely the greedy corporation searching for lost artifacts or the naivety of foreigners that don’t belong to that established system and so are in continuous peril of breaching. The fundamental difference is that the Determination Police actually combats an invasion of mirages invoked by a mad scientist – they should be on the “good guys” side, but their methods are no less questionable than Hoffman’s own – while Breach works to maintain the

balance of a very tenuous construed social order, where the danger resides in its own fragile framework, where “unseeing” is the column that equilibrates a system that may fall at any minute due to any providential mishap.

It is also interesting to note the way both novels are heavily political and how they achieve their points through different paths. While Carter builds an openly surrealist situation transforming the surrealism in a rather political narrative injecting post-structuralist concepts in pulp scenario, Miéville creates a rather political concept – borders and how they relate to the “homeland” – and gives it a surrealist twist by exaggerating its political nature beyond the most demented thresholds. This symbolic scenario mingling surrealism and socio-political relativity of frontiers between the real and the conceived (by intellect or desire) is a fully accomplished result in both novels’ narratives.

In the beginning of *Hoffman*, an old and experienced Desiderio conjectures: “consider the nature of a city. It is a vast repository of time, the discarded times of all the men and women who have lived, worked, dreamed and died in the streets which grow like a willfully organic thing (...)” (p. 12). This “repository” is the source of most illusions the Doctor throws against Desiderio’s city, and the same repository could be considered a kind of unofficial history that the Doctor’s machines force to emerge – a myriad of subdued microcosmos emerging to occupy the same space and time where they once were discarded.

This same repository is a shady source in *The city & the city* as layers of history fragmented under two societies that split and whose pasts could only be unveiled if they tried to solve the puzzle their past had become. The fragility of their past is such that by the end of the novel it is revealed that what truth there was about the third city – Orciny – was altered by the deranged mind of Bowden, and his seminal work on the subject was mostly fiction. As in the best traditions of detective stories, the murder is solved in the end – Bowden was guilty, as Borlú figures it out (while accusing him, another old cliché of pulp detective novels):

‘But it was *Orciny* that was the point for you, right? Mahalia figured out that it was nonsense, Doctor Bowden.’

How much more perfect that unhistory would be, second time around, when he could construct the evidence not only from fragments in archives, not from the cross-reference of misunderstood documents, but could add to those planted sources, suggest partisan texts, even create messages—to himself, too, for her benefit and later for ours, that all the while he could dismiss as the nothings they were—from the nonplace itself. But still she worked out the truth. (p. 358)

And so we return to the definition of truth (and of the real) and, departing from the deep set of distinctions that rules the line of questioning pursued by our investigation (and that of the

narratives), the truth is here summed up and reduced to the most basic of the questions that foregrounds the detective genre: “who is guilty?”. Miéville does not fail to honor the tropes of the detective novel, the good and old “cop catches killer”.

Sometimes, even in a surrealist scenario, the most important truth may be as simple as that.

4 CONCLUSION OR ONE RING WON'T RULE THEM ALL (NOT ALWAYS)

The *Lord of the Rings* is by a large margin the most influential fantasy book ever, and has created an entire sub-genre of 'high' fantasy - 'sword and sorcery' epics of dragon-slaying warriors and beautiful maidens. A lot of it is dreadful, some of it is very good. Though much of this influence is down to the book's appearance at just the right time, it would be churlish to claim that there's nothing to admire in the book. The constant atmosphere of melancholy is intriguing. There are superb, genuinely frightening monsters, and set pieces of real power.

China Miéville

(<http://www.socialistreview.org.uk/article.php?article number=7813>, January 2002)

There are plenty of reasons to be grateful to Tolkien, of course – and reasonable reasons to be ticked off at him, too: critique, after all has its place. But so does admiration. Tolkien never lacks for encomia, but that's no reason not to repeat those most deserved, or, even more, to stress neglected reasons for justified and fervent praise.

