

LITERALIZED METAPHORS IN CHINA MIEVILLE'S BAS-LAG NOVELS

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Literalized Metaphors in China Miéville's Ba-Lag Novels

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## ABSTRACT

In this paper, I will be discussing hybridity, Othering, and agency in China Miéville's fantasy novels set in the world of Bas-Lag. I will be expanding upon Joan Gordon's concept of "literalized metaphors" which suggests that fantasy fiction is able to comment on metaphorical concepts by literalizing those concepts into physical representations. Miéville's novels offer commentary on the nature of the postcolonial concept of hybridity through the physical realities of the nonhuman xenians and the criminal Remade. I argue that, through these literalized metaphors, the Bas-Lag novels suggest that hybridity leads to Othering, but it also leads to greater agency than would otherwise be possible.

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## INTRODUCTION

Fantasy fiction is a genre that is difficult to pin down. Edward James and Farah Mendlesohn suggest that fantasy is “about the construction of the impossible” (1). Ursula K. Le Guin, noted science fiction and fantasy author, describes her fiction as “a thought-experiment” (156). This definition allows science fiction and fantasy “the moral complexity proper to the modern novel” without the boundaries of the real world: “thought and intuition can move freely within bounds set only by the terms of the experiment” (Le Guin 156). China Miéville’s novels *Perdido Street Station*, *The Scar*, and *Iron Council* are set in a fantastic world named Bas-Lag—a “thought-experiment” that combines complex moral issues with impossible fantasy imagery. While bearing many of the trademarks of classic fantasy fiction in the vein of Tolkien, with adventurers, monsters, and magic, Bas-Lag is influenced by many genres, from steampunk and cyberpunk to horror and westerns. It is a world of primal and massive beasts, disturbing and twisted terrors, and self-replicating clockwork constructs. Miéville blends these various genres into a loosely connected fantastic trilogy, filled with strange characters and plots. The novels involve fanciful characters saving large communities from eldritch mind-eating moths, a hole in the fabric of reality, and a bizarre bomb that sucks the color out of its victims. Its bizarre array of characters includes a rogue scientist intent on giving a bird-man back his wings, a diving engineer with tentacles grafted to his chest, and a railway worker who can shape mud, shadow, and even time into golems. But despite the otherworldliness of Bas-Lag, the novels also offer real-life criticism by exploring the mutability of the human and by probing the limits of life, humanity, and human agency.

In *Perdido Street Station*, *The Scar*, and *Iron Council*, the liminal nature of many characters suggests a kind of social and cultural hybridity that has both positive and negative

moral implications and that sometimes facilitates and sometimes hinders action. But what is more, the extent to which this hybridity is realized physically allows the reader to confront hybridity wholesale: hybridity in Miéville is as a personified entity, a being who is marked, defined, and visually representative of its own perpetual state of unhomeliness. Joan Gordon, exploring hybridity in Bas-Lag, comments on how “literatures of the fantastic . . . have the particular freedom of literalizing metaphor” (457). These “literalized metaphors” offer fantasy (and similar genres) an approach to issues unavailable to more realistic fiction. The Bas-Lag novels, through its use of “literalized metaphors,” confronts issues of identity and humanity or of what it means to be humane if not human, especially as it position its menagerie of hybrids in social settings that other, marginalize, and stereotype them. Focusing on these “literalized metaphors,” I will explore hybridity in this paper as, building on Gordon’s definition of the term, as something that bears “exploration” and that is “meant to be generative rather than complete” (Gordon 456). Gordon suggests that the metaphor literalized by Miéville is the postcolonial concept of hybridity. In the world he creates, Bas-Lag serves as the setting within which hybridity is transformed, and thus literalized, from a cultural concept to a physical, biological reality, thereby recapturing and metamorphosing the meaning the word originally carried. For Gordon, this literalization is illustrated in Miéville’s creation of the city of New Crobuzon and its residents: while Miéville’s home city of London and its inhabitants may be “metaphorically hybrid,” the people of Bas-Lag are “fantastically chimeric” and the city is “fantastically accreted” (Gordon 457). Building on but also significantly extending Gordon’s reading, I will explore Othering, agency, and literalized hybridity in all three Bas-Lag novels.

Homi K. Bhabha, in both *Of Mimicry and Man* and *Signs Taken for Wonders*, argues that hybridity upsets and undermines colonial authority. In *Signs Taken for Wonders* particularly,

Bhabha highlights how hybridity rids both the colonized and the colonizer of their full presence and robs the colonial authority of the Other it defines itself against. Hybridity, he says, “disturbs the visibility of the colonial presence and makes the recognition of its authority problematic” (*Signs Taken for Wonders* 154). *Bas-Lag* is rife with hybridity—from Bhabha’s traditional mimetic colonized subjects who undermine colonial authority by mimicking the colonizer to chimeric physical hybrids composed of a mixture of human, animal, and machine, numerous characters in *Bas-Lag* experience one form of hybridity or other. While only some of these characters fall squarely into Bhabha’s definition, all toy with its basic premise; and their interaction with his theoretical framework and an examination of their positioning within Miéville’s world-building illuminate the novels’ fantastic approach to postcolonialism. Edward Said’s *Orientalism* additionally discusses how the West has used the Orient as a contrasting image—the opposite, or, in postcolonial terminology, the Other. This Othering can be seen, without fantastic “literalization,” in *Bas-Lag*, as the dominant culture of New Crobuzon labels anything unlike the norm as Other, providing those “contrasting images, idea, personality, experience” (*Orientalism* 1866). Miéville thus uses fantastic characters and situations to represent an exaggerated version of Othering, not quite making the metaphor literal, but rather illuminating the process and effects through vivid and visceral images.

Also tied up in *Bas-Lag* hybridity are the concepts of abjection and double consciousness. Abjection is Julia Kristeva’s term for that which is neither subject nor object, but rather “the jettisoned object . . . radically excluded” (Kristeva 2). Many of the characters in *Bas-Lag* represent the abject: they find themselves cast off and Othered by the disgust exhibited toward and projected at them because of their physical hybridity. In particular, the Remade, criminals who are forcibly reshaped by the New Crobuzon government, are forced into an artificial



underclass due to the abjection of their physical hybridity. In this way, abjection is another path to the label of Other—an extreme and hostile way in which the Other is excluded from the socially acceptable norm. The treatment of hybridity also leads to a kind of “double-consciousness,” a term used by W. E. B. Du Bois to describe the “twoness” of identity that comes with being an African American in a predominantly white culture (364). In *Bas-Lag*, this double consciousness is found among many xenians and Remade that the dominant culture of New Crobuzon Others. These individuals often experience the same kind of “twoness” that Du Bois describes, identifying with two different and warring cultures at once.

