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Socialism and Fantasy

China Miéville's Fables of Race and Class

CHRISTOPHER KENDRICK

Among a number of contemporary science and speculative fiction writers who identify as left-wing, China Miéville stands out, not only for the quality of his literary production, but also for the critical character of his political commitment, dedicated equally to socialism and to fantasy. In addition to his fictive works, he has written articles and given lectures on the nature and value of speculative and fantasy fiction; edited a collection of essays on Marxism and fantasy in an issue of the journal *Historical Materialism*; and, not least, published a list of “Fifty Sci-Fi and Fantasy Works Every Socialist Should Read.”¹ I wish to discuss here the form and thematics of the early novels known (after the alternate world in which they are set) as the Bas-Lag trilogy—which remains, if you take it as a single work, his most ambitious and memorable achievement.² But since Miéville is a serious critic and advocate of fantasy fiction, I will approach the books with a brief discussion of his aesthetic positions and program, gathered from essays and talks as well as from his literary works.³

Miéville began his career in the late 1990s, doing battle on behalf of fantasy on two fronts. First, he was concerned to claim, against the influential examples of J. R. R. Tolkien and C. S. Lewis, that historically informed fantasy fiction need not be socially and politically conservative. If those authors’ works went about aligning the repertoire of romance symbols and conventions with a hierarchical, organic society, Miéville’s productions, drawing conventions and imagery more from the Gothic and Poe than from medieval romance, instead seek to instill it with a democratic and egalitarian spirit.

On the other front, Miéville has taken as a target the modern distinction between science fiction and fantasy. This division is still sometimes found organizing the shelves of bookstores, and has long been enforced by advocates of science fiction’s supposedly superior “critical” value. It is not, Miéville would allow, that the distinction does not obtain in some cases and times, and not that science fiction works cannot possess

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remarkable powers of what Darko Suvin called “cognitive estrangement.”⁴ But to oppose critical to expressive, estranging to wish-fulfilling functions, and align them with different genres, is to misrecognize and to instrumentalize the nature of romance, an older genre fundamental to both kinds of writing. Miéville would endorse the general tendency of the last few decades, in which the more inclusive category of “speculative fiction” has begun to replace both “science fiction” and “fantasy.”

But the genre designation that he and several other writers in fact prefer is “Weird Fiction,” a term coined by H. P. Lovecraft. Miéville understands the Weird as registering a shift in the quality of the fantastic or monstrous that dates to the period of Taylorization, in which monsters came to be defined against newly refined forms of positivism and instrumental reason.⁵ In a further attempt at generic definition, Miéville has described the supernatural object of Weird Fiction as the “abcanny.”⁶ Whereas the uncanny designates the vengeful return, as if from within, of something deeply familiar, something willfully repressed from an original social project, the abcanny involves a return from without of the unfamiliar, of something we would only like to think we once knew, of something left out of the system or plan from the beginning. One might tentatively see the abcanny as a way of reframing the “underside of the system” as the outside, or in terms of psychic or social limits. But it is important to observe that in the essay in which it is introduced, the abcanny not only figures as the opposing term to the uncanny, but as a first step toward a splintering of the monstrous or fantastic, a re-categorization of the uncanny into many kinds of dread (the subcanny, katacanny, etc.), an unstable shifting among multiple heterogeneous affects.

Miéville’s emphasis on the many different sources of dread and wonder, of the Weird, might be connected to the astonishing variety of his own literary output. He especially does not believe in repeating himself from work to work, but the stricture also obtains within works, and none has been so internally various as the Bas-Lag trilogy.⁷ The fantastic aesthetic of the trilogy is one of florid overload, of one (or two, or three) too many monsters, and the first of the three novels, *Perdido Street Station* (2000), is copious to the point of exhaustion. I want to suggest that the principal aim of *Perdido* is, first, to inspire awe at what two centuries of capitalist development have done to the magical narrative of the romance genre, and at the new images thrown up of hope and dread; and second, to undertake a kind of comparative mapping, a testing and expanding, of the repertory of fantasy conventions and impulses. But before discussing the symbolic overload of *Perdido*, I need to remark on two basic features of the world of the trilogy as a whole.

