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Minding the Gap: Connecting the Mirror Cities of London in the Novels of Neil Gaiman and China Miéville

by
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Introduction
In his (2003) novel Perdido Street Station, China Miéville presents the city of New Crobuzon from the perspective of Lin, a woman who is half-human and half-insect called a “khepri.” Lin is able to view multiple sides of the city at once through her insect eyes:

Lin’s bulging mirrored eyes saw the city in a compound visual cacophony. A million different sections of the whole…Each visual fragment, each part, each shape, each shade of colour, differentiated from its surroundings in infinitesimal ways that told her about the state of the whole structure. (Miéville 14-15)

Lin encapsulates the issue with the postmodern city in general and the city of London specifically. Cities alienate their inhabitants, making it impossible for those who live in them to experience every aspect of the city. Even though Lin’s eyes can see many things at once, she cannot integrate every perspective into a cohesive whole. She can only use the “infinitesimal differences” to make an assumption about the whole city, but she still remains permanently estranged from its totality. The narrator also describes this estrangement for the rest of the khepri and immigrants within New Crobuzon: “They had settled, become workers and tax payers and criminals, and found themselves, by an organic pressure just too gentle to be obvious, living in ghettos” (Miéville 185). The city of New Crobuzon pushes the unwanted toward the outskirts and the poorer regions of the city with such subtlety that the discarded fail to notice they are being cut off from the city.
Cities that lie outside of literature and in reality, otherwise known as primary cities, also deny this cohesion to their inhabitants, because they are more than physical creations. Primary cities are a combination of the physical city and the mental city, both the paths each person follows and their perspective of them. This inherently makes a full association with a city difficult to achieve, because of the multitudinous viewpoints and pathways that when put together fashion that same “compound visual cacophony” made of sights and sounds. The compound visual cacophony is fully realized in a complex primary city like London, which has survived and grown since its creation as Londinium in 47 CE. This deprivation of totality for the inhabitants of primary London is highlighted in the secondary cities of London Above and Below in Neil Gaiman’s novel *Neverwhere* (1996), as well as New Crobuzon in China Miéville’s 2003 novel *Perdido Street Station* and the cities of Beszél and Ul Qoma in Miéville’s *The City & the City* (2009). These novels are a combination of these physical and mental cities, because they borrow varying degrees of both characteristics from the primary London, and therefore lie in the liminal space between life and literature. Gaiman and Miéville are not the first authors to take hold of primary London and transform it into a secondary version of itself. Their contributions are part of a larger tradition of depicting London in prose used to show the issues within the primary city—namely, how primary London consistently estranges its citizens in order to induce psychological transformation.

London as a primary city has fascinated authors due to its mutability, because each individual interpretation of London as a fictional city could theoretically be different. There is a tradition of representing primary London in
fiction that has lasted since the 19th century and continued into the 21st, which includes works like *The Picture of Dorian Grey* (1891) by Oscar Wilde and *Dracula* (1897) by Bram Stoker, and continues to the present day with the novel *A Darker Shade of Magic* (2015) by Victoria Schwab. Although Miéville and Gaiman’s novels are written within the last 20 years and are relatively new, these stories all still exhibit the themes of confusion and isolation that London as a city invites. Neil Gaiman critiques primary London through a secondary city called London Below that is hidden beneath and beside historical London. Therefore, *Neverwhere* and *The City & the City* are purportedly in reality, with fantastical elements grafted on to otherwise realistic cities. *Perdido Street Station* is set in the world of Bas Lag, and the city of New Crobuzon, which borrows both the map and themes of isolation and estrangement from the primary city of London. The three novels transform London to present the problems that beset the primary city, and so all three secondary cities are recognizably “London-Like,” although the fantastical elements that each author adds to his secondary version of London cause them to be unfamiliar.

In her article “This Monstrous City: Urban Visionary Satire in the Fiction of Martin Amis, Will Self, China Miéville, and Maggie Gee,” Magdalena Maczynska argues that Gaiman and Miéville’s contributions to secondary versions of London are born out of an entirely new genre of fiction called “urban visionary satire” (Maczynska 58). Maczynska defines urban visionary satire as a genre that combines “superrealist explorations of imaginary cityscapes with a satirical critique of London’s material, cultural, and social conditions at the end of the second millennium” (Maczynska 59). Maczynska is incorrect in her
assumption that the genre that Gaiman and Miéville are working within was
created at the “end of the second millennium”, as they are actually contributing to
the genre of gothic literature related to the primary city. Gaiman and Miéville are
also not operating out of laziness as Michael Moorcock says is the pitfall of some
authors in “City of Dreadful Light”, a review of _Perdido Street Station_. Moorcock
believes that authors besides Miéville oftentimes connect their secondary
literature to the primary world out of idleness to force the reader to draw
conclusions that the author has not earned. Moorcock recognizes that Miéville
stands apart from this crowd because

when Miéville avoids generic plotlines and stock characters and
writes about individual alienation and love, about difficult
relationships and complex architecture, the book comes most
thoroughly to life and takes on tremendous tensions. (Moorcock
34)

Those “tensions” between the characters and the city that Moorcock details are
also explained in Maczynska’s paper when she notes that authors like Gaiman and
Miéville are drawn toward the presentation of current issues that plague the
primary city, including alienation, estrangement, and dislocation.

In her explanation for what qualifies as urban visionary satire, Maczynska
mentions the requirement of “uncanny” effects in the novels (Maczynska 59). The
uncanny, famously defined by Sigmund Freud in his essay on “The Uncanny” in
1919, described not only the feeling of the uncanny, but also what situations
would create that feeling, “an uncanny effect is often and easily produced by
effacing the distinction between imagination and reality, such as when something
that we have thitherto regarded as imaginary appears before us in reality” (Freud 15). Both Gaiman and Miéville have the same goal of “effacing the distinction between imagination and reality” in primary London, but they approach their secondary cities of London with disparate attitudes.

Gaiman and Miéville employ different approaches to blend the primary London of reality with their secondary Londons. Gaiman uses the perspective of the Magic City, one based on awe, when creating his secondary London in \textit{Neverwhere}. Miéville’s creation of his secondary Londons in \textit{Perdido Street Station} and \textit{The City & the City} is filtered through the fear-tinted lens of the New Weird. The issue with Maczynska’s perspective is that she believes the existence of secondary cities that borrow from primary London is a new concept, as she believes Miéville’s work is representative of a “new field of convergence among established narrative modalities, whose realignment produces an innovative brand of contemporary fictional subversion” (Maczynska 66). However, this is not a new convergence of fantasy and satire. The novels of Miéville and Gaiman are examples of an extension and development of a branch of literature already in place: gothic literature.

The tradition of gothic literature began in the middle of the eighteenth century with Horace Walpole’s \textit{The Castle of Otranto} (1764). Since the inception of the gothic genre, gothic novels like Mary Shelley’s novel \textit{Frankenstein}, or \textit{The Modern Prometheus} (1818), Robert Louis Stevenson’s novel \textit{The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde} (1886), and H.G. Wells’s \textit{The Island of Doctor Moreau} (1896), have had one thing in common: the novels and their authors take part in the undermining and reevaluation of boundaries, and
help us address and disguise some of the most important desires, quandaries, and sources of anxiety, from the most internal and mental to the widely social and cultural, throughout the history of Western culture since the eighteenth century (Hogle 4).

Maczynska is incorrect about the genre that Gaiman and Miéville are working within, but she is correct about the reason behind the new iterations of secondary London. Maczynska correctly notices that Gaiman and Miéville are reacting to the primary city of London at the end of the twentieth century, and each author is struggling to examine the relationship between individuals and London prime:

London writers…responded to the unrest of the century’s final decades with narratives that break down textual boundaries, defy generic conventions, and transform fictional ontologies—as if only such outrageous reimagining of urban narrative and urban space could convey the force of the city’s millennial crisis. (Maczynska 61)

Maczynska is misinterpreting “urban visionary satire” as a new genre form simply because at the end of the last century into the beginning the twenty-first, there were more noticeable examples in the genre because of the number of authors contributing to it. In fact, there have been many different representations of London as a secondary city that combines the Gothic uncanny and satire, as seen in Charles Dickens’s *Bleak House*, serialized between 1852 and 1853 and H.G. Wells’ short story “The Door in the Wall” (1911). Both Dickens and Wells are progenitors to the combination of Gothic and satire in secondary Londons that Gaiman and Miéville recreate in their work.
Bleak House is part of the gothic tradition because Dickens, like the characters within his novel, recognizes the power of the modern primary city of London. “Bleak House grows out of Dickens’s perception that the remote and isolated country mansion or castle is not so much the setting of ruin and darns, mystery and horror, as the great modern city: the Gothic horrors are here and now” (Pritchard 435-436). Dickens addresses urban isolation, the fear of being lost within a city, and living a meaningless existence within the city at large, and H.G. Wells satirizes these issues within “The Door in the Wall”. Urban isolation is also experienced by characters within Neil Gaiman and China Miéville’s novels when characters like Richard, Yagharek and Tyador attempt to find their place within the city, just as the main character of Wells’s “The Door in the Wall”, Lionel Wallace, labors to discern the point of his existence. As a child, Lionel Wallace discovers a door in a wall that leads to a magical garden. After he is forced out of the garden, Wallace invests his time in meaningless activities that will bring him prestige, and he acknowledges that for all of his success, he has earned nothing. “I have success—this vulgar tawdry, irksome, envied thing. I have it” (Wells 713). In fact, when the door reappears to Wallace over the course of his life, Wallace always finds a reason not to go back through the door, even though the garden was the one place where he was happy. At the end of the short story, Wallace finally goes through the door, and his dead body is found the next day, creating ambiguity as to whether the otherworldly part of London existed in the first place. Therefore, like Neil Gaiman a century later in Neverwhere, Wells creates the implication of another, better London hidden within the primary London, as the narrator of the story observes that "The guise of the wall and door
offered him an outlet, a secret and peculiar passage of escape into another and altogether more beautiful world” (Wells 715). In order to access this more beautiful secondary London, a person has to be one of ‘‘Wells's men of vision and the imagination', whose intense imaginative powers set them apart from the common herd” (Freeman 167). Therefore it is a particular state of mind, imagination, and perspective of the city that allows characters to break free of its constrictive force, which both Gaiman and Miéville emphasize when they illustrate the process of estrangement, disorientation, reorientation, and transformation that the primary city of London lends to their secondary worlds.

The House without Doors

In an interview portion published at the end of the 2003 edition of Neverwhere, Neil Gaiman says that during the 1980s he believed he could see “the beginnings of a ‘Magic City’ genre, and how someone ought to write a Magic City book about London” (Gaiman 375). When asked why he set the story of Neverwhere in London, Gaiman listed several experiences that contributed to this decision, including memories of his youth. As a child, Gaiman thought about “magical places with names like Knightsbridge. Which are, I think, all ways of saying that London and the London Underground was always a part of the fabric of the story” (Gaiman 375). Gaiman’s representation of the “Magic” within the city is not something that he creates. The “Magic” is something that already exists
in the primary city and is amplified in the secondary city when Gaiman’s wondrous perspective as a child interacts with his view of the city as an adult. This intimate connection with the city of London is why, of all the novels containing a secondary version of London, *Neverwhere* is the most connected to the primary London. Gaiman essentially transplants the primary London of his memories and transforms it into a Magic City, accessible by all the readers of the secondary city.

This belief in the Magic City is a constant in Gaiman’s work and it is recognizable in Gaiman’s introduction of the 2005 edition of *Viriconium* by M. John Harrison. In his introduction, Gaiman notes that each time he rereads *Viriconium* and examines the cities within it, he has a different reaction to the novel: “Each time we return to it, it has changed, or we have. The nature of reality shifts and changes. The *Viriconium* stories are palimpsests, and other stories and other cities can be seen beneath the surface” (Harrison xii). Gaiman is saying something interesting here, because he imagines travelling to London when he looks at *Viriconium*, so the travel isn’t physical, it’s experiential; it is based on his memories of primary London integrating with the secondary world of *Viriconium*. He ascribes meaning to the city in *Viriconium* because he recognizes it, and senses that there is “more than a tang of the London I remember informing the city in these tales” (Harrison xiv). Thus there is interplay between Gaiman’s subjective memories of primary London and the fantastically projected secondary world of Harrison’s *Viriconium*, because Gaiman’s memories affect how he reads and the literature affects his memories, almost as if his memories and the novel are having a conversation in his mind. *Viriconium* is as much a
“Magic City” as London is because the reader Neil Gaiman can peel back the layers of to find other cities and stories in the text. The “Magic City” is a palimpsestic one; it holds different meanings at different times, because the person interpreting the city emphasizes different memories, old and new, each time he or she examines the city. This is why London as a secondary city in *Neverwhere* reveals itself as a palimpsest and part of Gaiman’s Magic City genre. As was the case with Gaiman peering through the layers of the *Viriconium* text, more layers appear within the secondary city the longer it is examined by the novel’s protagonist, Richard Mayhew, and his experiences shape both the way that he views himself in the city and his feelings for it. It is through Richard’s perspective that the reader rediscovers the city of London to discover the hidden parts just beneath the surface.