Hybridity for Miéville leads to more than just Othering. In Bhabha’s writing, a central theme is how hybridity and mimicry, caught between the colonized and the colonizer, leads to agency and power for the hybrid. In *Signs Taken for Wonders*, Bhabha explains that the colonial authority (imperial discourses represented by the English book, in his example) “cannot be represented as a plenitude or a ‘full’ presence” (*Signs Taken for Wonders* 149). To Bhabha, colonial power is “always ambivalent”—and this ambivalence complicates the Othering imposed by the colonial authority (*Signs Taken for Wonders* 150). Here, partial presence allows for the production of hybridity, which does not suffer from the partial presence of the colonizer. Closely related to this production of hybridity, Bhabha is highly concerned with mimicry, the imperfect replication of the colonizer by the colonized: “The display of hybridity . . . terrorizes authority with the *ruse* of recognition, its mimicry, its mockery” (*Signs Taken for Wonders* 157). Mimicry, Bhabha insists, reveals the weakness in colonial authority, the partial presence: “The *menace* of mimicry is its *double* vision which in disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourse also disrupts its authority” (*Of Mimicry and Man* 129). Mimicry, then, offers an alternate perspective on colonial authority, a “double vision” that, in turn, reveals the “ambivalence,” the partial

presence, of the colonial power, and undercuts its authority, exposing, ultimately, a lack of agency on behalf of the ruling class. In Bas-Lag, as in Bhabha's examples, hybridity instead grants greater agency to the oppressed and colonized: hybridity is able to "[challenge] the boundaries of discourse and subtly [change] its terms by setting up another specifically colonial space of power/knowledge" (*Signs Taken for Wonders*, 160). Similarly, Said projects that exiles, folks residing in a hybrid position outside their homeland and not yet accepted or assimilated into their current culture, have access to the same upsetting of power that Bhabha speaks of. Said explains that, while "most people are principally aware of one culture," the exile, in a position of hybridity, is "aware of at least two, and this plurality of vision gives rise to an awareness of simultaneous dimensions" (*Reflections on Exile* 186). This "plurality of vision" is similar to Bhabha's challenging of colonial discourse by the colonial hybrid. In Bas-Lag, hybridity is double-edged, granting agency through the "literalized metaphor" of hybridity: characters literally embody and thus claim full possession of their hybridity, wielding it as a weapon and/or positioning it politically in a manner that allows them access to power they would not normally have as social outsiders. The hybrids of Bas-Lag provide an alternate perspective and have ability to undercut colonial authority. Their hybridity labels them Other by the dominant Bas-Lag culture. But the novels also suggest that great good can arise from hybridity. Hybridity, Miéville suggests, produces agency where homogeneity fails. His characters illustrate how hybridity can lead to both Othering and agency.

Additionally, the communities of Bas-Lag are hybrid, physically reflecting and literalizing various levels of metaphorical, cultural hybridity. From the near-dystopian New Crobuzon, present in all three novels, over *The Scar*'s seafaring metropolis Armada, to the third installment's eponymous Iron Council, the perpetual train born of a proletarian revolution,

Miéville's communities exhibit the same cultural otherness his characters do. Their literal hybridities, of both composition and physicality, illustrate the cultural hybridity of their characters, just as the characters of Bas-Lag themselves do, on a smaller scale.

Miéville's novels are furthermore filled with monsters—and in Bas-Lag, “monster” and “hybrid” are strikingly synonymous; the terms frequently seem interchangeable and they draw attention to each other by their very proximity in the text. As mentioned before, the “literalized metaphors” of many of the novels' characters illustrates their hybridity through overt physical or cultural hybridities. These same hybridities, especially those that are physical, are labeled monstrous by the anthropocentric dominant culture of New Crobuzon. Monstrosity, then, becomes an umbrella term for all inhuman, unnatural, and physical hybridities within the world of Bas-Lag, leading to a decidedly negative Othering in the eyes of the government, but not it remains stable, strong, and a sources of social power when viewed from a perspective that embraces and accepts hybridity. For example, Lin, one of the major protagonists in *Perdido Street Station*, acts as a literalized metaphor for both the refugee experience and the experience of a liberal-minded artist who is alienated from the conservative, traditional culture that surrounds her because of her social and political position. However, she is also viewed as physically “monstrous,” with a red female human body and a large scarab for a head, and she is actively ostracized by mainstream New Crobuzon culture because of her deformity. Debra Benita Shaw, focusing on “self” and post-humanism, argues that “monsters” are deeply symbolic; their monstrosity contributes to their Othering with the fanastic world of Bas-Lag but also equips them with subversive agency: “Abjection and monstrosity are the lurking otherness which threaten the boundaries of the modern self and which . . . subvert the cartographies which establish the limits of . . . the human” (786). Shaw's argument centers on the concepts of self and

Other—the same division of self and Other that Said’s idea of Orientalism uses to define Europe against the Orient, and the same division the Bhabha’s colonial authority is dependent upon. Monstrosity may be thought of as hybridity seen from the perspective of the oppressive, self-focused culture—monstrosity is “that which cannot be encompassed by modernity’s taxonomic scheme” (Shaw 786). In *Bas-Lag*, monstrosity and hybridity are deeply intertwined; both concepts are vital to Miéville’s world-building. His monsters and his monstrous cities serve as the sources of the “literalized metaphors” through which *Bas-Lag* powerfully comments on hybridity.

## POWER: NEW CROBUZON'S COLONIAL PRESENCE

The characters and plots of *Perdido Street Station*, *The Scar*, and *Iron Council* are all influenced by the nation-state New Crobuzon. *Perdido Street Station*, named after the massive central railway station of New Crobuzon, is set entirely within the metropolis' various districts. *The Scar* follows a boat full of individuals leaving New Crobuzon, and while most of the novel is set within the floating city of Armada, New Crobuzon is a constant presence. The action of *Iron Council* takes partially place in New Crobuzon and partially elsewhere, with the Iron Council itself embodying a community derived from New Crobuzon. Though technically a single city-state, New Crobuzon's reach extends to the farthest corners of Bas-Lag, through resettlement, migration, and forced displacement, but mostly through the omnipresence of its Militia.

New Crobuzon thus emerges as a colonial, imperial power. The world outside New Crobuzon is subordinate to New Crobuzon: the Other, it is outside with New Crobuzon "dominating, restructuring, and having authority over" it (*Orientalism* 1868). This process of Othering, as Said calls it, positions everything and everybody who is not of New Crobuzon and tied to it as "outside" and "Other" through shared dominion and authority. Mirroring the colonial strategies of "splitting, denial, [and] repetition" described by Bhabha (*Signs Taken for Wonders* 156), New Crobuzon is a colonial state, whose influence stretches from the unseen colony of Nova Esperium (seemingly analogous to British-controlled Australia) to the Southerly cities of Cobsea and Myrshock. *Iron Council* chronicles a massive colonial endeavor known as the Transcontinental Railway Trust, a corporation closely allied with the government, which attempts to cut a transcontinental railway across the world's surface, opening up new areas to exploration and exploitation. The TRT, as it is called, fails due to a revolt by the underclass, the non-human and Remade railway workers that construct and operate the railroad. When the TRT,

and, by proxy, New Crobuzon itself, refuses to accept the terms the oppressed groups request, the workers appropriate the train and found the mobile, all-accepting community called Iron Council. Their revolt illustrates how the dominant culture and ideology of New Crobuzon enacts a type of Othering, much like how the West enacts Orientalism as described by Said. The accepted norm in New Crobuzon is less defined by its own specifics and more by its opposition to the Other—a label that encompasses much in New Crobuzon.