China Miéville

(<http://www.omnivoracious.com/2009/06/there-and-back-again-five-reasons-tolkien-rocks.html>, June 2009)

In the far-away galaxy of genre literature *fandom*, once in a while some author is able to wormhole his way towards familiar shores. It is always, however, a dangerous ride – more like the Argonauts' journey than an Enterprise's faster-than-light jump or *Doctor Who*'s Tardis hopping through time. Some authors – most of them, actually – won't even make the effort to try, after all, the genre is a cozy and comfy zone where everyone can feel safe while abiding by the conventions dictated aeons ago by their forefathers.

Even though paying the deserved tribute to this same forefathers, from J. R. R. Tolkien to Frank Herbert, as we have seen in the previous chapters, China Miéville establishes himself as a new author that resorts to non-usual sources for the mentality and orientation he will imbue in and for his Fantasy and Science Fiction. The ties that can be spotted between his work and

Angela Carter's are more than incidental, but a convergence of interests and common visions both authors share about politics, society, ideas, genre and fiction alike.

In the works investigated in this dissertation, we were able to trace a shared tendency towards the depiction of the marginal heroes, the ex-centrics, as this issue is exposed in *Nights at the circus* and *Perdido Street Station*. Both authors explore the links alterity and hybridity are able to offer, two similar concepts that may be supplementary if explored in a fantasy scenario. This is a golden opportunity frequently neglected by the standard default-fantasy writer, who does not worry about the manner of representation he or she chooses for the Other. Miéville and Carter, however, are very sensitive and keen to establish these kinds of ties.

Identities defined by pre-conceived roles are a major issue contested in both narratives. These roles are structured around a physical feature of hybridity, the wings both characters – Fevvers and Yagharek – display. In the case of Fevvers, gender biased roles influence her hybrid nature throughout her life and limit the choices she finds in her path. She, however, refuses all these roles thrust upon her and, more than a woman, she fashions herself as a symbolic representation of women, from the moment the role of Winged Victory is imposed on her onwards, she negotiates among these roles in order to grow, as if always striving for a next 'level', aiming for a day when "all women will have wings", just like her. Fevvers' goal, as noted by Paulina Palmer and Aidan Day, is a social order where woman are no longer confined to male-oriented stereotypes, which, as both critics point out, is a kind of utopian impulse that sets the tone to the novel's open ending.

As a matter of fact, Yagharek's own drama resonates more with Fevvers' in their winged essence. As a non-human race, his identity is defined by the traits that make him non-human. In any traditional fantasy RPG setting, non-human races are a bundle of shared characteristics and none has a particular identity (elves are serene and snobbish, dwarves are burly and rustic), so Miéville twists this retrograde concept of Otherness. While the Garuda race Yagharek belongs to may be a RPG-like bird-humanoid hybrid, Miéville shows us a Garuda which had his 'race'-oriented identity severed along with his wings. Yagharek becomes the version of a beardless dwarf in a Dungeons & Dragons setting, a wingless bird-human hybrid, an absurdity, an Other for humans who consider him alien and, for his own community, an aberration. His quest unveils towards finding his lost identity, and, recruiting scientist Isaac Grimnebulin for the task, he is

willing to pay any price whatsoever. Combining Yagharek's necessity and Isaac's own scientific ambitions, they unwillingly unleash the threat that almost wipes out all life in New Crobuzon.

Interestingly, both characters are heavily symbolic in nature. In the case of Fevvers, her nature as symbol is always attached to her gender in such way that feathers and gender run together, denaturalizing traditional gender roles but also playfully using them to fulfill her own demythologizing plans, so Fevvers becomes *Leda and the swan* incarnated, the Cupid, the Winged Victory, a damsel in distress, the angel in every men's dream, but she chooses her own path, which is independent of her gender or feathers.

Yagharek is fashioned after a divinity of the Hindu pantheon, the Garuda, symbol of impetuosity and strength, blended with the tragic doom of Icarus, with severed wings. He becomes the "landbound Garuda" due to an unmentionable crime, suffering the condemnation and penalty his own people considered fair.

