Use our LitLovers Book Club Resources; they can help with discussions for any book:

- How to Discuss a Book (helpful discussion tips)
- Generic Discussion Questions—Fiction and Nonfiction
- Read-Think-Talk (a guided reading chart)

Also, consider these LitLovers talking points to help get a discussion started for *The City and the City*:

1. Mieville provides no overall exposition in this book, leaving it up to readers to piece together the strange co-existence of Beszel and Ul Qoma. Do you appreciate the way in which the story gradually unfolds? Or, finding it confusing, would you have preferred an explanation early on?

2. Many critics and readers—but not all—have talked about Mieville’s imagined world, a world constructed so thoroughly that readers were easily absorbed in the two cities. Was that your experience as you read the book...or were you unable to suspend your belief, finding the whole foundation too preposterous?

3. What does it mean to "unsee" in this novel...and what are the symbolic implications of unseeing? In other words, do we "unsee" one another in our own lives? Who unsees whom?

4. Talk about the absurdities that result from the two cities ignoring one another’s existence—for instance, the rules put in place for picking up street trash.

5. What theory was the murdered graduate student investigating and what makes Borlu begin to think the theory is more than just theory—that it might be closer to truth?

6. Do you feel Mieville’s characters are well developed in this work...or underdeveloped? Defend your answer...to the death. What about the book's dialogue? Does it sound realistic—the way individuals actually converse? Or do you find it stilted, tiresome...or perhaps overly ambitious? Does it matter?

7. Point out some of the strange word-usage Mieville incorporates in *The City and the City*: words/phrases like... crosshatching, grosstopically, the alter, and so on.

8. What is the "Breach" and why it's required to maintain control over the two populations? What does the Breach suggest about authoritarianism in general—its origins, purpose, enforcement, corruption...?

9. Was the crime/mystery solved to your satisfaction by the end of the book? Was the crime the book’s central focus...or tangential? If the latter, what was the real focus?
10. Have you read other works by Mieville? If so, how does this compare? If not, are you inspired to read more of his books?

(Questions by LitLovers. Please feel free to use them, online or off, with attribution. Thanks.)

(top of page (summary))
Title: China Mieville
   British Novelist (1972 - )
Source: Contemporary Authors Online. Detroit: Gale, 2013. From Literature Resource Center.
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Updated: 09/06/2013

Table of Contents: Awards Career Further Readings About the Author Media Adaptations Personal Information Sidelights Writings by the Author

PERSONAL INFORMATION:


CAREER:

Writer. PC Dealer and Computer Reseller Weekly, subeditor, 1994-95; Warwick University, Coventry, England, associate professor of writing, 2008-. Honorary research fellowship, Birkbeck College School of Law, 2006-; Frank Knox fellowship, Harvard University.

AWARDS:


WORKS:

WRITINGS:

FICTION

• *The City & the City*, Del Rey Ballantine Books (New York, NY), 2009.
• *Embassytown*, Ballantine Books (New York, NY), 2011.
• *Railsea*, Del Rey (New York, NY), 2012.

"BAS-LAG" SERIES; NOVELS

• *Perdido Street Station*, Del Rey (New York, NY), 2001.
• *The Scar*, Del Rey (New York, NY), 2002.

NONFICTION

• (Editor, with Mark Bould) *Red Planets: Marxism and Science Fiction* (nonfiction), Wesleyan (Middletown, CT), 2009.


MEDIA ADAPTATIONS:

Miéville's short story "Details" was adapted for film by Dan Kay and subsequently optioned by Paramount Vantage.

Sidelights

China Miéville's debut novel, *King Rat*, was published in 1998 and hailed by some critics as an updated take on the urban-gothic fable. In London, after an unknown intruder kills a man, the man's son, Saul, is wrongly convicted of the crime. Put in jail, Saul escapes, helped by a mysterious stranger who claims to be King Rat, a subterranean ruler. What is more, King Rat declares himself the deposed leader of a rodent army and reveals that Saul's mother is also of rat-kind. Now aware of his inborn abilities, Saul discovers he can "eat garbage, move soundlessly and unseen, squeeze through impossibly tiny openings, and climb vertical walls," noted a *Kirkus Reviews* contributor.