One is that the alternate history of the novels, focused on New Crobuzon, a large polyglot city-state, is set, somewhat roughly and unevenly, in the stage of early industrial capitalism. New Crobuzon has advanced to the steam engine, and to the centrally motivated search for more efficient sources of energy and more productive technologies. But since this is an alternate history, steam power is supplemented by magical (or as the books have it, “thaumaturgic”) means of production unknown to us, and the search for new energy seems to be mainly conducted through magical science. Indeed, the story’s romantic premise is not just that science has not achieved the positivist form familiar to us today, but that it depends on, not breaks with, magic.⁸ Far more than the technology of real-world capitalism, the technology of the Bas-Lag novels relates to human powers and the body—to ends both harrowing and uplifting.

Meanwhile, the other big difference from capitalist history as we know it is not so much economic as social-political. Bas-Lag is a world of domains and regions rather than nation-states, whose map is dotted with blank or grey spots. New Crobuzon is not a national capital or city but a city-state, looking to solidify and expand an empire with still undefined borders. But if the novels’ world is disparately populated and unevenly known, the city is congested and densely trafficked throughout its districts. Though perhaps as reminiscent of modern Lagos or Mexico City as of nineteenth-century London, it has not advanced to the kinds of gating or walling off practiced in either city, and private cars seem to be absent. Thus it remains walkable and experientially knowable in a way that no “real” modern metropolis can be, an intricately imageable city of neighborhoods. This interconnection is a main source of the immense utopian appeal of the city, for all its considerable violence and disorder.

The other basic feature of the alternate-history setup that needs remarking on is the expansion of the category of *homo sapiens*—the presence in the world of several “intelligent” species other than the human. Isaac dan den Grimnebulin, the chief protagonist of *Perdido Street Station*, though unusual in being a maverick scientist, is otherwise an “ordinary” human. But Yagharak, the character who hires Isaac for the job that leads to his breakthrough invention, is a garuda, an eagle-man, who has been deprived of his wings and is desperate to fly again; Isaac’s girlfriend Lynn, a talented artist whose medium is saliva, is a khepri, an insect-person with a human body and a scarab head. Other characters are of similarly mixed species, most prominently the vodyanoi, or frog-people, and cactacae, or cactus-people. The idea seems to be that vodyanoi are to frogs as humans are to apes, and so on. These quasi-human species are given distinctive cultural characteristics: the cactacae are exceptionally

nostalgic and exclusive, their demeanor macho and phlegmatic, while the khepri, oriented toward tribal reproduction, indulge males and assign females all the work. Nevertheless, these cultures, and especially their individual representatives, are not as different as they should be, on consideration: there is a necessary “high literary” moment of disappointment written into their characterization. Still, the routine existence and action of these other human species effectively dramatizes Spinoza’s old claim that no one really knows what bodies can do; it introduces a sense of untapped human potential, of the variety of physical energies and powers, that is rare even in fantasy.

At the same time, this enlargement of the human tends to collapse ethnicity and race, and figure race as species-difference, to remarkable social effects. It decidedly does not, however, occlude the configuring power of social classes or of class struggle. Rather, precisely because species-difference is involved in everything, the maxim that class is mediated through traditional differences such as race and gender becomes much more palpable in the everyday life of New Crobuzon than in, say, an American city today. The hybrid social group in New Crobuzon that bears a special relationship to the common denominator of class is the numerous category of felons, whether political or social. New Crobuzon’s practice, a magical-early industrial improvement on traditional conventions of shaming, is to surgically “re-make” the bodies of criminals—sometimes capriciously, more often in ways that reflect their crimes, and then to enslave or indenture them to hard labor. So, for example, a mother who killed her child has the infant’s arms grafted to her forehead. Tanner Sack, a main protagonist of *The Scar*, has tentacles planted in his chest, for reasons left unspecified.