The ruling culture of New Crobuzon, defined and enforced by the central government, exercises dominion and authority over anyone inside and outside the city walls—effectively colonizing those outside but also othering its own populace. The office of the Mayor and the government military, the Militia, are a homogenous, powerful force that shapes and controls the city. While some citizens have the right to vote for the Mayor and Parliament, the government is clearly corrupt and does little to hide its goals. Humans, the apparent dominant race in New Crobuzon, are the baseline for accepted citizenry. “Xenians,” the physically othered within the city, are easily and immediately distinguishable from the humans, or the true, baseline New Crobozonians. Their visible difference, to quote Nicholas Birns, brings about “not plurality leading to a harmonious, diverse multiculturalism, but incommensurability” (203). The xenians, kept out of power and out of the Militia, are often forced into sections of the city that are little more than ghettos. For example, the khepri of New Crobuzon arrived centuries ago as refugees from some undisclosed disaster in their homeland. When they landed in the city, they counted themselves lucky; in other cities, they had been turned away or slaughtered wholesale. In New Crobuzon, the khepri are granted asylum but allocated one specific neighborhood within the city limits; in Kinken, a virtual ghetto, they are allowed to live sequestered away from the rest of the city. Kinken, by the time of *Perdido Street Station*, is a culture bound together by traditional

khepri ideas and infused with just a touch of New Crobuzon ideology. One khepri in *Perdido Street Station* describes the city quarter as a combination of “sanctimony, decadence, insecurity and snobbery” (*Perdido Street Station* 188). Eventually their numbers grows large enough to warrant another neighbor allocation, Creekside, which is even worse than Kinken. Where the khepri of Kinken have little money, the khepri in Creekside have less. Kinken has the benefit of a highly structured, traditional community, but Creekside’s residents are the underclass even to the other khepri: “Their sisters in Kinken despised them” (*Perdido Street Station* 185). Within the larger city of New Crobuzon, the khepri are called “bugs” and treated worse than other xenian races. Perhaps most important to our discussion here, they are forbidden from having relationships with humans; any mingling of their species with New Crubozian citizenship is not just undesirable but rigorously patrolled and regulated by the powers that be. Even if other races, such as the vodyanoi, are more integrated into New Crobuzon culture and industry, they too take a back seat to human supremacy. Xenians of any shape and persuasion represent the starkly obvious Other to the human “normal” of New Crobuzon.

Treated even worse than the xenians are the Remade, the artificially altered and physically modified underclass of the city. New Crobuzon has pioneered a technology called Remaking, wherein the state biothaumaturges in their punishment factories literally “remake” criminals by grafting mechanical contraptions or biological limbs onto their bodies. While Remaking was ostensibly conceived of as a punishment for terrible crimes, the government frequently exploits it for maiming political enemies and for scrupulously advancing state-funded industry. Felons are remade so they might better suit the specifications of dangerous or difficult jobs. Remaking is also one example of the literalization of metaphor in Bas-Lag: the violent process of cutting and replacing parts of people mirrors their “violent dislocation” that is “the act

of colonization” and reshapes them in the image or for the use of the colonizer (*Signs Taken for Wonders* 156). This violence does not only change the physical composition of the Remade, but also their social reality and their life after the crime. Permanently and physically marked by their crime, the Remade carry a heavy social stigma and exist only on the fringes of society as a chimeric underclass. Even those citizens who are sympathetic to xenians and have radical political leanings have a hard time caring about the Remade. Their crime becomes literally their identity. For example, one woman, in punishment for the killing of her infant child, is sentenced to having her child’s arms grafted to her head. Not only does this signal her crime and her cultural unnatural to others, it also forces her to relive and remember that crime constantly. Remaking is a powerful tool for New Crobuzon to reshape deviance and provide an Other to define themselves against. With Remade as the Other, New Crobuzon becomes the legal, legitimate, and crimeless standard—the organizing power that defines what is and what is not normal, natural, and lawful.

It is not merely these chimeric, non-human figures that are Othered by the New Crobuzon government. The Mayor and Militia also exercise harsh and violent authority upon undesirable individuals within their own culture, from those with non-normative sexualities to those with differing political beliefs. The Militia’s “Depravity watch” roots out gay men and lesbians through undercover work—throughout the Bas-Lag novels, multiple characters go to great lengths to avoid revealing their true sexual orientation, most obviously, Derkhan in *Perdido Street Station* and Cutter in *Iron Council*. Non-normative sexuality is also punishable by Remaking, which bonds the two oppressed groups permanently. New Crobuzon’s approach to alternate political views is similarly authoritarian. New Crobuzon is nominally a republic, but suffrage is granted through a lottery—a lottery that is suspected to be rigged in favor of the



normative culture. The few political parties that are dominant are little more than variations on the central theme: the dominant “Fat Sun and Three Quills parties; Diverse Tendency, whom Lin called ‘comprador scum’; the liars and seducers of the Finally We Can See Party” (*Perdido Street Station* 82). The Fat Sun and Three Quills parties are the political face of the racist dominant culture—in *Iron Council*, they have even devolved into little more than violent thugs that fight xenians in the streets. The Diverse Tendency party seems to be a group that proclaims acceptance for all but is, underneath it all, selling out to the Mayor’s office. Little is revealed about the Finally We Can See party, but based on the reactions of the politically active crowd in *Perdido Street Station*, they are barely better than the other options. While these different parties give an illusion of choice, the liberal and fringe individuals that find themselves outside of the normative culture see that they offer little change, instead acting like a “pompous bickering brood like all-powerful six-year-olds in a sandpit” (*Perdido Street Station* 82).

While horrible, violent policing is used in all cases, the most horrific violence is leveled against political dissenters. In *Perdido Street Station*, Benjamin Flex, the editor of the subversive newspaper *Runagate Rampant*, is hiding his true profession from the general populace. Once the Militia get their hands on him, he is tortured and eventually, it is implied, his eyes are removed as a replacement for the Mayor’s failing eyes. This treatment of Flex suggests the truth behind New Crobuzon’s “Eyespy Killer”—a serial killer who prowls the lower-class neighborhoods, removing the eyes of his victims. While ostensibly the force of law, the Mayor and Militia use illicit tactics for a corrupt end. The Militia’s mistreatment of the populace grows to the point that by the time of *Iron Council*, a small war erupts in the streets of New Crobuzon. While the fighting is fierce, in the end the Militia ruthlessly puts down the uprising. In fact, the Militia is still strong enough to be able to defeat the returning exile-community, Iron Council—a mobile

community that arrives too late to help the uprising succeed. The force of the military power that New Crobuzon is willing to wield against its political opponents is mighty—beyond even their systematic oppression of xenians, Remade, and humans of non-normative persuasions. The powers that be in New Crobuzon use force to keep their own interests central, marginalizing or driving out others. In the case of Iron Council, the railway workers who once left New Crobuzon by the train and who have now returned altered by their revolution and other experiences, New Crobuzon rejects how these exiles have “gone native.”