Gaiman originally wrote *Neverwhere* as a television series, but after it was produced and filmed in 1996, he returned to the piece and rewrote it as a novel that was released later in 1996. *Neverwhere* is a novel about Richard Mayhew, an unassuming Scotsman with pretensions to normality, who slowly learns to assert his individual identity while trying to discover his place in the city of London. Richard discovers two different versions of London that lie on top of one another: London Above, and London Below. London Above is a fictionalization of primary London, whereas London Below is a secondary world that is a fantastical London grafted on to the representation of the “real” London. London Below is almost a misnomer, in that not every part of it exists physically beneath London Above. For example, the labyrinth that Richard has to make his way through near the end of the novel is not simply a maze, but is made of sections of London
Below, which in turn is “built of lost fragments of London Above: alleys and roads and corridors and sewers that had fallen through the cracks over the millennia, and entered the world of the lost and the forgotten” (Gaiman 305).

Some of London Below does in fact exist underground. A historically real British Museum Station that Richard didn’t even know existed, and the sewer system of London are both part of London Below and both underground. Places underground are much more susceptible to being part of London Below because it is easier for places to be forgotten if they aren’t seen. The experience of being forgotten is also exemplified by those who dwell in London Below, because they are often seen as homeless people by those who live Above. Lear, a vagrant, is from Below, yet he lives on both sides of London because he has the ability to interact with those Above and see those Below. “Richard realized, with surprise, that the man could see them—and also that he was doing his best to pretend that he couldn’t” (Gaiman 139). Gaiman is expanding his “Magic City” here, because he is integrating magic into social reactions to the homeless, which is a real and concerning issue for primary London. Gaiman integrates magic into the places of London to not only illustrate what is out of the ordinary, but also what has become commonplace, like seeing someone hurt and alone on the streets of London.

London Below contains all that has been buried and ignored, including the places and people who fail to fit in Above. The Marquis de Carabas, after he has lured Richard into London Below in order to help Door, explains that “There’s London Above—that’s where you lived—and then there’s London Below—the Underside—inhabited by people who fell through the cracks in the world”
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The layers of Above and Below are indicative of a palimpsestic city and the compound cacophony that Miéville indicates, because the layers imply that there is always more in the city to be seen, and within the city there are a multitude of different parts each character could play. Richard’s journey, as the main character, begins with him as the unwitting visitor. Yet, in the Labyrinth, it is Richard who defeats the Beast of London, and he is the only one capable of leading the group. “He ran straight and true through the labyrinth, which no longer held any mysteries for him. He felt that he knew every twist, every path, every alley and lane and tunnel of it” (Gaiman 316-317). It is Richard’s fresh interpretation of London Below that uncovers the next layer of the city as well as himself. The palimpsest of Above and Below is also a state of mind because seeing the layers of the city, as in Gaiman’s observation about John Harrison’s *Viriconium*, requires the acceptance of the city as an ever-changing entity.

Those characters who live in London Above are often unaware of the existence of London Below, and often they cannot perceive the inhabitants of London Below even when they pass by them, because they are self-assured in the integrity of their individual experience of the city. Jessica, Richard’s fiancé, successfully attempts to organize a collection of angel paraphernalia at the British Museum, and spends most of her time trying to shape Richard into “the perfect matrimonial accessory” (Gaiman 11). This goal exemplifies Jessica’s obsession with shaping the world to suit her ideals. Jessica cannot see the discarded people who reside within London Below because they do not align with her sense of order. Jessica and others who depend on that sense of normalcy and order, literally and figuratively cannot see the places and people that make up London
Below. Even if those Above do see those who belong Below, they forget the people they have seen almost immediately. This occurs in the beginning of *Neverwhere* when Jessica is unable to focus on the injured Door, and remains “nervous and puzzled” by Richard’s continued interaction with Door (Gaiman 24). This lack of interaction goes both ways as those in London Below either don’t want to or are also unable to interact with those Above. Once Richard interacts with the Below version of London, he becomes a non-entity in the world Above and in the eyes of his friends, coworkers, and even Jessica, he ceases to exist because he has left the ordered world behind.

Shortly after Richard interacts with London Below for the first time, his landlord tries to sell Richard’s apartment, with Richard still living there. “‘Excuse me,’ Richard said plaintively. ‘I live here.’ They pushed past Richard on their way to the front door…‘Can you…can any of you hear me? This is my apartment. I live here’” (Gaiman 64). Richard can no longer function in the Above world because he has been completely shut out. However, the assumption that Richard was able to fully function as an individual in the city to begin with is incorrect. This failure to function in the city stems from two things: Firstly, because he comes from Edinburgh, Richard was an outsider from the start, and less able to function in London because he was unfamiliar with it. Secondly when he did attempt to access the city, Richard trusts in the integrity of the illusion of the ordered city of London Above, and this keeps him from experiencing the totality of the city of London as he attempts to orient himself in the new city through the use of the Tube map:
When he had first arrived, he had found London huge, odd, fundamentally incomprehensible, with only the Tube map, that elegant multicolored topographical display of underground railway lines and stations, giving it any semblance of order. Gradually he realized that the Tube map was a handy fiction that made life easier but bore no resemblance to the reality of the shape of the city above. (Gaiman 8-9)

If the map of the London Underground is merely a “handy fiction”, then anything off of the map, anything that is not labeled or an iconic landmark once again disappears into the incomprehensibility of London. The iconic modern map of the London Underground, designed by Harry Beck and first released in 1933, imposes the illusion of order where there in fact is no order to be found. However, many people believe that illusion, even in primary London, as an “estimated 95% of Londoners are said to have a copy at home” (Vertesi 9).

Those characters living in London Above who believe in the sense of order that the Tube map encourages, the sense that there is only one method of travel and understanding the city, are the ones that have the most trouble remembering those from London Below. This belief in a single method of understanding the city holds true for Richard’s exacting fiancé, Jessica, who from the very beginning of the novel brooked no deviation from the plan that she had for her life. When Richard begins to help the injured Door, who he believes is homeless, Jessica makes their continued relationship contingent upon Richard ignoring Door’s desperate condition and callously continuing on to a dinner party with her boss (Gaiman 25). To help a stranger would be to leave the territory of
the known, to disrupt an ordered itinerary by which Jessica leads her professionalized life, an itinerary that Jessica still feels obligated to follow later in *Neverwhere* at the British Museum. She is unable to recall who Richard is because he has fallen through the cracks within the worn path of the known, into the unknown of London Below. The British Museum, with its collection of angels from across time and space, contributes to the false sense of order within the secondary city and is as effective and meaningful at imposing order as the Tube Map is. The Angelus, the method of gaining entrance to Islington’s prison, was in the collection of angels. However, the Angelus wasn’t an angel at all, but a door. The men and women at the party believe that there is an impressive collection of art in the exhibition, but the one truly important thing in the room is the thing they do not see. Once Richard and Door walk through the Angelus and disappear, Jessica, along with “the guests, and guards, and serving staff, blinked, shook their respective heads, and, having dealt with something entirely outside of their experience, agreed, somehow, without a word, that it had simply never happened” (Gaiman 196). Because the deviation from normality cannot be explained, it is rejected. The partygoers in the Museum who reside in the world of London Above rely as much on their expectations of reality as they do the Tube Map to provide a sense of stability in their lives. Once Door and Richard disappear, the threat to normalcy has dissipated, and the partygoers can once again recede into their comfortable world of London Above.

Gaiman, through the citizens of London Above in *Neverwhere*, satirizes the primary city dwellers of London who, like Gaiman’s secondary characters, rely on the Tube map to present themselves with an incontrovertible method of
managing the city. Janet Vertesi in her article “Mind the Gap: The London Underground Map and Users’ Representations of Urban Space” interviewed primary Londoners and asked them to draw a map of London for her. A majority of primary Londoners interviewed drew not a map of their own creation, but one that was based on the Tube map, seen in fig. 1 below, even though that map is not geographically accurate. There was a “common claim that, by showing what is ‘on’ or ‘off’ the map, the Tube Map defines what is and what isn’t London” (Vertesi 13).

Vertesi’s study underscores the same sort of thinking exhibited by Richard’s fiancé, Jessica, showing how the image and the idea of something can be more important than the reality. At least in his early moments, Richard also relies psychologically on the Tube Map, which is why he is confused when he goes down an alley he has never been down before: “he had taken only a few steps from the well lit bustle of Oxford Street, he might have been in another city"
Hill 18

(Gaiman 43). Oxford Street in primary London is the busiest shopping street in the world, and it is so vital for primary Londoners to access it as an excursion site that no less than three Underground Lines service the Oxford Street Station, and eight different exits from the station lead onto the street. Before Oxford Street became an icon of capitalism in the late eighteenth century, “it was once known as Tyburn Road after the River Tyburn which now runs underneath it” (Time Out). Therefore, the London that Richard sees is not the natural landscape of London because it was changed to accommodate the desires of the people who lived there. This is why Richard becomes lost after having taken only a few steps away from Oxford Street. The unknown that lies underneath the surface of London is much closer than Richard knows, and he is estranged from London Above before he even ventures into London Below, because he never fully understood the intricacies of the Above world to begin with.

Richard goes into London Below with the mindset that everything he sees is abnormal and a deviation from the ordered way that the world should function. London Below is literally “Neverwhere” in Richard’s thinking: London Below does not appear anywhere on the official map of the London Underground, so Richard cannot accept it as real. It is Richard’s firm belief in a rooted sense of order that is incorrect in the first place, not the existence of London Below. Richard at the beginning of the novel was unaware of the connections Below that link disparate parts of the city together. During one early moment in the novel Richard is climbing a ladder in the sewers when he transfers from the Above world into London Below: “he was holding onto a metal ladder that ran up the
same ladder, and he had been inside, hadn’t he?)” (Gaiman 48-49). This disorientation and estrangement from the city is the catalyst for character change in *Neverwhere*. Stylistically, Gaiman italicizes Richard’s thoughts to highlight the difference between the incontrovertible reality of London Below, and Richard’s struggle to accept it. This struggle and estrangement occur because one’s sense of self is intimately connected to where one is, and how familiar that place is. As Kevin Lynch notes in *The Image of the City*, “But let the mishap of disorientation once occur, and the sense of anxiety and even terror that accompanies it, reveals to us how closely it is linked to our sense of balance and well-being” (Lynch 4). Richard needs to find a new balance to alleviate this feeling of anxiety, even if he cannot end it. This sense of rebalancing an identity through reorientation in a new world is represented in *Neverwhere* as Richard’s center of gravity moving lower. This occurs after Richard experiences his ordeal, and decides that he is not mad, and that London Below must truly exist. This full acceptance of London Below affects Richard physically as “His center of balance had moved lower, had become more centered…” (Gaiman 253). As the novel progresses, Richard changes when he becomes completely unbalanced by the existence of London Below, again when he reorients himself and his balance is equally distributed between both Above and Below, and finally at the end of the novel, when he feels he belongs more in London Below than he does Above.