In a variation of the Pied Piper theme, magical hip-hop music enters the story, leading to a showdown between King Rat and his young disciple. *King Rat* marks an "auspicious debut," according to a reviewer in *Publishers Weekly*, overcoming a "predictable plot" by pulling "the reader into the story through the kinetic energy" of Miéville's prose. To *Booklist* writer Roland Green, if the book lacks the balance of other works by noted urban-goth authors, those flaws are countered by Miéville's sense of "folksloric expertise." Green added: "His depiction of the grungier side of urban life is vivid and extensive, not to mention well-worded."

Miéville's second book, *Perdido Street Station*, inaugurates the "Bas-Lag" fantasy/horror series, set in New Crobuzon, a city full of gangsters, revolutionaries, and assorted human and nonhuman species. Isaac Dan der Crimnebulin and his lover, Lin, an insect-like creature, inadvertently release a flying monster on the city. Isaac and Lin must chase down the monster before the authorities find it, or them.

12/21/2014
Jackie Cassada, reviewing the novel in *Library Journal*, wrote that Miéville tells a "powerful tale about the power of love and the will to survive." A reviewer for *Publishers Weekly* called the novel "breathtakingly broad" and "an impressive and ultimately pleasing epic."

In Miéville's third book, *The Scar*, published in 2002, fugitives of New Crobuzon find that more dangers await them when pirates take them to the floating city of Armada, which is ruled by a devious pair called the Lovers. Some critics expressed dismay at the plot twists as well as with Miéville's writing style. Others found more to like; Jane Halshall, reviewing *The Scar* for *School Library Journal*, characterized Miéville's writing as "something akin to Lewis Carroll's use of portmanteau."

*Iron Council*, published in 2004, takes readers on a return trip to the city of New Crobuzon, where revolt stirs in the minds of the residents living under a repressive capitalist regime that does out inhumanic reconstructive surgery as punishment. A reviewer for *Publishers Weekly* maintained that "Miéville represents much of what is new and good in contemporary dark fantasy, and his work is must reading for devotees of that genre."

The novel *The City & the City* is set in a fictional world with twin mystical cities that exist just east of Europe, called Beszel and Ul Qoma. The cities exist in the same exact place, but the people of each city ignore one another. In fact, the people of Beszel do not see the people of Ul Qoma and vice versa. A power known as Breach allows this phenomenon to persist. Against this backdrop, Miéville presents a detective story. Inspector Tyador Borlu is investigating the murder of an archaeology student, and the case draws Borlu into the shadow world that exists between the two cities and keeps them apart. Discussing the book in a *Publishers Weekly* interview with James Davis Nicoll, Miéville remarked: "I'd long been interested in writing a crime novel, and though there's a fair tradition of such novels set in science-fictional or fantastic locations, I was more interested in a police procedural that was recognizably real, though with strange elements."

Applauding the result in *Library Journal*, Neil Hollands commended the "fascinating premise" and observed that "this work is more an existential thought piece than a reading pleasure." In *School Library Journal*, Dori DeSpain wrote that *The City & the City* will "appeal as much to a young, new-to-Miéville audience as it will to his loyal fans." According to a *Kirkus Reviews* writer, the "gritty, gritty reality occasionally spills over into unintelligible hypercomplexity, but this spectacularly, intricately paranoid yarn is worth the effort."

In a departure from fiction, Miéville authored *Between Equal Rights: A Marxist Theory of International Law*, a critique and overview of international law. Beginning in the sixteenth century and ending in the 2000s, the book provides a history of international law and its development. Miéville writes that human rights violations and genocides are all the direct result of faulty international laws that allow such calamities to occur.

In the *Stanford Journal of International Law*, William Partlett wrote that "despite its intriguing topic and provocative title, Miéville's work ultimately disappoints." However, Partlett noted, "all is not lost. By reminding us that there are and should be critical approaches to understanding international law, Miéville is correct to remind us that Marx might offer something to a better understanding of international law. Marxism's rigid materialist and base-superstructure approach to societal development may be outdated, but its critical spirit and insights into the nature of capitalism remain important as we seek to understand international law as a force of growing influence in an increasingly interdependent and capitalist world."