It is against this massive colonial authority—the office of the Mayor, the Militia, the dominant ideology and even the corporate arms of the government—that the protagonists of the Bas-Lag novels struggle. New Crobuzon others all of them in differing ways, leading to strife, but also a chance for action. In Bas-Lag, marginalization allows for individuals to work on the fringe, bypassing obstacles that would otherwise hamper them. On occasion, their literal, physical hybridity leads to greater physical capability, as is the case with Tanner Sack’s Remaking. But in each of the Bas-Lag novels, at least one central character illustrates the Othering that New Crobuzon forces upon individuals as well as the possibility of agency facilitated by their hybridity.

## THE BENEFITS OF HYBRIDITY: THE EXAMPLE OF YAGHAREK

One character in *Perdido Street Station* is a particularly vivid example of the “literalized metaphors” of Bas-Lag. Yagharek, the bird-man garuda whose arrival at Isaac’s workshop begins the central plot of *Perdido Street Station*, finds himself cast out and Othered for both his xenian appearance and the punishments imposed upon his body. Even though his punishments were not laid down by the biothaumaturges of the city, he is an outsider in New Crobuzon. His segregation in New Crobuzon is based almost solely on his race; from the garuda he is cast out for his crimes against other garuda and othered by the physical punishment they wrought upon him. After Yagharek was found guilty of “choice-theft” (in human terms, rape), his wings are sawn off, leaving him indelibly marked as a criminal and outcast among the garuda, a birdman community who live far to the South in the Cymek desert. New Crobuzon holds its own subculture of garuda in the slums, but, marked as criminal, Yagharek is not welcome there either. In an effort to hide his deformity, he disguises his lack of wings with a large cloak, presenting himself to the public and inexperienced eye as a “whole” garuda. In his first encounter with the scientist Isaac Dan der Grimnebulin, the central character of the novel, Isaac recognizes “the unmistakable shapes of its huge furled wings, promontories of feather and skin and bone that extended two feet or more from its shoulders and curved elegantly towards each other” beneath his cloak (*Perdido Street Station* 27). These wings, however, are a wooden framework, hidden beneath the cloak. He soon reveals to Isaac: “They were only a disguise, a trick, a prop on which to drape Yagharek’s incongruous cloak, to make it seem as if he had wings” (*Perdido Street Station* 42).

Yagharek is a unique character in *Perdido Street Station*, as he comes into New Crobuzon already Remade in a way. Like the Remade, he carries the physical reality of his

punishment with him. The missing wings mar and exclude him from garuda and New Crobuzonian society alike. Aishwarya Ganapathiraju stresses the trauma of Isaac's initial introduction to these scars: "Initially, without details about the nature of the crime, Isaac, like the reader, is confronted only with Yagharek as the victim of a harsh punishment. . . . facing the horrifying abject which is situated outside the symbolic order is an inherently traumatic experience" (6). Yagharek's physical form, not only through his physical, xenian Otherness, but his tortured and scarred body, is "outside" of Isaac's ordered, traditional worldview. Isaac's first impression of Yagharek is, in Ganapathiraju's words, of an individual set "outside the symbolic order." Yagharek is abject, outside of the parameters that Isaac is prepared to accept. Even though he is markedly different through this inversion of New Crobuzon's punishment of Remaking, Yagharek additionally holds himself at a distance from others. Even once he hires Isaac to help him fly again, he speaks little and spends his time walking the streets alone. In the words of Christopher Palmer, "Yagharek is stoic, reserved, apart" (228). These qualities describe Yagharek's relationship with any group—no community will accept him, and he seemingly will accept none as well. His isolation marks him as an outsider, unable to experience his partial connectedness to others like him: the garuda, New Crobuzonians, or the Remade—with all of whom he shares some familiarity.

While Yagharek's outsider nature, both physical and cultural, leads to him being set apart as abject and Other, it also offers him a chance to act and reclaim his hybridity when others cannot act. In *Perdido Street Station*, a crisis arises when a number of eldritch, vampiric slake-moths escape into the city. The slake-moths treat New Crobuzon as their hunting ground, and the government's traditional means of defense, the Militia, consistently fails to drive away or harm the moths. Instead, Isaac and his cadre of miscellaneous friends and allies successfully handle the

crisis of the Slake-Moth infestation. They are successful due to their varied skills and hybrid natures, while the homogenous militia fails. Isaac, being a rogue scholar not quite estranged from the university, is able to utilize connections between academia and the underworld. The Weaver, a multidimensional spider whose mind is alien, rescues the group from government persecution. The Construct Council, a hive mind of sentient robots, is used as bait for the moths. Yagharek's slow acceptance of his own physical otherness frees him to fight and act more effectively than any of the others; it allows him to comprehend but also utilize his hybridity in defense of others like him: outcasts. Working in tandem and alongside his outcast friends, the slake-moths are slain: "the slake-moths can eventually only be overcome . . . through cooperative, coordinated efforts of various beings," beings that have bonded over their physical difference from mainstream society (Ganapathiraju 5). Similarly, Joan Gordon describes "friendship groups" in *Perdido Street Station* as "another kind of hybridized entity" (468). Later, she elaborates: "A group of friends joins unlike members into a new thing, a cultural hybrid" (Gordon 470). Made up of disparate individuals, Isaac's little band of brothers share only one thing, otherness. It is this otherness which ties them together and from which they derive strength.

Yagharek's journey from self-loathing to fierce acceptance allows us to read hybridity as an agent of power in the novel. And this is supported by Isaac's motley band. In fact, Isaac's own position between legitimacy and underworld is what allows him to gather allies from disparate and unlikely sources. To begin, he draws on his friends and common connections, specifically Derkhan and Lemuel. These two, along with Yagharek, whose search for an alternate mode of flight actually released the slake-moths upon New Crobuzon, form the core of Isaac's group. In particular, the dynamic between the gregarious and exuberant Isaac and the silent and reserved Garuda illustrates the hybridity among this group. As Palmer writes, "the relationship of

these two opposites gives depth to the depiction of co-operation in diversity” (228). It is the diversity and cooperation of Isaac’s group that leads them to success in their attempts to slay the moths.