Gaiman disabuses the notion of normalcy in Richard’s life, first by setting up an expectation for routine in London Above, and then destroying that expectation completely through the very existence of London Below. Richard’s version of the “real world” and his dislocation from it influences his perspective
on the names of characters and places to such an extent that he considers them a
perversion of reality, as would any reader who lives in primary London. For
example, Hammersmith in primary London is "The most western of the inner
London boroughs, [and] seems to have derived its name from two Anglo-Saxon
words meaning ‘hammer’ and ‘smithy’. The first recorded mention of the name
was in 1294” (Weinreb and Hibbert 353-354). Gaiman transforms Hammersmith
from a place in primary London to a smith who operates a forge at the Floating
Market in the secondary London Below (Gaiman 270). This repurposing of
primary elements within the secondary city is an interesting aspect of Neverwhere
because comparatively in terms of names, London Above is the lie, not London
Below. Gaiman uncovers what Hammersmith originally referred to, and he
embraces the literal meaning forgotten and discarded in history instead of shying
away from it. In London Below, names have a special significance, and do not
occur by chance. The names often have one of three reasons for existing: the
names are either directly connected with existing place names from London
Above and filtered through that person’s purpose, as with “Hammersmith”, a
person’s nature, like “Mr. Croup”, or a name could be representative of a person’s
title, like “Hunter”. Names and places create an uncanny feeling for Richard in
London Below because there is an expectation that names are not literally
connected to purpose. Although Richard initially feels unease at the discrepancy,
he eventually comes to Gaiman’s wondrous perspective in creating this Magic
City. This literality provides confusion because even though the names are
familiar to Richard, he expects one thing and gets another. In part this confusion
is due to Richard’s presumption that he is familiar with London even though he is not.

Time is another cause of erosion between names and their purposes in primary London, as the explanations behind the names have become so distanced from the places they represent that the names are taken at face value. For example, the name “Blackfriars” in primary London originally referred to the black robes worn by Dominican monks who lived in a monastery where the Tube station of Blackfriars is today. “The monastery was dissolved by Henry VIII in 1538 but reemerged as a Blackfriars Theatre but was pulled down in 1665. The [Tube] station opened in 1870” (Here be Monsters). The name of a robe changed into the name of a place over the span of about six hundred years. Therefore, having monks who wear black in London Below isn’t contrary to the history of London. In fact, the expulsion and disavowal of the monks by Henry VIII is merely one example of a person attempting to bend London to their will and dictate what should be official London. Gaiman’s inclusion of the monks furthers his exploration of the Magic City of London, because he uses Richard as a conduit to uncover and revitalize historical aspects of the city that were rejected by those in power. Yet even when Richard tries to anticipate the relationship between names and purposes he comes up short, as is the case when Richard arrives at Knightsbridge in his attempt to find Door, and finds a bridge of night:

“Is there anything, really, to be scared of?”

“Only the night on the bridge,” she said.

“The kind in armor?”
“The kind that comes when the day is over…Night is happening. All the nightmares that have come out when the sun goes down, since the cave times when we huddled together in fear for safety and for warmth” (Gaiman 102-103).

The bridge tests Richard’s courage and as he confronts his own nightmares during the crossing, he realizes the true significance of the name “Knightsbridge”. As with the map earlier, the names of things and people in London Above are poor facsimiles of the truth, whereas the names in London Below tell the truth even if Richard does not understand what truth they are telling until he experiences it. Even as he struggles to adapt to London Below, the names establish expectations, and it is Richard’s challenge to decode the layers of the palimpsestic text that make up the Magic City, whether they be past and present, reality or fantasy, Above or Below.

It would be a mistake to believe that a name tells Richard everything that he needs to know about the different characters, because that would constitute a method of understanding that is too reliable, and therefore capable of expectation. Richard gains experience the longer that he remains Below and this often allows him to often peel back the layers of the Magic City without carrying an expectation of what is and isn’t a “legitimate” part of London. However, not even Richard learning from his experiences can prepare Richard to anticipate the actions of the Angel Islington in London Below, whose motivations run directly counter to his namesake: the Angel staging post at Islington.

The Angel, the nearest staging post to London on the Great North Road, was from Jacobean times a coaching inn opposite some
large elms. The Angel was especially useful to travelers by night…

Those journeying outwards were escorted by armed patrol from

Wood’s Close to Islington. (Weinreb and Hibbert 22)

Like Richard Mayhew, those readers familiar with the origin of the primary Angel at Islington, as well as the Angel Tube Station in the London Underground, would understandably believe that the Angel Islington of *Neverwhere* would protect the protagonists, while guiding them on their journey. Gaiman plays to this expectation, writing that the Angel’s “eyes were clear and wide. Its eyes were not white, as Richard had first thought: they seem to have been woven from light” (Gaiman 196). Islington as an angel is thus associated with purity and goodness, which is exactly counter to his nature, as he is the main antagonist of the novel. Richard is unable to anticipate Islington’s treachery because the transformation of places into characters is more than just a person being called by that place name. The places are truly personified, giving each character motives and nuances. According to primary cultural expectations, Angels are beings that protect and guide, like the Angel Gabriel. Therefore, Angel Islington should be good, but Angel Islington has less in common with the hosts of other angels than he does with the Angel Lucifer before his fall, so the characterization of those in London Below is much wilder and uncertain than Richard knows.

The more familiar that Richard becomes with the way that London Below plays with his expectations, the better equipped he is to anticipate the different challenges that London Below presents him. Even if he is not always correct, Richard no longer shies away from these challenges. He faces them. As Richard walks through the labyrinth with Mr. Croup and Mr. Vandemar, he reflects upon
his growing sense of assurance in this alternate London: “He had gone beyond the world of metaphor and simile into the place of things that are, and it was changing him” (Gaiman 307). As Richard learns to accept the nuances of London, to accept and see through all layers of the palimpsest at once he becomes part of the pattern. Once Richard is presented with Earl at Earl’s Court, instead of just accepting the existence of the court like he did at the Knightsbridge, he allows himself to be dazzled by the implications. “And then he began to wonder whether there was a baron in Baron’s Court Tube station, or a Raven in Ravenscourt or…” (Gaiman 153). Richard’s new method of thinking stitches together his expectations and his inferences, which allows him to feel more settled in both versions of London and to anticipate the next layer of the Magic City of London Below. Gaiman is able to play with Richard’s expectations of place and character names to create opportunities for the uncanny and satire.

*Neverwhere* manifests missed expectation as in the case of the names—the familiar made unfamiliar, which invites both the feeling of uncanny and the opportunity for satire. There is dark humor at the heart of the novel that relies on the twisting expectations as much as the uncanny does. Richard’s experience in the Floating Market is an example of this. The Floating Market is a place where citizens of London Below momentarily take possession of places in London Above in order to barter for goods. The first time Richard goes to the Floating Market, it is held within Harrods, an actual department store in Knightsbridge in primary London, which was established in 1834. The Harrods in primary London simultaneously claims exclusivity, while attempting to embody the store’s motto “Omnia Omnibus Ubique—All Things for People Everywhere” (Harrods).
Gaiman satirizes that slogan, because instead of selling all things, the merchants in the Floating Market in London Below sell anything they can, including one merchant who sells “‘Garbage! Trash! Offal! Debris! Come and get it! Nothing whole or undamaged! Crap, tripe, and useless piles of shit. You know you want it’” (Gaiman 110). In this satirical moment Gaiman twists the experience of shopping in a high-end department store like Harrods that caters to the elite like Jessica, and even Richard at the beginning of *Neverwhere* when Richard follows Jessica into her habits of consumerism. “Richard would accompany Jessica on her tours of such huge and intimidating emporia as Harrods and Harvey Nichols, stores where Jessica was able to purchase anything, from jewelry, to books, to the week’s groceries” (Gaiman 11). Gaiman is presenting the worthless nature of these goods by juxtaposing the Richard’s relation to consumerism early in the novel, and his relationship to consumerism once he has entered London Below. The placement of the Floating Market at Harrods forces Richard to compare his needs against his wants, until he understands that he doesn’t want the ephemera of life. He instead wants to experience the truth instead of well-crafted lies, and Gaiman creates satire through the comparison of what should hold value of those who live Above and Below.

In the beginning of *Neverwhere*, Richard has a firm belief in the supremacy of London Above and holds an expectation of what life should be. This idea that Above is good and Below is inherently bad is slowly disassembled over the course of the novel, because of Richard’s changing interpretation of what purpose his life will have in each city and what value he should give to the things that he has. In a strange way, Richard misjudges himself almost as badly as he
misjudges the Angel Islington, because he originally believes that he is not worthy of the tasks that he is given. However, Richard defies his own expectations as much as Islington does, because each has a more complex character than is initially implied. Gaiman continues to chip away at the integrity of London Above as he not only treats shopping as a meaningless activity, but he also creates satire by having characters treat meaningless goods, like chocolate and soda, as precious commodities. Richard encounters the disparity between what inherently has value and what the consumerist London Above claims has value when he is in Earl’s Court. “Richard was handed a bar of Cadbury’s Fruit and Nut chocolate and a large silver goblet, ornamented around the rim with what appeared to Richard to be sapphires. The goblet was filled with Coca-Cola” (Gaiman 160). This example falls perfectly in line with Maczynska’s thinking on the creation of satire in modern novels about London. Maczynska writes that capitalism can create satire through “the evocation of familiar (American) corporate brands” because valuing a good too much carries with it the implication of an “underlying critique of late capitalist culture and its insidious impact on the contemporary urban environment’’ (Maczynska 71). Gaiman sets the Floating Market in Harrods and in the process gives an overall critique of the capitalist culture that has cheapened London, because Harrods doesn’t just sell goods. Harrods sells a standardized identity and personality for London in the form of clothing, just like the Tube Map sells a normalized and “correct” way of navigating London. Richard finally understands the lie of standardized identity when vendors in Harrods sell “useless shit” instead of expensive shirts or pants, and then he sees branded goods like Cadbury and Coca-Cola treated as precious
objects, and this causes him to reevaluate what value those goods actually have. Because of this, Richard cannot continue his belief in the supremacy of a consumerist environment. Once Richard fully understands the illusion of capitalism, it is much more difficult for him to look at something that holds no value and pretend that it does. Richard gains new priorities to match his new understanding of the city, such as food, shelter, and loyalty, as he discards his old beliefs and requirements like shopping, visiting museums, and accepting the façade of the city instead of delving deeper.

When Richard returns Above, he attempts to get back into the consumerist way of thinking, but this change of heart and mind is not easily undone. He uses the knife that Hunter gives him as a letter opener when he first returns Above, but then he confronts a woman with it just to explain how important a seemingly meaningless knife is: “He heard a strange intensity in his own voice. ‘I wiped her blood from the blade. A hunter looks after her weapons. The earl knighted me with it. He gave me the freedom of the Underside’” (Gaiman 369). This knife is extremely important because it is something that only Richard has the right to own; it’s not something he bought. By recognizing the value of the knife, Richard rejects the consumerist culture of London Above and uses the knife to scrape the outline of a door on the side of a building and return to London Below. The London-based satire that Gaiman employs in *Neverwhere* is by no means the first iteration of satire for primary Londoners, but Gaiman has a special purpose in using satire in *Neverwhere*. As with the other layers of the Magic City, the consumerist London of London Above is not something Gaiman creates. This shallow reality already exists. Instead, Gaiman exposes the satirical nature of life
in London, through the synthesis of reality and fantasy and the comparison between life Above and Below.

This satire is a contribution to tradition of London-based stories and satire, the origin of which lies in stories such as H.G. Wells’s 1911 short story “The Door in the Wall”. Nicholas Freeman writes about “The Door in the Wall” in *Conceiving the City: London, Literature and Art 1870-1914*, where he claims that satire is created in fantastic versions of London because the “apprehension of another London, hidden within or beyond both the quotidian city and the self, emerged as an alternative to the materialist preoccupations of realism and impressionism” (Freeman, 149). London as a city is a generator for the uncanny as well as satire, because of the possibilities of both materialism and loss that the city offers. London Below transcends the everyday life of London Above, and instead of presenting the lives of the people in London Below as only a hopeless affair, Gaiman instead shows the good and bad of both versions of London. In London Above there is a world of safety and lies, and in London Below, there is a world of truth and danger. Both are valid sides to the city, and Richard’s full development as a character requires him to journey through both sides and acquire an identity for both Above and Below, to maintain the balance between the cities. However, as Richard finds new meaning for himself in the world of London Below, and as he finds purpose in his new identity as “The Warrior”, he eventually begins to believe this new identity so much that he can no longer integrate back into “normal” life.