Due to the norms established by genre approaches, the hybridity in Fevvers is looked upon more uncomfortably. *Nights at the circus* tends more towards magical realism than genre Fantasy, so the mundane scenario reacts to Fevvers nature with a blend of awe, terror and skepticism – that's why she is paraded in a freak show, kidnapped by a mad scientist or ends up in a circus. As *Perdido Street Station* is a straightforward genre fantasy – with its interdimensional spiders and Hell ambassadors - Yagharek is just another hybrid in the fauna that inhabits the city. He can even pass for a common Garuda using a cloak equipped with prop wings, a crutch where his empty identity can lean on. However, what Yagharek is trying to remedy is the penalty he was assign for his crime, the rape of a fellow Garuda.

So, unlike Fevvers, whose "crime" had been only to be born a winged woman in the land of wingless males, Yagharek had his identity severed due to a despicable act he committed. And when Isaac is made aware of it, he decides he will not help him become a "concrete individual" again. This centered subject – concrete – is essentially a rational and humanist-centered notion, may be best applied to the elves and dwarves of Dungeons & Dragons or Tolkien, but not fit for a postmodern subject, aware of its fluidity and decentered nature. Yagharek, now a fractured subject suffering the hazards of trying to articulate his own condition, endures a rite of passage where he tries to cleanse himself of his dead identity, ripping off his feathers in order to "put himself together again".

Fevvers does not need this kind of redemption – she actually inflicts it on Walser, a skeptic she teach how to accept – and believe – in a different future for women and men. In this sphere Walser is more akin to Yagharek, but the violence Walser perpetrated against women was metaphorical – iconic – a reflection of the patriarchal society he lived on, while Yagharek committed actual rape, the utmost material patriarchal violence conceived by men as male dominance. So it is rather proportional that Yagharek’s redemption would be necessary as self-flailing and self-mutilation while, on the other hand, Walser’s finally would sleep with Fevvers – even though surrendering to Fevvers a dominating role, submitting himself to the “woman on top” position, which is not as painful a redemption after all.

Carter and Miéville also refuse to be enslaved by narrow genre mentality. Even though Carter declared her admiration for writers of the so called New Wave of Science Fiction – and the surrealist tinges in her works reflects that, and Miéville is an outspoken champion for the genre literature, their work cannot be reduced to a certain amount of tropes and clichés as Hollywood and television Science Fiction (or Fantasy) commonly is. On the contrary, they make use of these same tropes to subvert reader’s expectancy and fulfill their own agenda – if “all fantasy is political, especially when it thinks it is not”, as Mark Bould and Sherryl Vint wrote, Carter and Miéville are fully aware of the kind of device they have at their disposal.

In the parallels found in *The infernal desire machines of Doctor Hoffman* and *Perdido Street Station* in relation to this subject, there was a clear inclination to subvert the genre and its tropes. Miéville’s identification with the New Weird subgenre is, in itself, evidence of this trend – the New Weird manifesto is one of subversion, aiming at the idyllic and manichaeistic version of Fantasy as photocopied from Tolkien and C. S. Lewis (something which Michael Moorcock called “Epic Pooh”, in an allusion to *Winnie-the-Pooh*), and recasting old tropes in new scenarios, namely scenarios of urban nature, political awareness and genre blurring. Carter is also conscious of the genre tropes, in special the ones made popular by pulp novels, and makes her main antagonist a caricature of the pulp villain.

There is also an interesting postmodernist approach to the science in their science fiction, as both authors are usually more identified with the Fantasy genre (although, of course, the lines are blurred here). They are both more interested in the poetics of the science jargon than in following the rules, or the “lens of plausibility” that envelopes the speculation of science in a hard Science Fiction story from ‘heavyweights’ like Isaac Asimov or Arthur C. Clarke. However,

they make use of jargon and theorization cunningly, creating imaginary sciences and fictional disciplines, applying post-structuralist theorization and intertextual connections to lend a kind of formal demeanor when framing these new sciences. As authors with a tendency to defy impulses for totalization, they use this artifice strategy to undermine the academic and scientific master narrative, creating alternative ‘knowledge’.