Yagharek has no community to belong to upon his arrival in New Crobuzon, holding himself aloof and far from other groups in New Crobuzon. His interaction with Isaac and the others slowly releases his anxiety, and he begins to identify with his physical otherness, allowing himself to be absorbed into their band. He begins helping the group, just a little at first, sticking to the edges and constantly bearing his massive wooden chassis and cloak, still miming his missing wings. For instance, he runs errands for Isaac, stands guard, and listens in on discussions. But when events begin to get intense and call for a level of action and engagement, Yagharek pulls back: “Yagharek had withdrawn, stood watching the proceedings, his features dim once more in the shadows of the hood” (*Perdido Street Station* 334). Yagharek’s disguise distance him from the rest of the conspirators as much as the physical distance he puts between himself and others. This changes throughout the latter half of *Perdido Street Station*, as Yagharek slowly accepts his position of hybridity, sheds his cloak, and gains greater agency.

Yagharek’s connection to Isaac’s group directly corresponds to his acceptance of his physical hybridity, and, by metaphorical extension, his hybrid cultural position. When he finally begins to emotionally connect to Isaac and the others, Yagharek forsakes his disguise, revealing himself to the world. After Isaac discovers that his colleague David has sold them out to the Militia, Yagharek opens emotionally as well as physically, revealing his face: “Yagharek came silently after him. He stood behind Isaac and peeled back his hood. . . . ‘I know betrayal Grimnebulin . . . . I know it well. I am . . . sorry for you’” (*Perdido Street Station* 337). Shortly thereafter, the group escapes from a Militia attack, but Yagharek loses his cloak and false wings

as they escape. He quickly adopts another cloak, but no false wings; he can no longer play at being a whole garuda. But he can play at being a legitimate New Crobuzonian now: With only a cloak and hood obscuring his feathers, he finds it “much easier to hide as a human than as an unwounded garuda” (*Perdido Street Station* 363). Yagharek finds increased ease in travelling through the city once he has accepted his lack of wings and his hybrid state between garuda and human.

Yagharek’s acceptance of his physical hybridity correlates with his increased action in the fight against the slake-moths. After losing his false wings, Yagharek begins to engage in the group’s endeavors—when they begin to set a trap for the slake-moths, “even Yagharek spoke, with a quiet excitement. He was a hunter. He knew how to set traps” (*Perdido Street Station* 417). Soon, he loses his cloak as well, using it to smother a torch and keep the others from discovery. Isaac realizes the sacrifice this represents for Yagharek, especially once he notices “the enormous emptiness behind his back shriekingly visible, his scars and stubs covered with a thin shirt” (*Perdido Street Station* 471). The cruel punishment—Yagharek’s mutilation—is finally visible. Yagharek’s ability to help the group by snuffing out the torch is directly correlated to his acceptance of his hybrid nature. By now Yagharek is a constant presence in the group, helping the others and being present, even if he is still not particularly verbose. In the final confrontation with the slake-moth, Isaac is struck dumb, Derkhan balks in terror, and even Motley’s guards do little more than annoy the beast, but Yagharek is able to assault it and successfully keep it from fully draining Lin’s mind. Yagharek is literally the only character able to react to the slake-moth’s attack in this crucial moment. Later, Isaac is faced with the victim of Yagharek’s crimes and it is revealed that Yagharek had been exiled for raping another garuda. Even once Isaac learns this, he can only respond ““Yagharek is my friend . . . When things . . .

went wrong . . . got complicated and dangerous . . . well, he was brave and he helped me”” (*Perdido Street Station* 607). In large part, Yagharek’s ability to help is linked to his friendship with Isaac, which is itself inextricably linked to his acceptance of his hybridity, both physical and metaphorical. Yagharek’s bravery and action are tied to his willingness to embrace his new, hybrid nature, eventually leaving him in the position to act when others cannot.

However, Yagharek’s story of accepting his hybridity ends with a return to rejection of his hybrid nature. *Perdido Street Station* ends with Yagharek separated from the group and subsequently rejecting his new cultural position. After Isaac is confronted with the victim of Yagharek’s crimes, the scientist decides that he cannot help Yagharek ignore the justice of the Garuda. Instead, Isaac and Derkhan leave, abandoning Yagharek in New Crobuzon. While the disgraced birdman walks alone, he is met by a Remade renegade who has previously assisted Isaac’s band: Jack Half-a-Prayer. Yagharek is offered “a return to community” with Half-a-Prayer, just as he had previously been in community with Isaac and the others: “*Jack Half-a-Prayer extends his Remade arm again and with a slow, portentous movement, he beckons me. He invites me in*” (*Perdido Street Station* 622). If he were to accept, Half-a-Prayer would bring Yagharek into a life of action, fighting against the oppressive New Crobuzon Militia and forming the Robin Hood-like fReemade gang. Yagharek, however, turns down the offer, and instead tears out his own feathers, attempting to forego his Garuda nature and instead become “*a man*” (*Perdido Street Station* 623). The pain of losing his community leads Yagharek to physically remove the traces of his hybridity. He attempts to accept the community of New Crobuzon rather than Jack Half-a-Prayer, joining in with the homogenous culture of humanity. Sadly, Yagharek finally gives up the last vestiges of his hybridity, embracing the dominant humanity of New Crobuzon. Yagharek explicitly calls out his newfound disdain for hybridity as he turns down



Half-a-Prayer's offer: "*He offers me the half-world. He offers to share his bastard liminal life, his interstitial city . . . I turn and walk into the city my home, not bird or garuda, not miserable cross-breed*" (*Perdido Street Station* 622-3). Gordon emphasizes that "Yagharek's words are [not] representative of the main energy of the novel" (471). Instead, his final "condemnation of hybridity" is a counter-betrayal, belying the true power and agency Yagharek had within hybrid community that fought the moths. In an inversion of Yagharek's earlier arc, embracing his mutilation and exile, he now rejects it, instead embracing the "wholeness" of humanity. Doing so, he turns his back on community a chance for greater action.

In the end, despite Yagharek's rejection of his hybrid nature, he still acts as an illustration of the action granted by hybridity. While working with Isaac and the others, Yagharek's embracing of his own hybridity leads to his own ability to act and save the city as well as his friends. While he may turn from hybridity in the end, the one who offers him that path, Jack Half-a-Prayer, goes on to lead a rebellion and found the fReemade, making a mark on New Crobuzon whereas the now-"human" Yagharek fades into the city. Yagharek serves as an example of both the agency-granting power of hybridity and how the loss of hybridity can lead to a loss of agency.

## EMBRACING HYBRIDITY: THE EXAMPLE OF TANNER SACK

While Yagharek temporally finds greater agency as he accepts his hybridity but then loses both, *The Scar* offers an example of a character that finds greater agency by willingly taking on greater hybridity. As he adapts from the life of a slave in New Crobuzon to a free man in Armada, Tanner's hybrid nature gives him a chance to act while other, seemingly more fitted individuals, cannot. Through everyday experiences in his underwater engineering job to a threat of war against his old city to a crisis of possibility in his new city, Tanner embraces his hybrid nature and emerges victorious.