In a more laudatory assessment, a *Bookwatch* reviewer called *Between Equal Rights* "a fierce dissection of the weaknesses, cruelties and blind spots of the status quo."

Miéville offers another urban fantasy with *Kraken: An Anatomy*, in which he returns to one of his favorite subjects: monsters. The novel follows British Museum curator Billy Harrow as he attempts to recover a preserved giant squid that was stolen from the museum. His investigation leads him through strange underworlds of animal-worshiping cults, magic, living tattoos, and impending apocalypse. "Everyone who's read a book with magic London in it is going to recognise a lot of this stuff, so I wanted to be faithful to it, but at same time tease it a bit," Miéville told Alison Flood in an interview for *Bookseller*. "So for me, *Kraken* has a lot more jokes in it than my other books."

Critics generally praised *Kraken*, drawing comparisons to the works of H.P. Lovecraft and H.G. Wells, though some found it difficult to follow. Many nevertheless believed it would strongly appeal to Miéville's fans. *Library Journal* contributor Jackie Cassada wrote that *Kraken* "combines brilliant storytelling with doses of eccentric humor and eerily compelling horror." A *Publishers Weekly* critic called the novel a "dizzying whirl of outrageous details and fantastic characters." Pointing out that it is a "dense read," *Booklist* critic Jessica Moyer nonetheless concluded that *Kraken* is "a rich literary work, full of wordplay and imagery that will appeal to literary-fiction fans."

Language, a theme of many of Miéville's works, is the explicit subject of *Embassytown*, which investigates how an alien language could influence culture and thought. The novel follows Avice Benner Cho and her linguist husband, Scile, as they return to her backward home planet of Ariecka so that Scile can study the unique language of the natives, for whom language,
thought, and reality are intertwined. In order to communicate with them, humans must use Ambassadors—clone-twins that the Ariekai can understand. Their culture is turned upside down, however, when one of the natives learns to lie, and a new breed of Ambassadors demonstrates a powerful sway over the natives.

Reviewers again found Miéville's work difficult yet remarkable. Commenting that his writing "feel[s] theorized, sweepingly grand in conception but sometimes a bit disembodied, not quite fully fleshed in scenes that feel genuinely lived," New York Times Book Review contributor Carlo Rotella wrote that "Embassytown has the feel of a word-puzzle, and much of the pleasure of figuring out the logic of the world and the story comes from gradually catching the full resonance of its invented and imported words." "Embassytown's preoccupation with monsters and metaphors keeps reminding us not only that everyday reality is sustained by language, but that language is a kind of fantasy fiction, always confabulating a world that doesn't otherwise exist," wrote Sam Thompson in the London Review of Books. "Not taking 'the real' for granted means noticing that the real is a story you're being told." Commenting on the complexity of the world Miéville creates and his "almost hallucinatory narrative structure," a Kirkus Reviews contributor called the novel "conceptually ... utterly astonishing. A major intellectual achievement that, despite all difficulties, persuades and enthralles."

FURTHER READINGS:

FURTHER READINGS ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

PERIODICALS

- Arena, April 1, 2008, Roland Boer, "China Miéville's Imagination."
- Chronicle, November 1, 2005, Don D'Amassa, review of Looking for Jake, p. 22.
- Details, June 1, 2009, "The Shelf."
- Internet Bookwatch, August 1, 2006, review of Between Equal Rights.
- Kirkus Reviews, August 1, 1999, review of King Rat, p. 1181; May 1, 2002, review of Jackie Cassada, review of The Scar, p. 625; June 1, 2004, review of Iron Council, p. 522; February 17, 2007, review of Un Lun Dun, p. 126; May 1, 2009, review of The City & the City; April 1, 2011, review of Embassytown.


• School Librarian, June 22, 2007, Peter Dixon, review of Un Lun Dun, p. 103.


• Spectator, May 6, 2000, Michael Moorcock, review of Perdido Street Station, pp. 33-34; June 20, 2009, Andrew McKie, "Unseeing Is Believing," p. 32.