As a state-produced laboring caste, the most stigmatized of hybrid races, the category of the Remade tellingly figures the paradox of the historical creation of the capitalist working class: that the separation of workers from the means of production, the horrible degradation associated with dispossession, is necessarily more than the mere destruction of old powers; it also means the terrible creation of new ones, of individual and collective potential. It thus makes possible the remarkably charged revolutionary figure of re-possession: of the re-assumption of the damage done by immiseration and oppression as new forms of individual and social power. So, at the level of the individual, Tanner Sack, once rescued by the floating pirate city of Armada, hires a “thauma-surgeon” to complete his remaking by supplying him with gills, and as an amphibian becomes a much more skilled and valuable worker. And *Iron Council* features the most memorable act of collective re-possession, when the workers of the

Transcontinental Railroad revolt and redirect trains and tracks into the wilderness. The key moment of this mini-revolution comes when the “normal” human workers accept the equal participation, and indeed leadership, of the Remade cohort, who through this desegregation become remade in a deeper sense, their disfigurements now the sign of a new collective power.

These two basic features of the alternate historical world are essential to the way the weirdest characters in the books, the monsters, are apprehended and thematically registered. One may see them as part of a strategy to make the Weird and irrational more socially comprehensible. That the world of the books recalls early industrialism means both that their plots look toward our present, and also, just as tellingly, suggest analogies with the present, between mercantilism then and financialization now. The “postmodern” theme of hybridity is firmly situated within the coming logic of class, with the result that Miéville’s monsters have more class resonance than monsters customarily do. By no means am I saying that these figures are completely explicable; the suggestion is rather that comparatively, they palpably reflect long-term social antagonisms, that the hope and dread they rouse clearly responds to capitalist contradictions current and future, as well as ancient.

Perdido Street Station tests this last proposition by what I have called a strategy of symbolic overload. The novel includes so many revampings of various fantasy conventions as to overwhelm the speculative impulse to social-allegorical mapping. I will reprise an essential, not exhaustive list of these fantasies. First, there are the slake-moths. Close to ordinary dragon size, these mutant insects have been acquired by the New Crobuzon state for possible military applications, but on proving too dangerous and unwieldy, are sold off for quick profit to underworld connections (except for the one that escapes and returns to rescue the other four). The slake-moths are nocturnal hunters, provoking and feeding on human ecstasy. Their wings, when unfurled and waved, produce such mesmerizing patterns of movement and color as to freeze in rapture any nearby mammal with a taste for beauty. The moths then suck up the enflamed, enthralled psyche of the unfortunate consumer, leaving a living but empty body behind. What the moths cannot digest proves to be a potent, highly addictive drug, whose high evidently offers a coarsened trace of the victims’ ecstatic fates. It is this “dreamshit” that interests the gangsters. Once the escaped slake-moths are preying freely by night, the substance too is liberated, and settles like fog over the city, bringing bad dreams and disturbing sleep. The moths are probably Miéville’s best known invention, and as complex a creation as they are sensational.

It seems roughly right to say that they are modern vampires (though without the humanity of the traditional vampire), updated to reflect the Frankfurt School's "consciousness industry."⁹

Second, there is the crisis engine. A long-term project of Isaac's, the proof of his theory that things both natural and social are animated by a contradictory energy that presses them to turn into their opposites, the device is funded by Yagharek, who wants desperately to fly. The crisis engine is a machine and not a monster, and takes its place in a line of science-fiction progress or time-travel machines, of which Wells's *The Time Machine* is the most famous example. Its pseudo-scientific premise, however, is not the equivalence of space and time, but rather the idea of the dialectic, not just of history or society but of nature. The crisis engine is as important to Isaac for proving the truth of the dialectic of nature as for what it can do (which is never made entirely clear, though the machine evidently cannot control the course of history).

This leaves space for another magical character: the Weaver, a huge spider-creature who seems to be a kind of cosmic nomad, inhabiting a world behind our world, a multi-dimensional web, and who creates, it seems, less by producing more web than by interfering in the dimensions' semi-independence, by a sort of crazed poetic cutting and pasting. Both an update of the classical fates and a benign avatar of the abcanny, the Weaver evidently never stops thinking aloud multi-dimensionally: the jammed syntax of his speech offers unsettling testimony to his commitment, as creator, to aesthetic principles of beauty.¹⁰ It is a sign of the city administration's desperation, as well as of the Weaver's power, that it should attempt to contract with the Weaver to help defend itself against the slake-moths. Likewise it speaks of the Weaver's benignity, or at least his good taste, that he sides with Isaac and the crisis engine, rather than the city leaders, as Isaac's main mission shifts to saving the city from the moths.