Even though Richard does not have access to the totality of London at first, he attains more experience within the city over the course of the novel, and
gives himself a depth of knowledge in both London Above and London Below. The historical and geographic layers create the physical palimpsest of the city, but there is also a palimpsestic nature to those characters who live in it. As the only surviving member of her family, the one character that perfectly symbolizes access to the city and who holds the power to pass between London Above and Below, is Door. Door has the power to open any lock and to create doors where there are none, so she can explore both London Above and Below. Door’s ability to create an open door is symbolic of perfect access, and she uses that access to integrate Richard into London Below so that he is no longer marginalized within the city. She not only retains full knowledge of the secondary city in *Neverwhere*, but her ability also allows Richard to explore the many sides of himself. According to Gaston Bachelard in *The Poetics of Space*, an open door in literature is an expression of exploring the palimpsest of the self, as an open door symbolizes

> the temptation to open up for the ultimate depths of being, and the desire to conquer all ultimate depths of being, and the desire to conquer all reticent beings. The door schematizes two strong possibilities, which sharply classify two types of daydream. At times, it is closed, bolted, padlocked. At others, it is open, that is to say, wide open. (Bachelard 222)

If Bachelard is correct, and the “Magic City” is a daydream version of the city, then Door is the character through whom Richard is able to make London Below—a daydream version of London Above and primary London—his new reality, and the Warrior his new self. Richard’s life in the beginning has more of
the imagery of a closed door, because the plans for his life have already been set with Jessica. Jessica patronizes the museums of London, and shops in the Above version of “affluent Knightsbridge” (Gaiman 11). Therefore, Jessica is as emblematic of the symbolic and meaningless access to London as Door is to the total, meaningful access to London. Door is a character made of pure possibility and changes this path because she is the only character that has the ability to open any door. As such she is empowered to help Richard find his true identity and “open up for the ultimate depths of being”. Door’s role is especially important, not only in the context of her representing door but also as key. If London is evocative of a text that can be read and understood, then it is a palimpsest, because all of the layers—social, political, and historical—lie on top of one another and bleed through each other the longer that the city is examined. As the person who can overcome any boundary in either London Above or Below, Door is the perfect personification of London as palimpsest. She is the only person who can read the layers of the city, and this defines her character down to her very clothes: "She was dressed in a variety of clothes thrown over each other: odd clothes, dirty velvets, muddy lace, rips and holes through which other styles could be seen" (Gaiman 29). As a representation of palimpsestic London, Door teaches Richard how to see through the historical layers of London, as well as the difference between the popular visible London Above, and the vastly important but unseen London Below.

Gaiman integrates an actual history of primary London into his novel because he wants to evoke the uncanny feeling when readers compare the fictional London to the London in reality. The narrator of Neverwhere mentions
that the inhabitants of London Below have a place to live due to Victorian sewer building. “There had been Sewer People before the Great Stink of course…but after the great plan of Victorian Sewer building, that was when the Sewer Folk came into their own” (Gaiman 264-265). This is a historically accurate representation of waste management in primary London, and thus furthers Gaiman’s ability to introduce satire into the treatment of the homeless.

London’s drainage had always been rudimentary, chaotic and a chronic danger to health. With the enormous expansion of the metropolis during the Victorian era, and the recurring outbreaks of cholera, radical reform became imperative. Before the Great Fire rubbish and excrement lay rotting and stinking in the gullies running down the middle of the cobbled streets. (Weinreb and Hibbert 237)

Shifting the waste of primary London underground is indicative of Londoners systematically moving the unwanted to places where it can no longer be seen, which includes the treatment of the impoverished. This haughty distaste for the discarded of primary London is satirized through inhabitants of London Below, especially in the case of the Sewer Folk, because to inhabitants Above, all of the inhabitants of Below appear to be vagrants. There is a glamour over the citizens of London Below that makes it nearly impossible for those Above to remember them, but people living Above also don’t want to see the homeless inhabitants of London Below. When Richard mentions to his fiancé Jessica at the beginning of the novel that they should help the injured Door, Jessica wants to ignore her: “‘Richard. Someone else will be along; someone else will help her’” (Gaiman 24).
It is Richard’s willingness to help someone in need that both puts him in the minority and puts him in danger of being sucked into the world of London Below. Even though the detritus of London can be ignored, as can the acknowledgment of people in need, not all aspects of historical London can be ignored. Then again, Door doesn’t want to ignore the historical aspects of London. She wants to integrate the past and present, and be the balance between both worlds and both times.

Door’s ability to combine all of the different aspects of London Above and Below is important because in the mythology of the novel, one version of London cannot exist without the other. Door’s father, Lord Portico, taught Door that “One must always maintain parity…parity, symmetry, topology” when it comes to the balance between Above and Below (Gaiman 215). Door is the character that helps maintain balance between the two worlds, and her presence makes it possible for Richard to learn how to balance between both cities, and create a London that is essentially an extension of Door herself. Like her home, London for Door holds no boundaries. The marquis de Carabas notices that the memories of the inhabitants of the “House without Doors” are imprinted on the walls, and the house itself is “an associative house, every room of which is located somewhere else” (Gaiman 81) Once again, Gaiman integrates history and memory as he does in the introduction to *Viriconium*. Travel in Door’s house occurs not through physical motion, but by thought. This travel by thought is especially relevant for primary London where modern buildings and remnants of antiquity exist side by side. London as a modern city is still organized around the wall that surrounded the original Roman fort of Londinium, which was constructed in the late second
century (Weinreb and Hibbert 479). Travelling into the past in primary London as well as the in the secondary London of *Neverwhere* is done by walking through the city and seeing the remnants of the past that have survived into the present. Therefore the past is still a physical presence in London, and in some ways London is a hybrid city of mentally combining past and present, one that Door can lead Richard through.

By the end of his adventures, Richard, through Door, is able to feel fully established in the both sides of the city. This is why Richard is able to identify exactly when and where he is at the end of *Neverwhere*, even though he has moved into a portion of London Below that is in the past. “He knew then, without knowing how, but with total certainty, that he was still in London, but London as it had been perhaps three thousand years ago, or more, before ever the first stone of the first human habitation was laid upon a stone” (Gaiman 347). He has an identity in each London. In London Above, Richard is simply Richard Mayhew, but in London Below, he is the Warrior who defeated the Beast of London (Gaiman 315). Richard experiences the marginalized places of London, so he reconstructs his own identity to fit his new place in both worlds. Experiencing that liminality leads Richard toward a hybrid self, one caught between both worlds, with an understanding of both. In this, Richard has created his own double, like “Hammersmith” or “Knightsbridge”. The double of a person in general, called a Doppelgänger, generates the uncanny as well, because “The Doppelgänger presents a notion of the subject/subjectivity that is defective, disjunctive, split, threatening, spectral” (Vardoulakis 100). The subject/subjectivity that Vardoulakis explains relates back to the idea of the uncanny. Individual
characters, like Richard, are the subjects. Everything around them, including other people, is an object because they are separate from the subject. The defective subjectivity exists when a person is no longer certain that their identity has integrity, when the identity is no longer inviolable.

If everyone has a mirror version of himself or herself, the implication is that Richard does too, and that does as much to destabilize his identity as the existence of London Below does. In fact, the implication of Doppelgänger places and people is not just a doubling, but also implies the idea of infinitely palimpsestic identities, that rise to the surface depending on the experiences, memories and personality held within every person. “The Doppelgänger is this liminal subject that allows for the relation between image and signification to be infinitely repeated” (Vardoulakis 114). According to Vardoulakis, identities are created through negation. Richard knows who he is only by knowing who he is not. The doubles create the possibility of other identities, and thus create the opportunity for an infinitely complex version of Richard, one not created through negation, but acceptance of the many versions of himself. This is why the more knowledge Richard has about both London Above and Below, as well as himself, the more uncertain he becomes. Once he has knowledge of both cities, he can choose to live happily in London Above with the full knowledge of what London Below offers. But that is not what happens.

At the beginning of the novel, Richard is uncertain of his place in the world. At the end of the novel, he is still uncertain, but what the journey through London Below offers him is choice. As Richard awakens after the defeat of Islington, “he had no idea at all who he was. It was a tremendously liberating
feeling, as if he were free to be whatever he wanted to be: he could be anyone at all” (Gaiman 335). The option to uncover new parts of himself, to become anyone, frees Richard. Richard cannot stand to stay in London Above at the end of the novel because he has uncovered a depth of character that can no longer coalesce with the beautiful, simple and cheap world of London Above. There is such a focus on consumerism, and keeping up appearances in the Above world, that anything other than London Below would feel like settling. Richard, if he remained Above, could predict his life easily, as clearly and as certainly as if he had been watching it on the big screen at the Odeon, Leicester Square: the rest of his life…In a year, or a little less, he would marry the girl from Computer Services, and get another promotion, and they would have two children, a boy and a girl, and they would move out to the suburbs…And it would not be a bad life. He knew that, too.

Sometimes there is nothing you can do. (Gaiman 363)

Richard rejects this life Above and purposefully estranges himself because he recognizes, with the help of the satirical aspects of the novel, that a life in London Above would be one that gives empty promises of meaning, just like the Tube Map. Life in London Above has no real substance, and is merely a repetition of acts of responsibility and boredom. London Below offers a dangerous, and almost certainly lethal, way of life and yet it holds as much meaning as Richard allows it to have. Therefore, once Richard has the chance to reject a life of dull predictability and self-doubt he takes it, and accepts a life of uncertainty that he can revel in. The doubling of London and the provision of London Below presents
the opportunity for Richard to find and create his own meaning, marking out a place for himself instead of fitting into a predetermined space where everyone, including his former fiancé Jessica, tells him he should fit. The existence of London Below is not a problem for Richard, but his knowledge of it is. “The thinned world promises new marvels, recognition is misleading, and there is no such thing as return, only a going forward” (Mendlesohn 254). In order for Richard to go back to his old life, he would have to forget that his new life existed.

This pattern of creating a fantasy London in which to play out feelings of estrangement, reinvention, and acceptance is one that will be repeated in both of China Miéville’s works *The City & the City* and *Perdido Street Station*. However, the difference between those novels and *Neverwhere* is that even though neither of Miéville’s novels claim to be set in the primary London, they are both equally representative of liminality in a London setting. As a result, they both also rely on uncanny and satirical aspects to bewilder and amuse both the main characters and the reader of the novels.

Even though Richard chooses to re-enter London Below at the end of the novel, Gaiman is not ruling out the possibility of accessing the entire city. There is an implication that Door and Richard will be the union between both worlds, because Door’s father, Lord Portico wanted the two worlds to connect (Gaiman 324), and Door wants to continue his work. Richard’s decision is important for the book as a whole, because if London Below is the place where forgotten people go, and Richard is choosing to go there, then he is willfully seeing the underbelly of London. He chooses to see the dirt, the vagrancy of those who have lost their
identity by living in London and who found homes in London Below instead. This makes Richard a rare person indeed, because he is accepting and eager to find a life apart from the normal life he once thought he wanted. In the beginning of the novel he felt like an outsider, and now, as an outsider desiring the liminal space, Richard feels that he has found his place at last. The reader embraces London Below due to Richard’s acceptance of the marginal, and as a result should hopefully struggle to see more of the city that they claim to belong to, the prized as well as the discarded, the liminal spaces and the popular culture.

Weaving the City

In the beginning of *Perdido Street Station* Yagharek the “garuda”, a half-bird half-man, approaches the city of New Crobuzon, in the secondary world of Bas Lag, with apprehension as he views the city as something that will prey on him. “How could we not see this approaching? What trick of topography is this, that lets the sprawling monster hide behind corners to leap out at the traveller? It is too late to flee” (Miéville 2). This description of the city distinguishes Miéville’s perspective of London from Neil Gaiman’s perspective because the secondary Londons that Miéville creates in both *Perdido Street Station* and *The City & the City* hold crucial positions within each text, nearly becoming characters in and of themselves. Miéville himself admits the presence of primary London as a defining one in his novels in an interview with 3 AM Magazine from 2003:

London is one of the cities that refracts peculiarly intensely
through fiction. London is a strong influence on me but just as intense is fictionalised London in all its forms. [Perdido Street Station] and [The Scar] are not set in London, they're set in fictionalised worlds but they are pretty obviously derived from London. (Marshall)

Whereas Gaiman identifies himself as an author of Magic City novels, Miéville adopts the identifier of “New Weird”, and in his novels *Perdido Street Station* (2000), and *The City & the City* (2009), Miéville writes that for the “New Weird”, “The focus is on awe, and it’s undermining of the quotidian. This obsession with luminosity under the everyday is at the heart of Weird Fiction” (Bould 510). A term coined by M. John Harrison, author of *Viriconium*, “New Weird” is like the Magic City in that the purpose is to mine the different layers of the primary world to harvest materials for the secondary world. In the Magic City of *Neverwhere*, Gaiman unfolds this palimpsest as the differences between primary London and secondary London are broken down, or at the very least troubled by the existence of each other. The Magic City and the New Weird are alike because they are created by looking at the primary city of London with a particular perspective, but while Gaiman’s childish perspective is one of a childish wonder, Miéville’s is more akin the childish fear of the boogeyman, an intense, irrational and nonetheless vital fear.