• Times Literary Supplement, September 1, 2000, Edward James, review of Perdido Street Station, p. 11; October 8, 2010, Stephen Abell, review of Kraken, p. 19; May 6, 2011, Roz Kaveney, review of Embassytown, p. 21.

• Voice of Youth Advocates, February 1, 2007, Joe Sutliff Sanders, review of Un Lun Dun, p. 544.

• Writing!, February 1, 2007, "Bookshelf."

• Xpress Reviews, June 10, 2011, Meredith Schwartz, review of Embassytown.

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• Fantastic Fiction, http://www.fantasticfiction.co.uk/ (August 18, 2004), "China Miéville."


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Gale Document Number: GALEH1000143968
The city & the city (May 2009)

Author: Miéville, China

Adults Fiction

Description:
Inspector Tyador Borlu must travel to Ul Qoma to search for answers in the murder of a woman found in the city of Beszel.

Book Appeal Terms: Definition of Appeal Terms

Genre:
Adult books for young adults; Fantasy fiction; Fantasy mystery stories; Hardboiled fiction; Mystery stories

Storyline: Intricately plotted

Pace: Leisurely paced

Tone: Thought-provoking

Writing Style: Gritty

Persistent link to this record (Permalink):

Database:
NovelList

School Library Journal:

Adult/High School—A blend of near-future science fiction and police procedural, this novel is a successful example of the hybrid genre so popular of late. In a contemporary time period, two fantastical cities somewhere between Europe and Asia exist, not adjacent to one another, but by literally occupying the same area. Forbidden to acknowledge the existence of one another—a discipline imposed by the shadowy and terrifying entity known as Breach—residents in both cities have honed the ability to “unsee” people, places, and events existing in the other realm. This ticklish balance ruptures when Inspector Tyador Borlu of the Extreme Crime Squad must investigate the murder of a foreign archaeological student. Long after the book’s satisfying conclusion, astute readers will have much to ponder, such as the facility with which Authority can manipulate a population and the attendant ills that life in such a society inevitably generate. Add in the novel’s highly effective cover art and the result is a book that may appeal as much to a young, new-to-Miéville audience as it will to his loyal fans. —Dori DeSpain, formerly at Fairfax County Public Library, VA —Dori DeSpain (Reviewed June 1, 2009) (School Library Journal, vol 55, issue 6, p151)

Publishers Weekly:

★ Starred Review ★ Better known for New Weird fantasies (Perdido Street Station, etc.), bestseller Miéville offers an outstanding take on police procedurals with this barely speculative novel. Twin southern European cities Beszel and Ul Qoma coexist in the same physical location, separated by their citizens’ determination to see only one city at a time. Inspector Tyador Borlu of the Extreme Crime Squad roams through the intertwined but separate cultures as he investigates the murder of Mahalia Geary, who believed that a third city, Orciny, hides in the blind spots between Beszel and Ul Qoma. As Mahalia’s friends disappear and revolution brews, Tyador is forced to consider the idea that someone in unseen Orciny is manipulating the other cities. Through this exaggerated metaphor of segregation, Miéville skillfully examines the illusions people embrace to preserve their preferred social realities. (June) —Staff (Reviewed April 13, 2009) (Publishers Weekly, vol 256, issue 15, p33)

Library Journal:
Méville (Un Lun Dun; Perdido Street Station) tells vivid stories in the borderlands of literary fantasy, science fiction, and horror, and here he adds noir crime to the mix. Fittingly, his tale is set in the borderlands, creating a mysterious pair of cities somewhere on Europe’s eastern edge. Beszel and Ul Qoma share the same ground, but their citizens are not allowed to react to one another, learning to “unsee” the other city and its inhabitants from a young age. Enforcing this division is a mysterious power called Breach. When an archaeology student is found dead, Inspector Tyador Borlú gets caught up in a case that forces him to navigate precariously between the cities, perhaps into the sinister worlds that straddle them. It’s a fascinating premise. Unfortunately, the cities, protagonist, and case remain stubbornly in the haze. For all genre fiction collections because Méville is a trailblazer with a dedicated following, but this work is more an existential thought piece than a reading pleasure. —Neil Hollands, Williamsburg Regional Lib., VA