Yet it requires still another science-fiction fantasy scenario, a fourth monster, to manage this. New Crobuzon steam-magic technology includes the use of robots in various service roles, and they have recently made the crossover to consciousness, and straightaway achieved that intense clandestine solidarity that often characterizes fantasies of awakening artificial intelligence. After being saved by a robot from capture by the city authorities, Isaac and crew make contact with the Construct Council at its center of operations, an island junkyard—the head of the Council is a huge robot rigged together from scrap—and undertake to use the crisis engine, wired to the Council as power-source but not grafted into its intelligence, to kill the slake-moths. The Construct Council's motive for the alliance is evidently partly that it still needs people to

keep on; but as Isaac realizes, it is also keen to possess or know the crisis engine, for its own evolutionary, and presumably anti-, rather than simply post-human, ends.

To this group, two further magical figures must be added, both variants of the Remade motif. Mr. Motley, the principal gangster figure, has compounded his original ethnic difference by having himself not so much surgically enhanced as overpopulated, adding to his body an array of limbs and organs. The self-made man as monster, he functions as an outlaw accoutrement of the state, offering the city militia his protection; he also embodies the very danger of “too much” that Miéville risks in the novel. Meanwhile, another kind of populist figure, Jack Half-a-Prayer, is an escaped prisoner turned legendary anarchist interventionist, the mantis claw given him for an arm on his Remaking now serving as a weapon and leftist symbol. His anti-police activities, though chosen and enacted on his own, are evidently supported by a radical underground, and he has become a figure of revolutionary hope. It is significant that, though otherwise marginal to the plot, he plays a key role in the book’s biggest climax, the confrontation between Isaac’s crisis engine and the slake-moths on the roof of Perdido Street Station, the city’s rail hub, in which the engine gluts and bursts three of the slake-moths with dialectically enhanced psychic foodstuff. Half-a-Prayer miraculously appears from nowhere to fend off the New Crobuzon militia, sent to capture Isaac and the crisis engine.

The book’s title comes to refer both to this climactic salvation of the city, as well as to the place, the huge train station that occupies the center, if anything does, of the teeming city-state. It thus conveys that the book coheres in an action as well as in a setting, a place of endless tangled circulation. The ambiguity relates to the theme of too-much, of fantastic overload, and to the attitude assumed toward it. On the one hand, the overload is felt as a problem; the book refers to our (late-capitalist?) culture as besotted by the known unknowns—the uncanny, uncanny, etc.—that become monsters. On the other hand, insofar as class consciousness in the novel exists, it is largely in the pile-up of the monsters, which asks then for narrative analysis, organization, and reconfiguration.

One finds such an analysis in the plot itself, which pits the popular alliance around the crisis engine against the slake-moths and the city establishment. A telling moment comes early in this story, just after the city authorities have used the city militia to crush a strike staged by the dockworkers, a mainly vodyanoi union that, largely for “racial” reasons, receives no assistance from other workers’ organizations. Seemingly as part of the clean-up operation, the headquarters of a militant press, the Runagate Rampant, is trashed by militia and

its editor thrown in prison. But the strike proves to be a mere cover: the authorities do not want the editor because of his contacts with the real political movers behind the strike, but because of a small article in the inside pages of a recent issue, reporting rumors of strange creatures that escaped the city jurisdiction as a result of corruption, now afflicting random citizens. To the editor's surprise, they want to know what he knows about the slake-moths. This shift of focus, and crisis, not only marks the supersession of the strike plot by the horror story of the moths; it also indicates that the moth plot is only a continuation by other, broader fantastic means of the social struggle for the city. It thus helps to make Isaac's crew, the alliance around the crisis engine on the roof of Perdido Street Station, legible as a working-class alliance, and its rescue of the city's imagination an epiphany of class consciousness, the manifestation of the working class as popular in the strong sense of being the class for survival.