The New Weird distinguishes itself from Magic City because of its articulation of the process that is occurring within the palimpsest. Miéville claims that New Weird arises out of this crisis of the traditional fantastic, the burgeoning sense
that there is no stable status quo but a horror underlying the everyday” and that “Weird does not so much articulate the crisis as that the crisis cannot be articulated. (Bould 513-514)

Gaiman’s purpose is to peel back the different physical, historical and social layers of the secondary city to explain the primary city’s power. By contrast, Miéville, through the New Weird, showcases the transformative power of the primary city of London that can be felt through the sense of horror it produces.

Instead of full integration with the city, in *Perdido Street Station* Miéville devises a city that is never entirely explained and as a result, totality is never achieved. From Miéville’s perspective, there is haphazardness and a lack of unity in the city of New Crobuzon that no rational explanation can serviceably articulate, and no individual perspective, even that of Lin, can break the cacophony down into its component parts and synthesize them into a cohesive whole. This constant influx of information is what makes the New Weird unsettling, and Miéville justifies his New Weird by a different, but equally important perspective of the primary city of London. Gaiman’s awe of the city stemmed from his child-like appreciation and wonder, whereas the awe that Miéville feels is more adult, connected to wonder perhaps, but also to fear. He considers London a great beast, complete with agency and ready to consume all that with which she is presented.

Miéville’s re-fashioned secondary London, New Crobuzon, becomes the main character of *Perdido Street Station*, with the continual modification of its myriad inhabitants’ perceptions of the constantly changing, palimpsestic urban environment as the plotline. Multiple forces threaten to tear the secondary Londons of Miéville’s fiction apart, and it is a place of possible destruction, but it
is also one of redemptive transformation, as is the case with Yagharek the garuda at the end of *Perdido Street Station*, when he makes the decision to remain in the city of New Crobuzon and strip himself of his wings, remaking himself into a man.

In this way, readers can perceive how the liminality and marginalization of Richard Mayhew in Gaiman’s *Neverwhere* is replayed once again in Miéville’s New Crobuzon, albeit on a grander scale of multiplied viewpoints and diverse consciousness. Each character has an individualistic view of the secondary city that constitutes one of the “million different sections of the whole” (Miéville 14). Like Lin’s perspective in the beginning of the novel, the sections are never integrated by the citizens of the city. The three main perspectives that are presented in *Perdido Street Station* are those of Isaac Grimnebulin, a scientist who practices a bastard mix of science and magic; Lin, a half-beetle half-woman artist, called a khepri, whose art reacts to the part of the city it is in; and Yagharek, a bird-man who has come to New Crobuzon to regain the power of flight. Miéville places these characters within an obviously London-derived setting, shown through the use of the map of New Crobuzon at the beginning of the novel.

The map of New Crobuzon (fig. 3) mirrors London prime, because its general shape looks uncannily similar to the map of London (fig. 2), and creates the familiarity associated with the uncanny for several reasons:
Firstly, the highway that surrounds the primary city, the M25 forms the outline of New Crobuzon in *Perdido Street Station*. Secondly, the shape of the Thames River is reproduced in New Crobuzon, and the river is given the new name of “Tar” (Miéville 22). Thirdly, like London prime, the map of New Crobuzon is also segmented into different districts that together form the entirety of the city. Finally, the map of New Crobuzon satirizes the ordered Underground lines of London Below by employing names like “Perdido Street Station” and the “Verso” Line.
As with the palimpsestic levels of the London Above and Below in *Neverwhere*, there are different layers to be read within the map of New Crobuzon. An important layer of the palimpsest includes Miéville’s secondary version of the Tube in primary London, which holds the same importance because of where the trains in New Crobuzon meet:

the centre of New Crobuzon, the knot of architectural tissue where the fibres of the city congealed where the skyrails of the militia radiated out from the Spike like a web and the great trainlines of the city met, converging on the great variegated fortress of dark brick and scrubbed concrete and wood and steel and stone, the edifice that yawned hugely at the city’s vulgar heart, Perdido Street Station. (Miéville 20).

The city of New Crobuzon is abjectly personified here to create the disgust and fear that is indicative of the New Weird. Furthermore, the titles of the stations within New Crobuzon are similar to primary London map of the Underground, because they imply a normalcy within the city. That normal predictability is immediately subverted by the meanings of the station names. Perdido means “lost” in Spanish, while “verso” is Latin for the left hand page of a manuscript (Merriam-Webster). Ironically, all of the railway stations lead to Perdido, and the Verso Line appears on the left side of the map in *Perdido Street Station*, thereby
inserting a metaphysical layer of understanding between reader and novel. Furthermore, Miéville is not only creating a hybridity of names and languages for the railway stations, he is also undermining the “handy fiction” of the primary map’s ability to display accurate information.

As is the case for secondary Londoners within Neverwhere relying on the Underground Map for edification of the city, the defined paths of the train stations in New Crobuzon are an incomplete truth, because they imply a totality of New Weird city that cannot be found, either through the use of the map, or by walking through the city, as Lin does. This unsettlingly inaccessible physical nature of the city extends throughout its entirety, and therefore the entire city of New Crobuzon is a kind of “Neverwhere”, as there is no predictability within it as there is in Gaiman’s London Above. The whole city appears randomized with no meaning to be found, and this lack of meaning within maps of either primary or secondary London is not limited to Miéville’s work. As Brian Baker explains in his article “Maps of the London Underground: Ian Sinclair and Michael Moorcock’s Psychogeography of the City,” maps are imperfect representations of primary cities in general because they create expectations that are never fulfilled:

The map becomes an organized illusion of the totality of the city, a totality incomprehensible in the everyday lives of its citizens. The walker, through her/his everyday practices of life, resists the organizing power of both the gaze and the map. The city is produced every day, inscribed with her/his journeys, journeys that create the city but “elude legibility”. (Baker 5)
The map at the beginning of the novel does create this “organized illusion of totality” and an expectation for the reader that the novel will have easily traversed streets. However, even Lin, who is a khepri resident familiar with the city, and used to creating her own organization of the city within her mind, can easily become lost when she travels away from the landmarks of the stations. “Signs around her crumbled on their perches and drooped to point in impossible directions, or were obscured with rust, or contradicted each other” (Miéville 28). The lack of reliable information from the signs is strange, because from the “perches” above the city, the signs should relay a clearer picture of the city just as Yagharek gains a clearer perspective of the city when he looks down on it. However, the lack of reliable information makes sense when viewed in the context of the New Weird, because Miéville is undermining the reliance on other guides within London, including signs, for truth.

As is the case in *Neverwhere* when Richard becomes lost after having left the iconic Oxford Street, the map in *Perdido Street Station* once again represents a “handy fiction” and each character must rely on his or her own sense of the city to work through it. This lack of cohesion within the streets of the secondary city of New Crobuzon satirizes the streets of primary London, where, as noted by the eighteenth-century novelist and magistrate Henry Fielding: “Whoever considers the great irregularity of London’s buildings, the immense number of its lanes and courts, must think that they had been intended for the very purpose of concealment” (*London* 2:50-3:00). This “great irregularity” of primary London’s streets has not lessened over time, as the layout of the city of London has changed little after the Great Fire of 1666 (Ackroyd 9). An exact number of the streets
within London have not even been quantified, but the number of streets must be
in excess of at least 25,000, as that is the number of streets in the six square miles
surrounding Charing Cross Station (London Key Facts). In addition to the sheer
quantity of streets causing confusion, the signage for streets only became popular
during the eighteenth century, and the signs were less for edification than for
catching the eyes of pedestrians by shop owners.

  Competing for recognition, they grew bigger and bigger in size
  until they almost completely blocked off both sun and air from
  London’s narrow streets. Often they became far too heavy for their
  brackets and crashed down to earth, killing and maiming
  pedestrians. (Weinreb and Hibbert 841)

Miéville is drawing a direct comparison between the street signs within New
Crobuzon and the signs in London prime, in that the signs in both the primary and
secondary city are not reliable sources of information, and are examples of the
city working against its inhabitants in an attempt to confuse their senses of
direction.

  The map of New Crobuzon also bears a close resemblance to a brain,
  which is emblematic of the city feeding on the dreams and lives of those that live
  within it, through the slake moths, the main antagonists of the novel. The slake
  moths, hideous creatures who feed on the minds of the inhabitants of New
  Crobuzon, link the main characters even as they wreak destruction on the city
  from above. One of the moths is accidentally released by Isaac, feeds on and
  permanently disables Lin’s mind and creativity, and is defeated by Yagharek and
  Isaac, among others. Even those surrounding those three characters are affected
by the presence of the moths, including Lublamai, Isaac’s friend and roommate, whose mind is eaten by one of the slake moths when he and Isaac return to their apartment.

He could not see its shape. Only its dark, glistening skin and hands that clutched like a child’s. Cold shadows. Eyes that were not eyes. Organic folds and jags and twists like rats’ tails that shuddered and twitched as if newly dead. And those finger-long shards of colourless bone that shone white and parted and dripped and that were teeth. (Miéville 219)

This partial description that shies away from the totality of the moth, measuring out a detail of the creature at a time, is entirely in keeping with Miéville’s New Weird, because the horror that Lublamai feels prevents description of the moth. The slake moths both take in the dreams of citizens, leave behind their drained husks, and their defecation is the remnants of the dreams of those that they eat, a drug that the inhabitants of New Crobuzon call “dream shit”. Miéville thus presents the force of the city as incomprehensible as well as parasitic. The city holds the power to create dreams and destroy them, and therefore the minds and imaginations of those who live within the city are its sustaining force. This force within the city is transformative, and occurs regardless of whether or not characters such as Isaac, Lin, and Yagharek want to be transformed. The city of New Crobuzon, like London Above and Below in Neverwhere, transforms its characters by physically estranging them from each other within the labyrinth of the city and by mentally estranging them from their former selves. However, it is not just part of the primary city that is liminalized, as London Below is in
Gaiman’s *Neverwhere*, but the entire population of New Crobuzon. Even the readers of the novel are liminalized through Miéville’s stylistic choices.

Stylistically, Miéville creates liminality for the reader of *Perdido Street Station* and aligns him or her with a character in the novel to create an empathetic understanding of the motivations of Yagharek and view his transformation from an outsider like Richard in *Neverwhere*, to a person that belongs within the city. Just as Gaiman’s Richard Mayhew traveled to London from Edinburgh, Yagharek originally comes to New Crobuzon from the desert, and therefore the city is far away from anything Yagharek has ever known. Miéville accomplishes an understanding of Yagharek’s confusion and dislocation by changing the perspective, and separating Yagharek’s introspective asides from the rest of the book. The reader therefore navigates Yagharek’s character change through the cacophony of the rest of the information that makes up the city. Yagharek, within the italicized sub-sections that stand apart from the rest of the novel, is the surrogate character through whom the reader views the world of Bas Lag. Yagharek’s personal asides are especially important because they are the only part of the text that are entirely in italics, not titled, from the first person perspective, and provide the most insight for the reader about the city and the other characters, an insight that extends to Yagharek himself. After Yagharek sees the web that makes up the world he notices that he is undergoing a transformation.