When Tanner is first introduced in *The Scar*, he too is a victim of forced physical hybridity and the culturally hybrid position that comes along with it. He is Remade, with two tentacles grafted to his midsection as punishment for some unstated crime. As one of the Remade, Tanner is part of the criminal underclass of New Crobuzon—a class defined by the physical changes enacted upon the Remade by the government. To illustrate the culturally hybrid position Tanner is forced into, he is being held in the cargo hold of the New Crobuzon ship *Terpsichoria* and en route to the colony of Nova Esperium as a slave laborer—and that is despite the fact that he was a skilled engineer, who, until recently worked free in New Crobuzon.

Much like Yagharek, Tanner does not initially embrace his hybridity. He resents his newly found slave status, and that resentment of his cultural hybridity plays out against his physical “monstrosity.” On the *Terpsichoria*, Tanner's new limbs are little more than dead weight, “*the spastic matter that twitches in my midriff*” (*The Scar* 16). Later he expands upon his initial experiences with the tentacles: “they had hung like stinking dead limbs. He had cut at them, experimentally, and the layers of nerves implanted in them had fired and he had nearly fainted with pain. But pain was all that had lived in them” (*The Scar* 85). However, once Tanner

is welcomed into Armada, freed, and given an honest paying occupation in the seawater, the tentacles begin coming to life: “immersed in the saltwater, they had begun to move. Their multitude of small infections had faded, and they were now cool to the touch” (*The Scar* 86). Once Tanner is free and able to live and act without the threat of New Crobuzon hanging over his head, his physical hybridity becomes a true part of him rather than mere fleshy baggage.

Along with this physical healing in the brine, Tanner finds himself a cultural hybrid in a hybrid culture. Armada is “a flotilla of dwellings. A city built on old boat bones” (*The Scar* 75). Physically, the city is a massive construct of rafts and boats and even oil platforms, all from different cities and cultures from all across the world. Pirates by trade, the Armadans steal the raw materials for their city from other societies, incorporating the physical reality of myriad peoples into one chimeric mass. A seafaring city, it is seen from under the water as “an archipelago of shadows” (*The Scar* 71). The people of these ships are likewise incorporated into Armada, such as the passengers of the *Terpsichoria*. “Press-ganged” into life on board the floating city, these citizens join the city-born in making up the population of Armada. They are assigned living spaces, offered jobs, paid, and expected to contribute to Armadan daily life. This openness and inclusion makes Armada a melting pot, where all cultures mix together into one, and even the native language, Salt, is “stolen . . . from other languages” (*The Scar* 78-9). Armada welcomes all, as the welcome the press-ganged newcomers receive makes clear: “Human, cactacae, hotchi, cray . . . Remade . . . In Armada you are not distinguished. Here you are free. And equal” (*The Scar* 74). Tanner, along with the other Remade, happily accepts freedom from their previous life, ostracized and cast out from New Crobuzon’s central culture. While he has for his whole life known only New Crobuzon, Tanner quickly integrates into Armadan culture and finds his loyalty to his new city. While the other protagonist of *The Scar*, linguist Bellis

Coldwine, feels alone and alienated in Armada, still pining for New Crobuzon, Tanner attempts to mesh with the other dockworkers, and “They opened to him” (*The Scar* 110). Despite, or perhaps because of, his hybridity between old city and new, Tanner is accepted into a society of others in similar positions.

Tanner’s growth and healing in the water is not the end of his physical, chimeric transformation. His cultural position has changed, putting him not only between New Crobuzon’s working class and criminal underclass, but now between New Crobuzon and Armada. Likewise, his physical hybridity changes, further distancing him from the normal human engineer he once was. Unlike any other character in the Bas-Lag novels, Tanner willingly undergoes Remaking, even after knowing the horrors of the procedure from his punishment in New Crobuzon. Once he has spent time in the water and his first Remaking’s tentacles have begun to awaken, he feels a greater pull toward the sea: “His coming to terms with the sea felt like a long, drawn-out birth. Every day he spent more time below, and the water felt better against him” (*The Scar* 129). Tanner increasingly feels at home in the water, but even so, he is mostly a creature of the land. Underwater, he can only look on clumsily as “Bastard John the dolphin policed his watch, passing through the brine with unique motion” (*The Scar* 129). However, even when he leaves the water he still doesn’t feel entirely comfortable with his body: “When he left the sea, Tanner felt his tentacles hang heavy and uncomfortable” (*The Scar* 129). While he may be more agile in the water than the normal human, Tanner isn’t at home yet either in the sea or on dry land. When he is working, he wants greater freedom, to “swim free, across and up into the light and even, yes, even down, into the cold and silent darkness” (*The Scar* 129). This taste of hybrid ability intrigues Tanner, driving him to willingly Remake himself in order to have a greater capacity for freedom in the water and greater ability to assist his community. The

biothaumatarge he visits cuts Tanner gills and sews webs between his fingers and toes. Once he has recovered, Tanner is an amphibious creature. Shortly after he returns to work, he is able to show off his newfound aquatic agility when a bonefish, a terrible undersea predator, attacks the dockworkers. Tanner is the first on the scene, tearing off his shirt and diving in “without hesitating” (*The Scar* 171). In contrast, while Tanner is agile and swift, the other divers clamber “desperately . . . appallingly slow and clumsy in their suits” (*The Scar* 171). Tanner’s actions solidify his place among those loyal to Garwater, the neighborhood of Armada in which he resides. When his loyalty is questioned, others defend him as “a good man . . . He’s had himself Remade, the better to dive, the better to work in the docks—he’s a sea creature now. He’s loyal as any Garwater born” (*The Scar* 221-2). Tanner’s voluntary transformation into an amphibian secures his place as a hybrid in a hybrid city—not only is he simply more effective at his job, he is also willing and able to risk his life in the defense of his workmates.

While Tanner embraces his new community, he still exhibits a double consciousness, torn between the city that cast him as a criminal Remade and the city that accepted him regardless. Tanner is not entirely divorced from his hometown, as is proven when the next crisis arises. Both Tanner and Bellis reflect Said’s discussion of exile (“Reflections on Exile”). Said emphasizes how the exiled individual experiences an unhomeliness and pain that never fully recedes. Much of the middle third of *The Scar* is concerned with Bellis’ discovery of a plot against New Crobuzon and his subsequent attempts to warn the city. Bellis serves as a counterpoint to Tanner, and her pain of exile illustrates Said’s concept. Whereas Tanner adopts Armada eagerly, Bellis clings to her home city: ““I was always going to return to New Crobuzon. I would never wish to see my days outside it”” (*The Scar* 95). In Armada, Bellis feels alone, but one of the other refugees from the *Terpsichoria*, a New Crobuzon spy named Silas Fennec, both offers her