Kirkus:

* Starred Review * Fantasy veteran Miville (Iron Council, 2004, etc.) adds a murder mystery to the mix in his tale of two fiercely independent East European cities coexisting in the same physical location, the denizens of one willfully imperceptible to the other. The idea’s not new—Jack Vance sketched something similar 60 years ago—but Miville stretches it until it twangs. Citizens of Beszel are trained from birth to ignore, or “unsee,” the city and inhabitants of Ul Qoma (and vice versa), even when trains from both cities run along the same set of tracks, and houses of different cities stand alongside one another. To step from one city to the other, or even to attempt to perceive the counterpart city, is a criminal act that immediately invokes Breach, the terrifying, implacable, ever-watching forces that patrol the shadowy borders. Summoned to a patch of waste ground where a murdered female has been dumped from a van, Beszel’s Detective Inspector Tyador Borlú learns the victim was a resident of Ul Qoma. Clearly, the Oversight Committee must invoke Breach, thus relieving Borlú of all further responsibility. Except that a videotape shows the van arriving legally in Beszel from Ul Qoma via the official border crossing point. Therefore, no breach, so Borlú must venture personally into Ul Qoma to pursue an investigation that grows steadily more difficult and alarming. Griny, gritty reality occasionally spills over into unintelligible hypercomplexity, but this spectacularly, intricately paranoid yarn is worth the effort. (Kirkus Reviews, May 1, 2009)
THE CITY & THE CITY

by China Mieville

Macmillan, 17.99 [pounds sterling], pp. 312, ISBN 9781405000178

[ILLUSTRATION OMITTED]

China Mieville's second book, Perdido Street Station, made his name by reimagining fantasy as thoroughly as had M. John Harrison's Viriconium or Alasdair Gray's Lanark. He followed it with two more novels set in the same world, and a children's fantasy (Un Lun Dun) that was hailed as an instant classic and made the New York Times bestseller lists.

The City & The City, however, has not a single monster, demon or alien. It is, at first glance, a straightforward police procedural. When a murdered woman is found dumped on waste ground in Beszel, a rundown city somewhere on the eastern edge of Europe, Inspector Tyador Borlu of the Extreme Crime Squad realises that she comes from the neighbouring city of Ul Qoma, a more prosperous metropolis reminiscent, perhaps, of the modern sections of Istanbul. This presents Borlu with the central difficulty of his investigation, and the reader with the central premise of the book, and its one fantastic element.

The separation between Beszel and Ul Qoma is strictly maintained and more than physical, though it is possible—by negotiating serpentine bureaucratic procedures—to pass from one side to the other through the precincts of Copula Hall, an administrative centre for both cities. To breach the border elsewhere is the ultimate crime, so serious that it is handled by a shadowy authority (known simply as Breach) against which there is no appeal, and whose sanctions seem limitless.

The cities, in fact, exist not only side by side but, in some fashion, cross-hatched upon each other: the inhabitants of both have learned from childhood to 'unsee' anything from the other side. Borlu's investigations quickly bring him into contact with politicians, radical groups which favour either unification of the cities or stringent nationalism, and an archaeological dig in Ul Qoma where the victim (an American, it turns out) has been working on a theory that a third city, Orciny, somehow exists beside the other two.

The tightrope trick of maintaining this central conceit is handled remarkably skilfully by Mieville; though the publisher predictably invokes comparisons with Kafka, there is nothing especially outré about the story, once the premise is accepted. Borlu uses fax machines, cell phones, grapples with paperwork, physical clues, unreliable witnesses, the sheer cussedness of events; the murder investigation plays fair and is realistic. Or realistic, at least, in the conventions of the detective novel, which is, like all fiction, a sort of fantasy.
In that sense, the hallucinatory aspects of the book owe more to Borges, or perhaps Les Gommes, Alain Robbe-Grillet's subversion of the policier. Most impressively, Mieville's underlying point, that all city-dwellers collude in ignoring real aspects of the cities in which they live--the homeless, political structures, the commercial world or the stuff that's 'for the tourists'--is never laboured.