*I am changing. There is something within me which was not there before, or perhaps it is that something has gone. I smell the air and it is the same air it was yesterday, and yet it is different. There can*
be no doubt. Something is welling up under my own skin. I am not sure who I am. (Miéville 438-441)

Viewing the web of the world will eventually make it impossible for Yagharek to leave the city, but there are many other interesting portions in these lacunas in the text, because they often provide insight into the character that is the most on the outskirts of the plot as well as the physical text. To begin, the asides occur every hundred pages or so, which implies a strange regularity. Yagharek feels his old identity crumble because he is lost in the city, and misses any of his old connections to himself and his personality. This dislocation necessitates change, just as it did for Gaiman’s Richard Mayhew in *Neverwhere*, but at first Yagharek resists the change in identity by attempting to “trace the city’s monstrous geography” to discover where this change first began so he can stop it (Miéville 439). According to Kevin Lynch, this is typical of those who live within primary cities because “The terror of being lost comes from the necessity that a mobile organism be oriented in its surroundings” (Lynch 125). Yagharek feels this terror of being set adrift when he travels to New Crobuzon, and he feels himself losing hold of his former identity. Yagharek believes he can find his old identity by tracing his disorientation and subsequent reorientation in the city, but the task is impossible. The New Weird enters *Perdido Street Station* here because although the map at the beginning implies legibility within the landscape of New Crobuzon, the city actively works against each character to defy an intricate mapping of the city.

Yagharek, from the perspectives of the other characters, is not a sympathetic person because of the rape he committed while a part of his desert
community. And yet the asides make him so. When Yagharek stops trying to forgive himself and return the person he once was, he is driven toward his moment of decision within the city, and the reader perfectly follows this decision. Yagharek begins the novel as a liminal character, but moves away from that liminality to eventually carve out a new identity for himself that is not conducive to a fuller understanding of the city. However, Miéville implies that the only way to achieve a perfect understanding of the city is by sacrificing any role within it; instead, comprehension is achieved, in opposition to *Neverwhere*, from the outside in, as is the case with the Weaver.

The most liminal character in *Perdido Street Station* is a spider-like god called Weaver who attends and manages the web that creates the secondary universe. It is actually the most powerful being within the novel, but it is also insane, and unsettlingly ambiguous in that it has neither a gender nor an identifiable morality. The Weaver uses its non-committal nature to balance itself on the web that connects every possibility and reality within the city, by bringing together the tangible and intangible parts of the city.

> Every intention, interaction, motivation, every colour, every body, every action and reaction, every piece of physical reality and the thoughts it engendered, every connection made, every nuanced moment of history and potentiality, every toothache and flagstone, every emotion and birth and banknote, every possible thing is woven into that limitless sprawling web. (Miéville 348)

The web combines both the mental and physical portions of the palimpsest that comprise the total city. The Weaver in this way is *Perdido Street Station’s* version
of Door from *Neverwhere*. Because it is the only being that can traverse the underlying web of the Universe and make sense of the cacophony and influx of information that the city of New Crobuzon provides, the Weaver uses its liminality to its advantage. It is able to connect to any part of the city because of the hidden web that underlies New Crobuzon and ties together the secondary universe of *Perdido Street Station*. As with Door, there is no place within the secondary city that the Weaver cannot access—even Yagharek’s italicized sub-sections.

Even though Yagharek fails in this attempt and cannot discern the pattern of his life and what he should do next, the italicized sub-sections create a strange regularity. It is almost as if the reader becomes the Weaver for every aside in this text, stitching together a regular pattern that Yagharek cannot discern. This stitching creates an empathy and understanding of Yagharek that otherwise would not exist, by stripping Yagharek of his silence and giving him his own voice. This is because for the Weaver, there is no difference between the physical city and the mental processes of those that live within it. “For the Weaver, dreams and consciousness were one. The Weaver dreamed of being conscious and its consciousness was its dream, in an endless unfathomable stew of image and desire and cognition and emotion” (Miéville 552). The Weaver is an inverted version of the city, and as such is the only entity that can bear the weight of the city in its entirety, even though the Weaver has to be mad in order to do accomplish this.

Only the Weaver is capable of coalescing the unconnected images to form the web that not only represents the palimpsest of New Crobuzon, but also guides
and sustains the city. As with Gaiman’s perspective of the Magic City, the
Weaver’s examination of the web is completed with a dream-like wonder; as it
spins and rearranges the different segments of the web, the Weaver creates its
own palimpsest of the city. In *Perdido Street Station* and in *Neverwhere*, the
totality of the palimpsest is not always a pleasing sight, considering the sacrifices
that are required to see it, but it is always the way the city should be. The actions
that the Weaver employs to fix the layers are not always nice, as the Web often
demands the lives of those who live within the city, or just an ear from Lemuel,
Derkhan, and Isaac after it saves them from the slake moths at the beginning of
Part Five (Miéville 358). Although the pattern appears randomized, the Weaver is
the one being who can find regularity within it in order to read it. The Weaver is
limited only by its singular purpose of maintaining the web, and thus seeks to
destroy the slake moths because as they destroy the minds and dreams of the city
dwellers, they also tear the web. The horror that manifests the New Weird here is
a mix of comfort and discomfort because the quotidian stability of the city has
much less integrity than Isaac, Lin and Yagharek first believe. There is a comfort
to be found in the idea that the minds of those who live within a city create a
stability that allows it to function. The horror is introduced when, after a few
minds are consumed, that delicate web is torn, the balance shifts, and the city
begins to collapse without the fragile truce of physical and mental composition
that can make or unmake the terrifyingly complex city.

Just as characters such as Lin (a half-insect khepri woman), and Yagharek
(half-bird) are hybrid beings, New Crobuzon is, fundamentally, a hybrid city.
Everything and everyone has a different category that they fit into, as animals,
humans, and machines are jumbled together and reformed into a mongrel mixture that is constantly changing. After the slake moths are defeated, and the rhythm of the city returns to what it once was, the narrator of *Perdido Street Station* describes the state of the city:

Rain and streetlamp light made all the lines and edges of the city complex—a palimpsest of gusting trees and architecture and sound, ancient ruins, darkness, catacombs, building sites, guesthouses, barren land, lights and pubs and sewers—it was an endless, recursive, secretive place. (Miéville 590)

The complexity of the city is exemplified through the style of the passage. The narrator is describing New Crobuzon as Lin’s compound eyes would see it, one detail at a time. The details form together to create the totality of the palimpsest, but the readers are so distracted by the disparate parts of the whole that they cannot understand how this Weird magic trick is accomplished. In addition, the complexity of the city doesn’t lead to empathy and understanding among its residents, as inhabitants of New Crobuzon are constantly marginalized by each other and the city. Yet, the marginalized remain important because the people pushed to the fringes are those that the story focuses on. Each of the main characters within the novel, including Yagharek, either begins on the outskirts of society, as with Richard in *Neverwhere*, or is pushed to the limits, as is the case with Isaac, due in part to his association with Lin.

Miéville introduces satire into *Perdido Street Station* here, because even though New Crobuzon is built on hybridity, fraternization between species and other tribes is taboo. In fact, Isaac has to hide his relationship with Lin from the
less open-minded inhabitants of New Crobuzon. The longer they stay together, the more nervous that Isaac becomes, as he is from the very beginning of the novel:

> Questions as yet unasked demanded attention. Innocent remarks and askance looks from others, a moment of contact too long in public—a note from a grocer—everything was a reminder that they were in some contexts, living a secret. (Miéville 11).

Isaac is party to a distinct tension in his relationship with Lin, because even though he loves her, he doesn’t want to risk being shunned by the other citizens of New Crobuzon, so his relationship with Lin teeters on the edge of public and private. Isaac is not the only character who is affected negatively by the other inhabitants of the city, as Yagharek is rebuffed by the other garuda in New Crobuzon because he is one of the desert garuda, and therefore doesn’t belong in the city. Miéville identifies the hierarchy between the different species within the city, as well as the hierarchy between citizens of the city and “tourists” like Yagharek, who merely visit the city.

Satire is also introduced into *Perdido Street Station* in regards to the government officials who attempt to control the slake moths. Miéville uses the New Weird to incorporate satire into the novel after the introduction of the slake moths by implying there are horrific elements that control the city to begin with. For example, the government attempts to solve the problem of the slake moths without contacting the Weaver, and therefore Mayor Rudgutter liaises with an ambassador demon who serves “Its Diabolic Majesty, the Czar of Hell” (Miéville 243). The mayor has no delusions about the necessity of the government
interacting with Hell, and admits that he understands the demon ambassador more than the Weaver because the demons are “tortured and torturing, calculating and capricious. Shrewd. Comprehensible. They were political” (Miéville 287). This is a satirical and pessimistic viewpoint of the workings of government in the city, first because the government is incompetent, and secondly, because it is infernal in every sense of the word. This is typical of Miéville’s perspective of government in primary London, because as Jessica Tiffin notes in her article “Outside/Inside Fantastic London”, Miéville’s secondary London “is energized by his Marxist awareness, but it is also…very much about multiplicity and hybridity” (Tiffin 35). The government wants shape the city to its will, as Jessica did in Neverwhere, but the mayor still acknowledges that the Weaver is the only being with true power over the shape of the city. Instead of believing he can access and shape the city at the end of the novel, Yagharek wants to disappear into the city and be consumed by it.

At the end of Perdido Street Station Yagharek has to make a choice as to which part of the city he wants to experience, much like Richard forced himself to decide in the secondary world of Neverwhere. Both Half-A-Prayer, mercenary who helps defeat the slake moths, and the city of New Crobuzon itself offer Yagharek different versions of the city. The version of the city that Half-A-Prayer offers Yagharek is one of marginalization, and Half-A-Prayer wants to celebrate the separation from the crowd of New Crobuzon. “And he offers me a way out, into his uncommunity, his margin, his mongrel city. The violent and honourable place from where he rages” (Miéville 623). However, Yagharek rejects this version, because he so desperately wants to disappear into the city. In the
beginning of the novel, he is afraid that the city will consume him, but at the end of the novel, he welcomes this consumption, this submission to the overwhelming force that drives the city and those that live within it.

I turn away from him and step into the vastness of New Crobuzon, this towering edifice of architecture and history, this complexitude of money and slum, this profane steam-powered god. I turn and walk into the city my home, not bird or garuda, not miserable crossbreed. I turn and walk into my home, the city, a man.

(Miéville 623)

Neil Gaiman in *Neverwhere* employed his satire in order to reject capitalism within his secondary version of London, but China Miéville in *Perdido Street Station* engages satire to show how the transformative nature of the city, the hybridity, is not confined only to the citizens living within the city, but also the words used to describe the city. “Complexitude” is not a word on its own, but it is a hybrid of the words “complexity” and “multitude”. Complexitude as a hybrid word is tailor-made specifically for the city, because it concisely describes New Crobuzon’s nature, and it is as accurate a depiction of the city as a “palimpsest of gusting trees and architecture and sound, ancient ruins, darkness, catacombs” (Miéville 590). The hybridity of the city is an awesome and terrible sight, and it is not always something that makes its citizens happy. Yagharek cannot experience the totality of the city, but he also cannot bear the margins of the secondary world, so he would rather disappear into the crowd of the city than suffer or succeed on the outskirts, because he considers success on the fringe to be a meaningless victory. Although in the beginning of *Perdido Street Station*, Yagharek doesn’t
belong in the city, by the end of the novel Yagharek at the very least belongs to the city.

Gaiman in Neverwhere and Miéville in Perdido Street Station specifically, disagree about how much of the city can be experienced, and thus try to teach the reader different lessons about London prime. In Neverwhere, Richard chooses liminality with the implication that, through Door, he can experience the totality of the city. In Perdido Street Station, Yagharek abhors liminality, and there is an implication that in order to experience the totality not just of the city, but also of the universe, the character must remain outside of the world, which demands a little madness. Gaiman has a more optimistic view of the city, and how much it can be accessed, and Miéville’s secondary city actively works against legibility and assessment. This is the New Weird bubbling to the surface of the palimpsest, because the city “undermines the quotidian” itself and however much other characters might want to get to know the city, they do not own the access of the city, the city owns them. The characters have fundamentally misjudged their place within the city, as they believe they are in control when in fact the city has wrested control from every inhabitant.
**Unearthing the City (and the City)**

The secondary Londons of Bes el and Ul Qoma in Miéville’s 2009 novel *The City & the City* are in many ways defined by the characteristics that are part of the other two secondary Londons, including the disorientation of Tyador Borlú, a Bes detective investigating the murder of Mahalia Geary, a young American anthropologist studying in Ul Qoma. In addition to that, there is also the ostracizing nature of both Bes el and Ul Qoma, hybridity between cities, the city as palimpsest and a final decision moment where Miéville presents his opinion on whether or not total access to a city is possible. However, there are differences in the way this version of London is created within the secondary cities of Bes el and Ul Qoma that show Miéville’s logical progression and understanding of the primary city over time, as Miéville treats New Crobuzon in *Perdido Street Station* as something to be feared first and investigated second. As a detective story, *The
City & the City houses two cities that are literally made for examination by both the main character of Tyador Borlú and the readers of the novel.