Miéville draws heavily from his academic background – frequently with a touch of humor: “a scholar can never get mere wrongness get in the way of the theory”, says the academic from *Embassytown* (MIEVILLE, 2011, p.41), and he makes his Moving Field Unified Theory, from *Perdido Street Station*, sounds scientific, even if based on something as abstract as the idea of a ‘crisis’ energy. Carter, as Sarah Gamble wrote, sounds like a postmodern theorist going on about the depthlessness of the signs, the representations that constitute the world and the untenability of an objective reality, while creating her own abstract idea of eroto-energy, where desire and sexual ‘energy’ would shape reality.

In this manner, the characteristic postmodern approach of installing and subverting is used to the best extent by Miéville and Carter, as they adopt science and academic jargon in order to parody the ‘instituted knowledge’ of academia and employ genre tropes to subvert the genre itself.

Miéville has also dabbled in genre criticism when facing the Marxist SF theory. He tackled Darko Suvin’s notion of cognitive estrangement and Fredric Jameson’s and Carl Freedman’s theorization that spun off from it. More as a defense of the Fantasy genre than anything else, Miéville argued against the misconceived dismissing of the Fantasy genre on the grounds of a supposed ‘ideological estrangement’, as Marxist SF theory often affirmed that Fantasy lacked the cognitive awareness that would render it something more than “irrationalist estrangement”, a kind escapism. In opposition, SF would bear a supposed ‘cognitive awareness’, which Miéville points out that is based on an ideologically loaded rationalism, since the science based ‘cognitive effect’ they claim as a mandatory experience is derived from an external authority.

Although Carter has never dwelled in genre criticism, *Hoffman* antagonizes the rationalist post-Enlightenment myth of reason associated with progress and civilization by means of a kind of radical skepticism, something that sounds similar to what Miéville preaches should be applied to Marxist critic towards Science Fiction criticism, in order for genre Fantasy finally be accepted

as deserving of scrutiny and not scorn. As she states in the interview that sums up her views on Speculative Fiction, Carter's own "cognitive estrangement" sums up in a "system of continuing inquiry". She means the reader-writer-text relation as part of the same process of asking questions derivative of former questions, while never feeling really satisfied with the answers.

The fact that both scientists' struggle with – or against – dreams is a central point in the novels. Isaac has to fight against the seemingly unstoppable dream-eating moths, while Hoffman uses dreams, desires and the unconscious to alter reality. "*Doctor Hoffman* is a novel 'of' as well as 'about' the Surrealist imagination!" (GAMBLE: 2001, p. 81), and *Perdido*, while a little more concerned with abiding by genre tropes and reflecting Miéville's own political sense, also pays homage to the surrealists in the kind of imagery it summons to construct its scenario and characters.

In Miéville's *The city & the city* another interesting point of convergence with *Hoffman* is a central theme of the novel. Both novels display the way the real is construed and subordinated by discourses. In *Hoffman* it is a machine that is responsible for materializing dreams and desires and shaping reality in such manner that most people get 'lost' in it. In *The city & the city* it is a socially construed convention that imbues psychological blind spots in two societies that are able to occupy the same physical space without acknowledging each other, unseeing.

These defiance of the idealization of reality finds resonance with Jean Baudrillard's concept of hyperreality, echoed in the quote from Baudrillard that best explains Hoffman's powers: "the real is produced from miniaturized units, from matrices, memory banks and command modules – and with these it can be reproduced an indefinite number of times" (JAMES; MENDLESOHN, 2012, p. 119). Carter literalizes this concept in the peep show episode, when Desiderio discovers the box of 'magic samples', and its links to the core of Hoffman's powers are revealed. Hoffman built a 'hyperreality generator' and it seems to have followed a blueprint based on Baudrillard's concepts. Desiderio's indifference turns to be a protection against it, but, however, his personal "reality" is not invulnerable and ends up slowly eroded by the invasion of Hoffman's daughter and her seductive appeal.