The other two books in the trilogy continue this narrative meditation on the relation of fantasy to class struggle and revolution. In *Perdido Street Station*, the thematics of revolution are in a sense displaced into the adventure story: at its end, the average citizen of New Crobuzon has suffered and been saved without knowing why, without taking part in the action. In *The Scar* (2002) and *Iron Council* (2004), by comparison, revolutionary adventures are collective affairs. Certainly the city-state in *The Scar* is itself an actor. The floating pirate city of Armada, constructed from a series of ships chained together, must fight for its existence, and so knows itself as agent, in a way that New Crobuzon and other cities cannot. Although (or rather because) it is largely based on plunder for its subsistence and indeed its population, Armada enjoys an intense equality and diversity, its economy socialist and its polity a federated republic, that is utopian from the perspective of New Crobuzon, or from our own. What is striking and paradoxical about this book's revolution is that it takes the form not of a transformation of social relations, but of a return to political first principles. Spontaneously led by Tanner Sack, an impressed Remade New Crobuzoner who, like most of the citizens of the immigrant city, becomes a patriotic native, the sailor rank-and-file overthrow the leaders who have plunged the city into a wild gamble for power, bringing an end to the book's complicated main plot.

What stands out about the monsters and magical technology of *The Scar* is not their sheer quantity, but the way they form part of what Fredric Jameson has called a "mode of production aesthetic," the way they correspond to the Armadan social formation. Armada's prosperity depends on its invisibility, on being able to strike or steal from others without being

located, at least by a larger power such as New Crobuzon. Its current means of mobility, an assortment of tugboats, leaves much to be desired. So the fantasy its situation inspires is one of infinite mobility, of being everywhere and nowhere at the same time.

A military version of this wish appears in the form of one Uther Doul, the effective general of Armada's militia, and a magical sword that allows him to "mine possibilities" in battle—i.e., to slow time down so as to strike in multiple combinations simultaneously. His example inspires a pair of leaders known as the Lovers, from the largest district in Armada and propelled by their own private, sadistic-erotic cult of love- and self-making, to spearhead a project to take the city to the Scar, a legendary place with which Doul's "possibility sword" is associated, in the hopes of acquiring something like Doul's military power for the city. The "science" behind the plan is tenuous, while the quest—which, as I have stressed, is portrayed as organic to Armada's situation—is politically deforming, ruining the democracy among districts in favor of Garwater, the Lovers' district, and installing an autocratic cult of leadership. The revolution against this fantasy of Progress, the salvation of the city, is cast as a relatively somber and low-key affair, given that it returns the utopia, albeit now with more experience and self-knowledge, back to its original state, and to its basic problem (not just the vulnerability to other powers but the contradictions of plunder). Yet the book manages to teach admirably systematic, relativist lessons about social revolution and the ideology of progress.

Iron Council differs from the first two books in centrally featuring not one but two main settings—New Crobuzon and the Iron Council—and moving back and forth between them. It also distinguishes itself by virtue of its fine-grained narrative attention to an "actual" revolutionary process (failed, as it turns out), focusing especially on the difficulties of orchestration and timing that arise in a revolutionary crisis (no crisis engine here). The plot that gives the book its title might be seen as a return to the strike of *Perdido Street Station*, but in conditions more favorable for the workers. A mystical capitalist has mustered a project to build a railroad across the forbidding continent of which New Crobuzon occupies only a small corner. Suffering from supply shortages and already low wages held in arrears, the railroad workers—composed of free wage laborers, the Remade, and a group of camp followers consisting mainly of prostitutes—unite in rebellion and, with some assistance from the Weaver, commandeer the operation. Knowing that negotiation is impossible, they turn the rails and train into the wild and dangerous borderland of the "cacotopic stain," the uninhabitable site of an ancient alien invasion in which nature's laws do not hold, and re-lay the track in front

of them once they pass over it, changing the train in this respect into a kind of automobile. Against the odds, they fend off the militia posse sent by the capitalist New Crobuzon, and, after escaping into the wild to places unknown, become the stuff of rumor and legend. Suffice to say that the story's central stress is on the formation of a government that will organize the jubilant energy released by initial victory and ensure that the various activities necessary for survival—preparing ground, carrying and laying track, gathering fuel and food, scouting, fighting, etc.—get done. Ann-Hari, a prostitute, and Uzman, a Remade, are especially charismatic and reliable Iron Council members.