This is Mieville's most accomplished novel since Perdido Street Station. It deserves an audience among those who would run a mile from his other books: it is fantastic in the careless, colloquial sense, too.

McKie, Andrew

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Introduction

China Miéville's *The City & the City* is often classified as a work of fantasy fiction, specifically of the subgenre called the New Weird. However, elements of outright supernatural influence are rare to nonexistent. Rather, the work focuses on human psychology and the potential power of the human mind as the mechanic behind the strange state of affairs in *The City & the City*.

The two cities referred to in the title are located in Eastern Europe and are named Beszel and Ul Qoma, respectively. Although both cities occupy the same geographic space, they are separated more by culture, perception, and human psychology than anything else. The plot follows the actions of Inspector Tyador Borlú as he investigates the brutal murder of a young woman. His investigations eventually lead him from his native city of Beszel to its counterpart, Ul Qoma, and he eventually uncovers intimations that there may be yet a third city hiding between the other two.

The book was nominated for a Nebula Award and a Hugo award in the Best Novel category, and won both the BSFA Award for Best Novel and the Arthur C. Clarke Award.

Major Characters

**Tyador Borlú** is an Inspector with the Beszel Extreme Crime Squad. Borlú is a veteran detective with a penchant for travel and extensive experience. He is a citizen of the city of Beszel. The protagonist of the novel, Borlú is drawn into events by the mysterious murder of a young woman.

**Lizbetic Corwi** is a young beat officer. Borlú befriends Corwi early on in the book, and she quickly becomes his assistant. Borlú values Corwi because she has the ability to talk intimately with younger people of Beszel with whom Borlú does not easily interact, due to the generation gap that exists between them.

**Quissim Dhatt** is a senior detective in Ul Qoma, Beszel’s “sister city.” Borlú joins up with Dhatt when Borlú’s investigations lead him to Ul Qoma. Dhatt can be seen as the “bacoop” to Borlú’s “gudcop.” Dhatt swears constantly, beats what he needs to know out of suspects and generally embodies the archetype of the hard-boiled detective.

About the Author

China Miéville is an award-winning English fantasist whose work is often considered part of the New Weird movement in speculative fiction. His work often blends a variety of elements or bridges speculative fiction with other fiction genres, such as the sea quest (*The Scar*), American Western (*Iron Council*), or detective noir (*The City & the City*). Miéville is also well known for his work in literary theory and his left-wing political thought, having published both essays and books on those topics. These impulses manifest themselves in many of Miéville’s works, including *Iron Council*, considered by many critics
to be Miéville's most overtly political novel to date. As Miéville explains in an interview in the Believer, however, his novels, while they may express his political interests, are not vehicles for his politics, but expressions of his passionate love for "monsters and the weird and horror stories and strange situations and surrealism."

*The City & the City* features a pair of twin European cities. Ul Qoma is a beautiful, vibrant city, while Beszel is a rusting urban graveyard like the one in this picture.
© Pablo Corral Vega/Corbis

**Literary and Historical Context**

*The City & the City*, while a work of new weird fantasy fiction, owes a great deal to the tradition of detective novels and police procedurals. As Denise Hamilton of the *Los Angeles Times* describes it, "Miéville mines the tropes of detective fiction—the murder scene, the coroner's autopsy, the witnesses who saw nothing." *The City & the City* takes those tropes, builds upon them and fuses them with other diverse elements to produce the narrative of the story. Adding to the mystery that serves as the foundation of the novel as a police procedural, Miéville creates other mysteries of a more esoteric nature, questions which explore the laws of reality as they apply to the "plural" nature of his created city.

The protagonist of the book, Inspector Borlú, represents one of the classic detective archetypes, the veteran gumshoe. Other archetypes are used to create characters like Quissim Dhatt, a native of Ul Qoma and example of the "badcop" character who physically shakes down the perps to get the information he wants, or Lizbyet Corwi, the young beat officer with a finger on the pulse of the city around her.