In Miéville's narrative, the logic of 'unseeing' is an inversion of the hyperrealizing (or else it might be the capability of hyperrealizing something *away*): "In the mirror of the car I saw Mr. Geary [an American tourist] watch a passing truck. I unsaw it because it was in Ul Qoma." (p. 94). Following Baudrillard's theory, the tool of unseeing would provide the ability to render

the physical space metaphysically unconceived or derealized, even if it is materially right there. On the other hand, *Hoffman* presents an attempt to sink reality in a simulated other, a literal hemorrhage as hyperreality tries to take over and gorge upon what was human space.

Further on, Baudrillard argues that both these processes – the ‘invasion’ of a simulated hyperreality and the derealization of reality – are bound together, especially concerning more recent Science Fiction texts, as the “real” is day by day becoming more “science-fictional”, so the simulation will be dressed as real, as derealization precedes hyperrealizing in order to “reinvent the real as fiction” (BAUDRILLARD, 1991, <http://www.depauw.edu/sfs/backissues/55/audrillard55art.htm>). Naturally, both authors are interested in realism, not a “bleak realism”, but as a kind of reinvention. Carter said, “the question that I ask myself, (...) they are very much to do with reality” (CARTER, 2010, p. ix), while Miéville stated that he wanted to make his cities “real and full-blooded (...) to make them feel plausible and half-remembered, as if they were uneasily not quite familiar rather than radically strange” (MANAUGH, 2011, <http://bldgblog.blogspot.com.br/2011/03/unsolving-city-interview-with-china.html>).

Both novels also express radically postmodernist approaches towards the grand narratives conceived by Jean-François Lyotard, as their plots are in some way engaged in portraying a collapse of the legitimization of those master narratives based in a totalizing discourse of oppressive nature. In Miéville’s novel, the societies comprised of Beszel and Ul Qoma are held hostage by their shared mentality of derealizing their surroundings and this discourse is dully enforced by the bogeymen-police organization of Breach – and Breach is also a by-product of the same discourse, once it derives its omnipotent and omniscient “powers” from the narrative. Breach is the materialization of that discourse, it embodies all social and semiotical meanings that tie the cities together and enforce their status quo. The novel portrays the event when Breach is finally challenged by protagonist Borlú and “demythologized” as the detective finds himself freed from the psychological blindfolds that obscured the world for him and for his people and is able to finally judge the situation on his own.

The fictionality of discourses taken as real – including the totalizing master narratives – is also present in *Hoffman*. Carter, as someone openly in the “demythologizing business”, distrusts and deconstructs those metanarratives. She does not create a specific microcosm, as Miéville did when designing Beszel and Ul Qoma, but she aims more generally towards the post-

Enlightenment myth of reason, the rationalist ultimate truth that materializes in the ‘real’. In this sense, Carter portrays the clash of both armies, as Aidan Day noted that Desiderio represents the rejection of the “ultimate implications of a postmodern world-view” while Hoffman is “a species of archpostmodernist”, taking to extremes the deconstruction impulse in such a radical way that it becomes totalizing as well, the liberation of senses, labels and desires is a means for a totalizing goal, achieving “absolute authority to establish a regime of total liberation” (p. 36), or, as Desiderio assures, “I could not see how he could have got that notion of liberation inside his skull. I was sure he only wanted power.” (p. 250).