A major difference between The City & the City and the other secondary versions of London is the way that fantastical elements intrude into the novel. In Gaiman’s Neverwhere, the magic of London Below was separate from London Above, whereas in Miéville’s Perdido Street Station magic was so much a part of society that it is essentially science, as Isaac attempts to create a paradox machine that will allow Yagharek to regain the ability of flight. The geography of the cities of Bes el and Ul Qoma in The City & the City is inherently fantastical because two cities lie on top of one another, with a different city lying on top of the geographic palimpsest, depending on what part of the city each person is in. This division between Bes el and Ul Qoma even extends to the map of the cities that Borlú examines during the course of the investigation: “the lines and shades of division were there—total, alter, and crosshatched—but ostentatiously subtle, distinctions of greyscale” (Miéville 46). Tyador describes the areas that are totally in one city or the other as “topolgängers”, a secondary version of Doppelgängers (Miéville 144). Topolgängers are therefore places that are geographically identical, but in different cities. The map is also separated into crosshatched areas, where the only things tying each citizen to their own city are mannerisms and perspective. The cities violate the natural laws of the primary universe, and this is important because “in the fantastic, the uncanny or supernatural event was perceived against the background of what is considered normal and natural; the transgression of the laws of nature made us even more powerfully aware of them” (Todorov 173). Miéville transgresses the laws of nature within the secondary
version of London, and creates parallel cities that lie on top of one another to show the inherent laws or rules of primary London, and how the primary city is not necessarily accepting of those that live within it.

The title of *The City & the City* is itself a metaphor because even though there is a differentiation between the two cities of Bél and Ul Qoma, a connection between them is established through the use of the ampersand within the title, which inexorably links both cities together. This connects the secondary cities to the primary city of London, because there are actually two cities of London. The first is the “City” of London, which is “The area ruled by the Lord Mayor and Corporation of London covers some 677 acres, or slightly over one square mile, including the Temple precinct” (Weinreb and Hibbert 127). Then there is the “city” of London, normally referred to simply as London, which encapsulates the 32 districts of London as well as the City of London. Both London and the City of London have their own governments, city halls, laws and mayors (0:30-0:53 Grey). Primary London readers of *The City & the City* would already be familiar with the fragmentation of one city into two, and the “City & the city” of the title is referring to the primary city of London itself. This is not the first comparison between primary and secondary Londons that Miéville makes within the text, as the entire novel is a palimpsest, comprised of varying levels of physical and psychological details belonging to primary London.

There are two layers of this literary palimpsest and each constitutes an important aspect of the relationship between the secondary cities Bél and Ul Qoma. The first layer is physical, as streets can be in Bél or Ul Qoma, but a location can also be “crosshatched”, meaning a street, building, or even room can
be in either city. Therefore, a citizen of Bes el can walk down a street in the city on a crosshatched area and see buildings both in Bes el and Ul Qoma. This creates the uncanny feeling of familiar unfamiliarity within the text, because the city is permanently half-legible to those who live in it, as it is illegal for citizens living in one city to see the other. This lack of legibility is also satirized in Neverwhere, for every character except Richard and Door, who can experience all sides of the city. Perdido Street Station also relies on a lack of legibility for the citizens living within New Crobuzon. As Miéville writes, the city of New Crobuzon carries within it a “complexitude”, a hybridity that renders the city impossible to fully comprehend, and this manifests the distant familiarity. This complexitude is matched within Bes el and Ul Qoma, and one of the many examples of familiar unfamiliarity occurs at the very beginning of The City & the City, when Borlú describes the location of his apartment in Bes el in relation to Ul Qoma. In a similar situation to when Richard is invisible in his apartment to those who live Above, Borlú purposefully approximates that lack of sight and pretends that he cannot see citizens in the other city. “In the morning trains ran on a raised line metres from my window. They were not in my city. I did not of course, but I could have stared into the carriages—they were quite that close—and caught the eyes of foreign travelers” (Miéville 25). Borlú has a proximate physical location to Ul Qoma, but he still considers himself entirely in Bes el, and does not consider it possible to see or visit Ul Qoma. Therefore, because it is illegal for citizens to look and walk through both cities it is impossible for an individual citizen to fully experience the physical side of the either city because they are always carefully negotiating the other city with the purpose of not seeing it.
Physical mapping of the cities of Bes el and Ul Qoma is impossible as there is not a “whole” city to be traversed, and therefore legibility within the secondary cities in The City & the City is unattainable: “a legible city would be one whose districts or landmarks or pathways are easily identifiable and are easily grouped into an overall pattern” (Lynch 3). Tyador is often cut off from walking down one street by an entirely different city, as he is near the end of the novel, and therefore the cities themselves are denying totality to him, so Borlú transgresses their laws. If a citizen wants to snap the city into legibility, the only option is to break the laws dividing both Bes el and Ul Qoma and enter into what Miéville calls “Breach.”

Breach is paradoxically, the unifying force that separates the cities within the physical and mental layers of the palimpsest. Breach constitutes both the symbol of separation within the cities of Bes el and Ul Qoma, and the symbol of totality and perfect integration within the cities, akin to the figure of Door within Neverwhere and Weaver within Perdido Street Station. Breach is both a place and a kind of person who polices the borders between the cities, ensuring that Bes el and Ul Qoma remain distinct, and because of this, each avatar that represents the power of Breach is endowed with the privilege to walk in both of the cities. The citizens embrace the power of this organization that lies outside of the governments because a great majority of the citizens within both cities stand against the unification of Bes el and Ul Qoma; they believe that if the cities were to make breaching legal, then the individual cities would cease to exist and they would merge to become one city, which a group of protesters attempt to bring about at the end of the novel.
Now they were all grouped as one, dragging a grassroots breach with them as they went from wall to wall spraying slogans in a rather artful combine of Bes el and Illitan, words that, perfectly legible if somewhat filigreed and serifed, read TOGETHER! UNITY! in both languages. (Miéville 279)

All it takes for the Bes and Illitan languages to be unified is changing the shape of their letters. This simple unification for the entire city fails because Breach intervenes, but this fear of the mongrel city is realized in Borlú, as he eventually joins Breach at the end of the novel, and leaves both cities behind. Miéville is saying that the totality of the cities is not achievable for everyone because of Breach, but he is also claiming that individuals can achieve totality, even at the expense of living on the liminal spaces of the city.

Tyador allows himself to Breach in order to catch the man who not only killed Yolanda, a friend of Mahalia Geary’s, but also moved Mahalia Geary’s body. Borlú does this because he cannot communicate with Bes el police while he remains in Ul Qoma, so he runs to catch the murderer’s accomplice himself, and sheds the bureaucratic ties that could have allowed the man to escape. As the accomplice moves from a crosshatched area to a “total” Bes el area, he believes that Borlú, currently residing in the Ul Qoma portion of the crosshatch will be unable to stop him. “He looked at me at the threshold to that abroad-only geography and made a tiny triumphant smile. He stepped toward space where no one in Ul Qoma could go. I raised the pistol and shot him” (Miéville 237).

However, physical separation is not the most important aspect of the friction between the cities.
The second layer within the palimpsestic text of *The City & the City* is mental and contributes to the satirical content as the inhabitants of each city struggle to “unsee” each other, and even as Borlú struggles to move through the city of Bes el, “the streets were crowded with those elsewhere. I unsee them, but it took time to move past them all” (Miéville 25). Just as Jessica cannot abide the existence of another city in *Neverwhere* and “unsees” those who do not fit into her structured reality, the existence of the other city in *The City & the City* is not only an inconvenience, it is actually more effort to pretend not to see the other citizens than to acknowledge them. In fact, as in *Neverwhere*, the acknowledgment of the existence of another city is treated as a kind of disease, as it is within *The City & the City* when anonymous caller breaches in order to call Borlú from Ul Qoma with information regarding Mahalia Geary. “He made me accessory. The information was an allergen in Bes el—the mere fact of it in my head was a kind of trauma. I was complicit. It was done” (Miéville 37). As with Richard’s experience with London Below, the existence of the “other” city is an embarrassment, regardless of whether the other city is Bes el or Ul Qoma. This is why the governments of Bes el and Ul Qoma strive to drive a cultural wedge in between the cities and create as many arbitrary distinctions as possible in order to keep the cities separate.

Cultural aspects such as language are similar in Bes el and Ul Qoma, as the separate dialects of the cities are still from the same root language, just as each city is a branch of the same physical city that used to be connected before they were split by an event that the citizens of Bes el and Ul Qoma call the “Cleavage”. Borlú views this confluence of items himself, when he travels to the
Ul Qoman dig site where Mahalia Geary was working before she was killed:

Items that should have spanned epochs, contemporaneous. No other culture in the region made any but the scantest, seductively vague references to the pre-Cleavage locals, these peculiar men and women, witch-citizens by fairy tale with spells that tainted their discards. (Miéville 150-151)

While the cities form a geographical hybridity that is an intrusive example of the New Weird within the text, there is also a historical hybridity between the two cities to be found. Professor Bowden, the man who first invented the theory of the mythical third city of Orciny, finds evidence of the connection between Bes el and Ul Qoma during an archaeological dig that he is participating in, as he finds artifacts that belong in both cities in the same place. Not only that, but the professor also finds artifacts from different time periods mixed together, and tells Borlú “‘you’ll dig up what looks like cutting-edge late antiquity, really beautiful complicated bronze work mixed right up with frankly Neolithic stuff’” (Miéville 91). This historical palimpsest within the dig site in Ul Qoma is an example of Miéville recreating the temporal palimpsest that Gaiman presented in *Neverwhere*, because the primary city of London has a rich historical background that intrudes into the modern city it is today, just as the past artifacts are mixed with more contemporary iterations. One of the many examples of the past intruding into the present is the storage of human remains within the London Museum in primary London:

Most visitors to the Museum of London are completely unaware that thousands of bones are perfectly preserved underneath their
feet…Each of these boxes contains the bones of one person. The numbers are astonishing…close to twenty thousand. (Secrets of London)

In this way, primary London has also experienced the New Weird, by finding bodies from different eras within modern London, and also because the Weirdness of London has always existed, but it is being uncovered layer by layer.

There are also the arbitrary linguistic differences that are heavily enforced between Besź and Illitan (the Ul Qoman dialect). These meaningless distinctions exist only to separate the cities from each other, and as Borlú notes, “Despite careful cultural differentiation, in the shape of their grammars and the relations of their phonemes (if not the base sounds themselves), the languages are closely related—they share a common ancestor, after all” (Miéville 42). The relation of Illitan and Besź languages is a satirical element within the novel, because although the countries are closer to each other in cultural terms than not, the citizens still throw up barriers to prevent empathy towards each other, just as New Crobuzon is segmented by race and profession to prevent the taboo interaction that Isaac and Lin represent. This is akin to primary London, as there are roughly 100 languages spoken in every borough in London, with a total of approximately 300 languages spoken (Bentham). There is a linguistic palimpsest that primary residents of London live in that estranges one citizen from another. The citizens of Besź el and Ul Qoma force themselves to ignore the linguistic differences instead of embracing them, and are even more cut off from each other as a result.

The continued separation of Ul Qoma and Besź el is due to the existence of Breach, but also to a systematic level of bureaucracy that keeps both of the cities
partially detached from one another, in addition to clouding the details of the murder that Borlú would otherwise be able to see easily. Borlú has to receive permission to investigate the murder in Ul Qoma, because it is considered to be outside of his jurisdiction. Furthermore, because Mahalia Geary’s body was carried through official channels, and was not simply thrown from one city into the other, the murderer did not commit Breach, the ultimate inviolable law that rules both cities. “Even if the permits were faked, the travel through the borders in Copula Hall made it a question of illegal entry, not of breach. That is a crime you might have in any country. There had been no breach” (Miéville 111). If the government in both cities functioned properly together, then Borlú would have had a much simpler path for his investigation, and Miéville makes it clear that whatever occupations that the governments and people should be concerned with, they are both failing.