One of the main fantastic entities in this book, then, is a travelling revolution, an outback, circus-like soviet. And the Iron Council is integral to the novel's second plot, insofar as its example motivates another revolutionary uprising, this time not restricted to one trade, in New Crobuzon. The chief cause of the general strike that begins the rising is oppression as usual, exacerbated by depression; it is prompted also by an unjustified and costly war with the Tesh, a small rival country with more developed magical powers, who threaten to invade. But the workers are inspired and held together in good part by the myth, not just of the Council's success, but of its expected return to New Crobuzon. Their uprising might have proven successful, we are given to understand, if Judah Lowe, a leading member of the Council and hero of the book, had not had to use up precious time blocking the Tesh invasion, thus saving the city as a whole; and if the Iron Council had not arrived back at the city just a few days late, after the uprising was brutally put down.

This novel's other memorable revision of magical stereotypes concerns golems, whose special association with the pent-up suffering of the Jews is evidently relevant, but referred to only in Judah's name. Judah is a radical golemist, and though his career is not narrated as a linear bildungsroman, we see how his vocation develops out of a special capacity for empathy, a rare sensitivity. "Golemetry" is practiced as street entertainment and used for some services in New Crobuzon, and one gathers that Judah acquires his interest, and perhaps some skill, in his early years there. But a flashback episode shows him living in a hinterland marsh and learning to communicate with the stiltspear, a quasi-human tribal people, mostly hunter-gatherers, who have developed the ability to arrest the time, or at least the immediate environment, of the animals they hunt. From studying and absorbing their practice, he becomes a much more powerful magus than any in New Crobuzon, able to raise giant golems out of cliff faces, lakes, and so on, and to manipulate their movements to military and other ends. His role as witness to the destruction

of the stiltspears' environment, and indeed the virtual genocide conducted by the Transcontinental Railroad, followed by his employment by the railroad and fully engaged participation in the formation of the Iron Council, makes him a radical with a difference, too. Indeed his investment in the Council drives him to new levels of golemetry: his defenses against the New Crobuzon militia posse, after the train has been liberated, are powerful and inventive, and absolutely necessary if not sufficient to the Iron Council's survival. It is crucial to add though, that, although he is one of the Council, he is set apart, not just by his special powers as magus, but by the sympathetic intelligence that enables them. Judah remains an observer, detached and above the people he belongs to; even in erotic relationships, it is as if he suffers himself to be loved. Ann-Hari, in her last encounter with him, says he has always had a savior complex.

Judah's final act, when he sees the Iron Council arriving at the city in which no revolutionary forces wait to take it in, but only the massed weapons of the state, is to make a monument of it—to freeze the Iron Council in permanent place just before it breaches the barricades, almost certainly to meet a rapid and ugly demise. Technically, this is a breakthrough: the physics of "ordinary" golem-making involves arresting time in a certain space so as to lift an object out of it, but here time is not only arrested but made to loop on itself, so that the golem (the militant Council) is eternally outside time, and cannot be touched, much less destroyed.

It is a miraculously rich act and image, with which the book leaves us. On one level, the act is clearly hubristic—Ann-Hari is right about Judah's savior complex—and the frozen image questions the motives and value of any fantasy-construction, however sympathetically intelligent or politically radical. On another level, Miéville includes a coda that encourages another reading of Judah's last act: presenting the train-golem as an image of the mole of revolution ceaselessly grubbing its way, implying as it does so that the transformed, primitive magic of the stiltspear is integral to the revolution's coalescence, and that it survives as more than a memory. I quote here the book's final paragraph, which can serve as an example of Miéville's prose style in one of its many modes. The "we" that speaks is first of all the people, and they are many, who cannot be kept from visiting the illegal monument to a revolution frozen in time:

Years might pass and we will tell the story of the Iron Council and how it was made, how it made itself and went, and how it came back, and is coming, is still coming. Women and men cut a line across the dirtland and dragged history out and back across the world. They are still with shouts setting their mouths and we usher them in. They are coming out of the trenches of rock toward the brick shadows. They are always coming.¹¹