companionship and shares with her a secret he had discovered: plans made by the horrifying grindylow to invade New Crobuzon. Bellis, with her deep love of the city but knowing that the rulers of Armada would never let her send off a message, hatches a daring plan that culminates in Bellis, message in hand, attempting to sneak away from an Armadan landing party, through a jungle in which she would not last five minutes, to deliver the message to freebooters. However, all of these obstacles prove too much for Bellis, and she is caught by Tanner. Tanner, however, is perfect for delivering the message. Bellis begrudgingly explains what her mission is, attempting to stir in Tanner some sentiment for New Crobuzon. His own loyalties to New Crobuzon are strained but not broken: “Of course the thought of New Crobuzon and all those people . . . all broken and destroyed and drowned . . . of course that appalled him” (*The Scar* 305). Tanner’s double consciousness is on full display as he struggles to decide what to do: “Tanner Sack was loyal to Garwater, and he felt the passion of that loyalty inside him, beside a sad affection for New Crobuzon—a kind of melancholic regretful fondness. . . . The two emotions flickered inside him and circled each other like fish” (*The Scar* 307). Eventually, the old love wins out, and Tanner carries the message via the sea, avoiding the jungle in a way that Bellis could not. It is only through Bellis’ and Tanner’s position, torn between two communities, as well as Tanner’s self-imposed physical hybridity—the same hybridity that had served him so well in the bonefish attack—that the message is delivered to New Crobuzon.

The cultural hybridity, literalized through Tanner’s physical hybridity, plays a key part in saving the day. Tanner and Bellis help to steer Armada through one final crisis, near the end of the novel. After their message is delivered to New Crobuzon, the leaders of the Garwater neighborhood of Armada, nicknamed the Lovers, summon and harness a massive sea serpent with which to drag the entire city through an inhospitable sea and to the Scar. The novel’s titular

Scar is a wound in the world, where probabilities break down and other possible timelines leak through—the Lovers intend to use this otherworldly place to garner great power for themselves. Through this crack in the world, a single person slips through, a refugee from an alternate universe where Armada has reached the Scar. This refugee brings news that when Armada reaches the Scar, it is destroyed, but this report is silenced before it becomes public knowledge. Bellis learns of it because Lovers’ right-hand man, Uther Doul, takes a shine to her and brings her to a place on board the Lovers’ vessel where the harmonics are aligned so that one can listen in to the conversations being held in the Lovers’ chambers. When the Lovers take this universe-hopping migrant into their chambers, Bellis leads Tanner into the belly of the ship to her listening-post. There, in the bowels of the Lovers’ ship, Tanner and Bellis overhear the fate of Armada and the Lover’s response: “‘We’ll not let this seditious shit succeed. This goes no further. We bury this story, right now, right here, and we go on’” (*The Scar* 551). Tanner, armed with this information and a passion for his newly-adopted city, refuses to let this happen. Bellis realizes that she is a poor candidate for sharing this news and turning the peoples’ opinions against the Lovers, but Tanner, due to his history with the city and his experiences as a hybrid in this hybrid community, is perfect. Rich Paul Cooper claims that Tanner is “able, despite his Remaking, to lead a successful popular revolt” (Cooper 219). However, the opposite is true—it is *due* to Tanner’s Remaking and subsequent acceptance into Armada that he is able to rally the people: “Tanner Sack was known. He was the one who had fought a bonefish to save a dying man. He had Remade himself into a kind of manfish, the better for life in Armada. He had lost his boy. Tanner was known, and he was respected. You listened to Tanner, and you believed him” (*The Scar* 552). With Tanner spreading the word, with his credibility born of hybrid action,

the revolt brews, overthrowing the power of the Lovers and turning the city around, away from the Scar.

Tanner, with a great deal of help from Bellis, is able to change the fate of both New Crobuzon and Armada. Despite his displacement, caught between a city that had cast him off as a slave and a city that took him in through force, Tanner embraces his culturally hybrid position in Armada. His actions would not have been possible without his physical hybridity, his double Remaking, which has actively literalized his culturally hybrid position. While Yagharek grows in agency by embracing his hybrid nature, Tanner grows even greater by willingly increasing his hybridity.



## HYBRID COMMUNITIES IN BAS-LAG

Each novel set in Bas-Lag includes at least one major community that exhibits and experiences hybridity much in the same way as the aforementioned characters. These cities are culturally hybrid, as modern London or New York are hybrid. Andrew Smith, in *The Cambridge Companion to Postcolonial Literary Studies*, comments that modern “Britain or Australia or the United States . . . are seen as increasingly *multicultural* societies” wherein cultural hybridity “implies the mingling of once separate and discrete ways of living” (251). However, he is swift to note that this approach is simplistic, ignoring the artifice of culture. Rather, hybridity denotes “the recognitions of the fact that all culture is an arena of struggle, where self is played off against the purportedly ‘other’” (Smith 252). In Bas-Lag, where this kind of cultural struggle is literalized into physical, obvious hybridity, cities break the boundaries between architectural styles, locations, and even the distinction between city and vehicle. Bas-Lag’s urban hybrids allow for a clear reading of the cultural *mélange* that inform their composition and make-up.

Much has already been stated about New Crobuzon. The metropolis is a near-dystopian police state. It is also a hive of cultural hybridity, where citizens range from the most straight-laced human to refugee khepri to massive animate cactus folk. New Crobuzon is a patchwork of minor neighborhoods, each with their own particular mixture of residents. Graffiti refers to “the mansions of Flag Hill” (*Perdido Street Station* 109). Less well-off neighborhoods are known for other traits: “Brock Marsh would always be the Science Quarter: Bonetown the Thieves’ District” (*Perdido Street Station* 58). But while each of these districts is distinct, separated by race or class, New Crobuzon is composed of all of them together. As the crime boss Mr. Motley describes it, the city is a place of “Transition. The point where one thing becomes another. It is what makes . . . the city, the world, what they are. . . . The zone where the disparate become part

of the whole” (*Perdido Street Station* 37). Motley, who is a literal motley of physical features, a “ragged discordance of . . . flesh” (*Perdido Street Station* 67), sees himself as a symbol of the city. Both are made up of disparate parts that join together to create something more. This is not merely a description of the physical city, however. The physical hybridity of New Crobuzon is the literalization of the myriad cultures and peoples of the city—one district may be industrial, defined by the class of its inhabitants, while another will be dominated by the traditional architecture of its primary racial and ethnic population.

In addition to the physical hybridity of the city, New Crobuzon, just like some of its inhabitants, is described in monstrous terms—monstrosity again being a subjective view of hybridity. For instance, when he first arrives in New Crobuzon, Yagharek describes the city as “Red brick and dark walls, squat churches like troglodytic things, ragged awnings flickering, cobbled mazes in the old town, culs-de-sac, sewers riddling the earth like secular sepulchers, a new landscape of wasteground” and “a sprawling monster” (*Perdido Street Station* 1-2). This description is full of images of abjection and monstrosity, as though the city was cast off and looked down upon, from the “troglodytes” of the apparent holy places to the “ragged” and “cobbled” architecture. It echoes Shaw’s assertion of Bas-Lag monstrosity and abjection being “the lurking otherness which threaten the boundaries of the modern self” (786). The city’s perceived monstrosity re-emphasizes its cultural hybridity—the boundaries are blurred, and no one group exists in the city without the others. To one who does not embrace this hybridity, such as the imperialist government or, at the beginning of the novel, Yagharek, the city and the people appear monstrous rather than fantastic.