Miéville places himself within the tradition of satirizing the government of London in the twentieth century, just as Dickens did during the nineteenth. Miéville accomplishes this through the use of a detective character that investigates not only the murderer but also the government of the city, and even the many-layered city itself. The city is as much of a character in *The City & the City* as it was in *Perdido Street Station* because the cities of Ul Qoma, Bes el, and New Crobuzon promise truth and then hide it, implying the city has motivations far beyond an inanimate block of buildings. Borlú explores the incomprehensibility of the secondary world of *The City & the City* when he continues the investigation even after the request to invoke Breach is denied. Miéville satirizes the primary government of London as he did with the “infernal”
government of New Crobuzon. “At that official checkpoint where the cities meet? Many crimes are committed in such an act, but breach is not one of them” (Miéville 110). Miéville’s satirizes the government here by presenting the government as a willingly incompetent bureaucracy. He employs satire here because he wants the primary government to become more effective in making laws that are catered to the way the world actually is, not the way that politicians view it. Miéville doesn’t present the case as unsolvable, but Borlú has to break the law in order to uphold it when he Breaches and shoots a suspect, which shows exactly how useless the governments that work within the cities are, as they separate themselves from one another. However, it is not just the governments of each city that establishes a larger gap between the cities.

Cultural competition also leads to satire in The City & the City, as inhabitants in Ul Qoma distinguish themselves from Bes’ citizens through their culture, language, and even the colors that they are allowed to use on their storefronts (Miéville 94). However, this is not so much an identity for each culture as it is a negative identity. Farah Mendlesohn explains the issues with this kind of thinking, because “The problem with seeing oneself in terms of what one is not, is that this is a fundamentally negative set of virtues, an attitude that leads to the draining of the soul and sensibility” (Mendlesohn 186). This mental prejudice based on geography also occurred in London prime between the East and West Ends, which Miéville is satirizing here. Originally, the West End was the answer to the question of how to separate the rabble of the crowd from the civilized people of London, "but they didn't remain models of civic harmony for long. The London crowd, with all its mess and degradation flowed into every new
space. No one could live apart from it” (*London* 21:00). Segmenting and creating a piecemeal version of the city, thereby stratifying the different social categories, would only work for so long without the outside intervention of an organization like Breach, because the only reason that Ul Qoma has a growing “New Wolf” economy distinct from Bes’ stagnant economy is because Breach separates it from becoming one with Bes (Miéville 92). This economic imbalance is mirrored in primary London, as shown in a study executed by London Voluntary Service Council (LVSC). The gap of the income divide between the richest and poorest of London is one of the greatest in the world:

The Hills enquiry in January of 2010 revealed that even the worst-off of the richest 10% of people in London have wealth which is 273 times greater than that held by the best-off of the poorest 10% of Londoners...1 in 5 Londoners earns less than a living wage, which is £7.85. (LVSC 8-12)

Miéville is satirizing the cultural and economic inequalities that are purposefully implemented to keep the people in both the primary and secondary cities separate from each other, and the inequalities are part of the reason why Borlú changes to Breach at the end of the novel. Tyador Borlú is drawn to Ul Qoma because he recognizes it as being similar to his own city. As he becomes more familiar with the state of each city, the more he dislocates himself from them both.

Both the mental and physical layers of the palimpsest that create the cityscapes of Bes and Ul Qoma lend themselves to disorientation. This is because each city requires its citizens to fully commit to their city, while constantly ignoring evidence of the other. Thus dislocation, the catalyst for
character change within the city, is much simpler for Miéville to introduce into this text because of the individual nature of the geography of the secondary cities. Tyador Borlú must travel into Ul Qoma, the city he has been taught to never see and only barely acknowledge, in order to solve the mystery. Unlike Richard or Yagharek, this disorientation is a purposeful one, as Borlú travels into the other city and intentionally “unsees” the city of his birth. Borlú goes through an orientation process before he is allowed to enter Ul Qoma in the second part of the novel. Therefore, he, like other tourists visiting Ul Qoma, practices “unseeing…familiar environs, where we lived the rest of our life, and seeing the buildings beside us that we had spent decades making sure not to notice” (Miéville 133). This experience of the city generating the possibility for estrangement, and the character purposefully taking that opportunity generates the feeling of the uncanny.

To introduce the fantastic is to replace familiarity, comfort, das Heimlich[e], with estrangement, unease, the uncanny. It is to introduce dark areas, of something completely other and unseen, the spaces outside the limiting frame of the “human” and the “real” outside the control of the “word” and the “look”. (Jackson, 43)

By purposefully separating himself from what was once familiar, Tyador accidentally creates the uncanny feeling of recognition for himself and the reader of The City & the City and invokes the New Weird. Another complication for the cities is introduced by Pall Drodin, a member of a group that wants to unify both cities, when he explains to Borlú that Mahalia Geary could have been killed because of her belief in Orciny, a mythical city that underlies the other two.
“Orciny’s the third city. It’s between the other two. It’s in the
dissensi, disputed zones, places that Bes el thinks are Ul Qoma’s
and Ul Qoma Bes el’s. When the old commune split, it didn’t split
into two, it split into three. Orciny’s the secret city. It runs things.”
(Miéville 50)

This not only complicates the palimpsest, but it also entirely unhinges Borlú’s
previous experience of the city, as well as the reader’s comparison with primary
London, and disengages him from his beliefs and also his personality as he has to
reorient himself from the belief in two cities to the belief in three. This also
generates the feeling of the New Weird, because this secondary city seems to be a
sinister palimpsest, with a third dark layer underlying the other two that waits to
reach up and drag down anyone who learns about it.

Just as there is disorientation for Tyador Borlú within the text of The City & the City,
there is also a psychological displacement for the readers of the novel living in the primary world. Readers become just as disoriented as Borlú does as the novel progresses because humans in the primary world use their surroundings to create psychological stability as much as the characters in the secondary world do. This occurs because Miéville includes details within The City & the City that imply that the secondary cities of Bes el and Ul Qoma actually exist in the primary world. He does this by referencing details that would belong in the primary city, such as the existence of the musician Van Morrison (Miéville 37). This splintered connection to the primary world, made by mixing primary and secondary elements, creates the uncanny because there is an inherent familiarity with primary world details that Miéville mines to juxtapose with the secondary
cities, and “Although set within a fantastic ontological, individual elements of the city are altered only slightly, producing and unsettling sense of disturbed familiarity” (Maczynska 71). This juxtaposition between reality and fantastical elements creates the hesitation that manifests the uncanny, because the primary world details generate the familiarity and the cities of Ul Qoma and Bes el produce the unfamiliarity, and the reader stands on the mental threshold, belonging in one and looking into the other.

There is also a stylistic estrangement once again enacted by Miéville with this text, similar to how he used the breaks in text in Perdido Street Station to his advantage in showing the liminal nature of Yagharek. The City & the City is split into three parts: Bes el, Ul Qoma, and Breach. These “portal pages” that are separated from the rest of the text are important because the reader can infer Borlú’s state of mind given what stage of the novel Borlú has achieved. For example, immediately after the “Part Two: Ul Qoma” page near the middle of the novel, when Tyador enters Ul Qoma and leaves Bes el behind. This textual progression not only shows his physical and mental journey through the novel, as Borlú identifies himself first as a Bes detective, then as a man within Ul Qoma, and finally as an avatar of breach at the end of the novel.

This stylistic choice is important because it keeps the cities separate, while the plot presents the cities as part of the same palimpsest, two halves that lie on top of one another to create a single entity linked by Breach and the crosshatched areas. Although the citizens would like to believe otherwise, the cities are connected, and both sides of the palimpsest, physical and mental, are manipulated by the murderer of Mahalia Geary, Professor Bowden, as well as Borlú at the end
of the novel. After Professor Bowden is found to be the murderer, he attempts to walk out of both cities through the crosshatched areas, and the police cannot touch him until his mannerisms betray which city he is in. However, “He walked with equipoise, possibly in either city. Schrodinger’s pedestrian” (Miéville 295). Bowden would not be able to access any part of the city that way, because he has to remain within the crosshatched areas, but, as an avatar of Breach notes: “‘He’s been a student of the cities,’ Ashil said. ‘Maybe it took an outsider to really see how citizens mark themselves, so as to walk between it’” (Miéville 308). Thus Miéville is saying something important about the way in which inhabitants of London access the city as opposed to outsiders. Kevin Lynch recognizes that for inhabitants of primary cities “there seemed to be a tendency for those more familiar with a city to rely increasingly on systems of landmarks for their guides” (Lynch 78). The more familiar an inhabitant is with a primary city, the less likely he or she is to explore it. People wouldn’t purposefully get lost when they have a clearly definable path, unless disorientation is their purpose in the first place, in order to induce change. This purposeful disorientation is what Bowden accomplishes by refusing to commit to either city, and this allows him to experience both sides at once. However, Bowden is still limited because even though he can access part of the city with his physical equivocation, he cannot access all of it.

The only entity that can see through all of the levels of the palimpsest, and experience all sides of the city, are the people who police the transgression of the laws: Breach. Breach is not only who these people are, it is where they are, as when Tyador arrests Bowden: “I dragged Breach with me, enveloped him in it,
pulled him out of either town into neither, into the Breach” (Miéville 304). However, this access to the city comes with a price, as Tyador can no longer interact with anyone from his former life, and therefore “I live in the interstice yes, but I live in both the city and the city” (Miéville 312). Tyador changes his identity in order to experience the city, just like Richard does in Neverwhere when he transforms into “The Warrior”. Tyador lives in the liminal space outside the laws of society, and becomes Tye, an avatar of Breach. Therefore, for a person who has access to the entire city, Miéville believes that a sacrifice is required. In contrast to Perdido Street Station, Tye doesn’t shun the sacrifice of his normal life for a life on the margins of society, as Yagharek does.

Miéville’s views of the city have evolved over time from the 2000 novel Perdido Street Station to the 2009 novel The City & the City, to where he now believes that totality of the city is possible, but not to someone who accepts comfortable patterns. Miéville is implying that familiarity breeds contentment, then the citizens within the primary city stop examining the city. They do not want to be disoriented by the view of the New Weird bubbling up from the depths of the primary palimpsest. For Miéville, that purposeful disorientation, accomplished by shaking loose the bonds of repetition, is not necessarily a bad thing. If Tye had not put himself into the middle of the palimpsest by investigating every layer of it, then disorientation and character change would not have occurred.
The Magic City, The New Weird, and the Book of London

In Jessica Tiffin’s investigation of the works of Gaiman and Miéville in their transformations of primary London, she writes

The city’s tensions and oppositions are ideally suited to fantastic depiction, which in its classic provision of clear-cut moral and magical oppositions has the power to externalize issues as symbol: to create and then investigate and image of otherness. (Tiffin 34)
Gaiman and Miéville examine what it means to be made an “other” not only by individuals within the city, but also by the primary city itself, which holds many opportunities for success and for destruction. London invites description, but defies encapsulation and beggars belief. It is a paradox generator in and of itself, constantly living and dying, an animate inanimate. Although London is a place, the city is also representative of a state of mind, and as Richard, Yagharek, and Tyador navigate their secondary Londons, they are also experiencing a mental journey. Although the Magic City and the New Weird perspectives differ in tone, the experience of disorientation and reorientation remains the same for both authors, because the physical travel within London isn’t the most important aspect of the city. Both Gaiman and Miéville recognize the city of London as a psychologically transformative force, shaping the minds of those that live within it, and disengages them from previously known surroundings in order to see the different layers of the palimpsestic nature of primary London, which is a text of social, political, geographic, economic, and historical pages that bleed into one another. As a cultural and historical text, each interpretation of primary London in *Neverwhere*, *Perdido Street Station*, and *The City & the City*, has seen a consistent obliteration of the arbitrary gaps between these pages, as well as the distinctions between physical and mental, past and present, high and low. This not only means that these books are a continuation of the urban gothic, this also means that achieving the totality of primary London is accomplished through perspective. The only importance that the separations hold is the significance that the characters give to them. If Richard, Yagharek and Tyador do not willfully mind the separations between those that live Above and Below, between garuda
and man, or between the citizens of Bes el and Ul Qoma the gaps cease to exist, and this is the message that both Gaiman and Miéville are trying to get across: Primary London is a physical and mental text, and all that is left to do is to read it.

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