Notes

1. Of his essays, I will mention here and recommend "The Limits of Utopia," for the online magazine *Salvage*, available at <http://salvage.zone>; "On Monsters: Or, Nine or More (Monstrous) Not Cannies," *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts*, 23, no. 3 (2012): 374–92; and his afterword on science fiction and fantasy in *Red Planets: Marxism and Science Fiction*, ed. Mark Bould and China Miéville (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2009). Several of Miéville's talks are easily findable on the net; "Marxism and Halloween" is particularly good (<https://plutopress.wordpress.com>). "Symposium: Marxism and Fantasy" is in *Historical Materialism* 10, no. 4 (2002). The list of fifty works can be found at <http://theweekly-ansible.tumblr.com>.
2. The trilogy is *Perdido Street Station* (New York: Del Rey, 2000); *The Scar* (New York: Del Rey, 2002); *Iron Council* (New York: Del Rey, 2004). *The City and the City* (New York: Del Rey, 2009), because of its shorter length and thematic concern with borders, is probably now the work of Miéville's most often found on college syllabi.
3. This is not exactly, then, a general introduction to Miéville. Of those, the best that I know is by Kirsten Tranter, in her preface to "An Interview with China Miéville," *Contemporary Literature*, 53, no. 3 (2012): 417–36. Carl Freedman's *Art and Idea in the Novels of China Miéville* (Canterbury, UK: Gylphi, 2015) is the best book on Miéville's whole corpus. For a stimulating work on monsters and capitalism, see David McNally, *Monsters of the Market: Zombies, Vampires and Global Capitalism* (Haymarket, 2012).
4. The argument that cognitive estrangement is science fiction's defining generic feature is associated with Darko Suvin's *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction: On the Poetics and History of a Literary Genre* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1977). For an update and extension of the same argument, see Carl Freedman, *Critical Theory and Science Fiction* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2000). Fredric Jameson revisits and defends the distinction between science fiction and fantasy in *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* (London: Verso, 2005), suggesting that science fiction mobilizes a "mode of production aesthetic" (i.e., that its take on the world privileges the interaction between different social systems). All these critics stress the filiation of science fiction with the classical utopian genre.
5. See his reference to Christopher Caudwell's work in the "Marxism and Halloween" talk, cited above.
6. See Miéville, "On Monsters."
7. The first major novel after the Bas-Lag trilogy, *The City and the City*, whose fantastic premise is the co-residence of two ethnically distinct cities on the same site, reads like a grittily realistic detective novel. *Kraken: An Anatomy* (2010), which depends on the aboriginally monstrous qualities of the octopus, prominently includes a police procedural and at times recalls Pynchon. *Embassytown* (2011), featuring a conventional science-fiction setup on a remote space colony and a middlebrow space-travelling protagonist, centers its anthropological gaze on the epochal crisis of a society of aliens markedly divergent from humans in both appearance and ability. The more recent *Rail-Sea* (2012), Miéville's second young adult novel, is a kind of maritime adventure, with the twist that the ocean-surface takes the form of a railroad track, and the sea itself that of an earth churning with underground species, cognate with but larger and more malign than those we know. Such thumbnail descriptions do not convey an adequate sense of the generic multiplicity of each of the novels, but Miéville's recent books have tended toward a reduction of generic overdetermination, as well as to a streamlining and tightening of verbal style. (This continues to be seen in the recently published short-story collection *Three Moments of an Explosion* (2015).
8. Another way of putting this might be to say that electricity, though scientifically understood, retains an outward resemblance to magic.
9. See Steven Shaviro, "Capitalist Monsters," *Historical Materialism* 10, no. 4 (2002): 281–90.
10. An example of this strange, all-capitals speech, taken from the episode in which the Weaver rescues Isaac and Yagharek from the police: "I MUST TURN MAKE PATTERNS HERE WITH AMATEURS UNKNOWING ARTISTS TO UNPICK THE CATASTROPHIC TEARING THERE IS BRUTE ASYMMETRY IN THE BLUE VISAGES THAT WILL NOT DO IT CANNOT BE THAT THE RIPPED UP WEB IS DARNED WITHOUT PATTERNS AND IN THE MINDS OF THESE DESPERATE AND GUILTY AND BEREFT ARE EXQUISITE TAPESTRIES OF DESIRE" (396).
11. *The Iron Council*, 614.