But of course, New Crobuzon’s cultural elite and governmental institutions do not embrace its cultural hybridity. Rather, the dominant culture, led by the office of the Mayor and

enforced by the Militia, imposes an almost dystopian police state upon the people of the city. Birns emphasizes that, even though the city may be home to many cultures, coexistence is “tortuous, tenuous, and highly segregated” (203). The extent of monstrosity and abjection in New Crobuzon is a direct effect of this denial of hybridity, as human culture attempts to distance itself from the Others that populate the city. Despite the physical hybridity inherent in the city, the lack of acceptance leads to a dystopian city of abjection and monstrosity.

*The Scar* introduces a second community, Armada, that is perhaps even more hybrid than New Crobuzon in both physical form and cultural composition. As mentioned before, Armada is a “pirate city,” built from boats and ships stolen from all over the world. The pirates of Armada capture ships from other cultures, such as the New Crobuzon ship *Terpsichoria* that is captured early in *The Scar* and that bears Tanner in its hulk. These ships are the raw building material for the city, and the passengers and crew of those ships become citizens of Armada. Bellis, newly press-ganged (forcibly incorporated into Armada’s citizenry), sees the city as a “vista of reconfigured masts and bowsprits, a cityscape of beakheads and forecastles” (*The Scar* 75). The city is literally an armada of “hundreds of ships lashed together” (*The Scar* 75). This composition leads to an otherworldly hybridity, as Armada combines massive New Crobuzon steamers right next to “scorpion galleys” and even “a barge carved from the ossified body of a whale” (*The Scar* 75). Of course, the physical reality of Armada reflects the cultural *mélange* of the city—with people pulled from nearly every corner of Bas-Lag, the citizenry of Armada is truly diverse. Unlike New Crobuzon, Armada embraces the variety of individuals that comprises the community. Humans, xenians of every stripe, and even Remade are all equal citizens. One of the New Crobuzoners, Johannes, declares that Armada is “the sum of *hundreds* of cultures” (*The Scar* 96). While Armada, like New Crobuzon, does have multiple districts, the city is

unequivocally the sum of all parts together—it travels, shares resources, and generally governs itself as a whole rather than separate districts. Johannes emphasizes how smaller parts come together to “meet here and overlap like scales, and make something new” (*The Scar* 97). In this culture of hybridity, Tanner Sack, despite his Remade status, is welcomed. In Armada, he finds a home in an unfamiliar place. The very composition of Armada demands that it be a community of great physical and cultural hybridity.

Despite embracing hybridity, Armada still faces problems it must address before it can be truly utopian. *The Scar* details events in which the leaders of Armada’s districts override the city for their own goals and fight among themselves. As mentioned above, Bellis and Tanner stumble upon a plot by “the Lovers,” the leaders of the most powerful district, Garwater. The Lovers plan to summon and harness a gigantic sea serpent and then use the harnessed beast to pull the entire city to a dangerous, eldritch ocean called The Scar—all for their own personal profit. Initially, they sell Armada’s population on the idea by promising a bright future for the city. However, the closer the city gets to The Scar, conditions get worse and the people begin to lose faith. The Brucolac, leader of another district, attempts a coup, but it is not until the citizenry of Armada rise up themselves that a successful revolution may be launched. It is only through embracing that which makes Armada so richly culturally hybrid—the people—that Armada is saved.

*Iron Council* introduces the reader to the eponymous Iron Council, another offshoot from New Crobuzon proper and a community that not only is born out of hybridity, but also utopian in its democratic socialism. Centered around a “perpetual train,” Iron Council is a community on the move, as the Iron Councillors, as they call themselves, continuously pull up tracks and re-lay them allow the train to run along, constantly and without interruption. The community derives from New Crobuzon’s colonial effort to build a railway through the uncharted interior of the

continent. Led by the Transcontinental Railway Trust (TRT), the rail is built by hundreds of underpaid laborers who work alongside Remade slaves. The train is additionally compromised of prostitutes and families, who follow the workers through the uncharted lands, making it a hodgepodge community or castaways and their loved ones, serving their needs and exploiting them at the same time. A failed strike and the violent reaction of TRT's gendarmes to the laborers' demands incite a full-blown insurrection as the workers, Remade, and prostitutes unite and hijack the train. Staging the perfect Marxist revolt, Iron Council evades TRT authority, usurps New Crobuzonian power, and becomes its own entity: a new community of outcasts. Birns notes that by taking the train, a symbol of colonial power, the council becomes a hybrid, composed of something New Crobuzonian and something entirely new: "even this long-standing emblem of standardizing, conformism modernity can be rogue" (204). The new community is open to all, and Remade are as fundamental and accepted as any "freeanole" councilor. The Council is ruled through discussion and election, rather than rule by any individual. One of the strongest voices among the Council's Remade, Uzman, emphasizes this distinction when he comments "We ain't decided yet what we do here . . . But we decide" (*Iron Council* 245). As the Council is born out of a single moment of action from a group of hodgepodge outcasts, it is uniquely suited to its role as a hybrid utopia. It is, Birns suggests, a metaphor for the Remade themselves—"created" by New Crobuzon, but reborn into a new life and new purpose. Birns, almost using the language of "literalized metaphor," comments on how "the wildcat, self-generating railroad . . . has its biological analogy in the proletarian Remade" (205). Iron Council is, in a way, the literalization of the hybrid agency seen throughout Bas-Lag.

## CONCLUSION

Bas-Lag is comprised of monstrous others is literally defined by its own hybridity—both through characters and communities. Xenians and Remade experience a physical hybridity that echoes their culturally hybrid position, and hybrid cities exhibit varied levels of utopian qualities. The “literalized metaphors” highlight an underlying metaphorical hybridity through tangible physical traits in a method uniquely situated to the “thought-exercises” of fantasy fiction. In the words of Sandy Rankin, Miéville’s fantastic approach “situates hope in miscegenation, misbegot things, *unbeauties* by conventional capitalist and patriarchal standards” (242). Bas-Lag is a highly visceral, “unbeautiful” world, which undermines conventional ideologies with subversive ideas. Jonathan Newell describes Miéville’s hybrid characters, specifically the Remade, as a challenge to the readers who present “a defamiliarized vision of our own social reality, broadly construed: a reality structured around strictly and largely subconsciously enforced binaries of self/other, us/them, whole/broken” (498). Through these literalized metaphors, Miéville’s novels comment of these structures and challenge the reader to reconsider otherness, duality, and deformity. In Miéville’s thought-experiment, the alteration and the permanent marking of the physical body are presented as punishment first and as a force of liberation, a recognition of the other as part of the self and the emergence of new hybrid and empowered identity, second.

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