Another very peculiar distinction from both writers (and in all the novels read) is the inclination to practice the blurring of genre boundaries. This is a way also to challenge absolutist discourses – genre is, after all, a totalizing discourse that can behave in oppressive manner if not held carefully, and it is in the core of postmodern narrative practice to defy those frontiers. In *the city & the city*, not only Beszel’s and Ul Qoma’s boundaries are blurred, as Miéville fashions a detective procedural narrative with a noir ambience, but sets a scenario that echoes the Todorovian notion of the Fantastic and evokes a cognitive alienation response from the reader similar to the reaction Marxist Science Fiction critics deem as mandatory. It is also easy to pinpoint some dystopian elements, even though *The city* steers away from the traditional dystopian novel tradition.

Hoffman sits in the boundary of Science Fiction and Fantasy, its surrealist tinges suggesting an approximation with the New Wave of British Science Fiction from the 1960s and 1970s (especially with J. G. Ballard and Michael Moorcock as declared influences) and also displaying pulp roots. To make things even more blurry, Sarah Gamble even goes as far as spotting historiographic metafiction elements as the battle between conceptions assumed as ‘legit’ and Hoffman’s desire to delegitimize them rages on. In this sense, *Hoffman* can be (also) read as a commentary on how “both history and fiction are discourses, human constructs, signifying systems, and both derive their major claim to truth and identity” (HUTCHEON, 1988, p. 93), which, then, would also surely include *The city & the city* under the same label, even if both novels are galaxies away from our historiographic metafiction usual standards. All in all, *Hoffman* is a novel that is best described as Speculative Fiction, an umbrella term where Carter used to feel comfortable with and with such broad definition that could encompass all fiction not straightforwardly realist.

At the same time, *Nights at the circus* flashes the same blend of different genres, being usually widely regarded as magical realism, it would fit under Speculative Fiction umbrella as well as in the Fantasy genre. *Perdido Street Station*, on the other hand, is a novel that has its own subgenre, being considered the landmark that defined the New Weird, which is, in itself, a blurred mix of previous Speculative Fiction subgenres with an outspoken agenda of overturning the fossilized clichés of the Fantasy genre. So, from Urban Fantasy to Science Fiction and Lovecraftian horror, the New Weird is conscious of its genre-like nature and, from *Perdido Street Station* onwards, it has already joined the genre fiction fauna in the cauldron that defines tropes and market labels so sought of by fans and publishers alike.

When Tolkien opened his Fantasy epic with the famous One Ring inscription poem, he probably never thought he would become a market label. People referring to Fantasy – in special readers of mainstream literature – are usually mentioning Tolkien-cloned generic heirs. Terms like ‘epic’ Fantasy or ‘high’ Fantasy became a derogatory label to designate those faint photocopies of its main patriarch. Fantasy, after all, liking it or not, is mirrored on *The lord of the rings* – all Fantasy writers are conscious that they are going to be inevitably compared with The Old Professor, be it for stating a rejection or an acquiescence to His heritage. This is a peculiarity that won’t happen in Science Fiction, for instance, as no writer feels the responsibility of carrying in his or her shoulders the Oedipal resentment of reflecting the ‘Big Daddy’ – not even with the genre-defining masters the likes of Isaac Asimov, Robert Heinlein and Arthur C. Clarke.

However, as Bakhtin wrote, genre evolves: it is “reborn and renewed at every new stage in the development of literature and in every individual work of a given genre” (MAKARYK, 1993, p. 84). While for a long time Fantasy kept mostly fossilized in reproducing its forefather masterwork as a kind of blueprint, writers not identified with the Fantasy genre – as Angela Carter – were reinventing it outside the genre ghetto and receiving the praise of the specialized critic, such praise genre writers are usually so resentful of. Then it came the day when a generation of writers saw the necessity of turning their x-ray spectacles from the wasteland of genre and to the experimentalism of mainstream literature in order to recruit that diversity for the genre legions.

So, in this reinvented genre, the task of taking the One Ring to Mount Doom belongs to ‘phantasists’ that won’t accept the most usual quest fulfilling paths anymore. The evil lord is not

so evil, the hero is not the docile sheep that embarks in a journey just to accomplish his inborn fate.

Well, at least not without questioning 'why'.

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