With its concept of Breach (a mysterious force that acts to keep the borders between the two cities and their peoples and culture intact), *The City & the City* also brings to mind elements of dystopic novels such as 1984. Likewise, parallels can also be made with "wartime Sarajevo or Cold War Berlin" (Hamilton). In many ways, the cities themselves, with their distinct cultures and styles, are characters in their own right, just as Inspector Borlú or Lizbyet Corwi are characters in the novel.

**Themes**
The “crosshatching”—defined by authors John Clute and John Grant in *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy* as “two or more worlds [that] may simultaneously inhabit the same territory”—of Beszel and Ul Qoma in *The City & the City* provides a solid structure for the examination of a number of the book’s central themes. Miéville is, in fact, known for writing which melds theme and structure, so much so that one “cannot help but be impressed by the fact that the central concept of the book is ... a natural continuation of the themes” (McCalmont).

The separation of the cities is accomplished, in part, by the psychological conditioning of the inhabitants to “unsee” anything relating to the “other city.” This brings up themes of perception and the question of how to define boundaries, as well as a comment on the power of the human mind (a theme that is echoed in Inspector Borlu’s murder investigation).

Themes of cultural identity also dovetail into the structure, all the more so because the two cultures in conflict literally occupy the same space. Beszel and Ul Qoma were once enemies, and are still rivals, for every person in each city occupies the same physical space. Each city nevertheless maintains a distinct culture and the separation of the cities works to preserve that culture. Miéville’s use of neologisms reinforces this. As Jonathan McCalmon puts it, “The obsession with the layering complexity and ultimate arbitrariness of language feeds the idea that culture is not something that is born of essential properties but of habit, custom and will.... The cities of Beszel and Ul Quoma are manifestations of the ultimately arbitrary and essence-free nature of human culture: two cultures, one shared space.”

**Style**

*The City & the City* is a departure from Miéville’s customary style. Hamilton, who describes Miéville’s earlier works (particularly *Perdido Street Station*, *The Scar* and *Iron Council*) as “baroque, dense and lyrical,” observes that “where earlier books were drunk on language, detail, color and character, [The City & the City] is gray, chilly and stripped down.” This departure in style reflects a noir aesthetic, and calls to mind the gritty black-and-white feel of such noir film masterpieces as *The Maltese Falcon*.

The noir format does not, however, completely define the style of the novel. More than anything else, *The City & the City* is a work of the new weird. It pushes the literary boundaries of the fantasy genre and blends inspirations, tropes and literary devices from a number of sources to produce the overall narrative. The noir format, and its attendant archetypes provide a baseline structure for plot and character, from which Miéville departs and refines his novel.

The noir archetypes are particularly evident in the characters, from the veteran detective Inspector Borlu to the “badcop” Senior Detective Dhatt. The damsel in distress, however, is already dead—a victim of plot. Her death is the inciting incident that sets the narrative in motion, a narrative that contains numerous twists and dangers befitting any example of the noir detective novel or police procedural. This narrative is thus familiar and yet different.

The thread of “familiar yet different” in *The City & the City* is also evident in Miéville’s use of neologisms. The new words he has created help explain unfamiliar concepts and give us an additional insight into the culture(s) of the novel. Words such as “unsee” (72), “unsmell” (66) and “topolganger” (144) take familiar roots and combine them to express unfamiliar concepts expressed in the book.

**Critical Reception**

*The City & the City* garnered positive responses from readers and critics overall. In addition to winning an Arthur C. Clarke Award, a Hugo Award for Best Novel and a British Science Fiction Association (BSFA) Award, as well as nominations for a number of other awards, *The City & the City* was lauded by many reviewers. A veteran writer of science fiction and fantasy, Michael Moorcock reviewed the book for the *Guardian*, saying “As in no previous novel, the author celebrates and enhances the genre he loves and has never rejected. On many levels this novel is a testament to his admirable integrity. Keeping his grip firmly on an idea which would quickly slip from the hands of a less skilled writer, Miéville again proves himself as intelligent as he is original.”

Reservations about the novel were expressed by some critics, albeit most often as part of a “mixed review” response or as a single reservation about the work as a whole. Denise Hamilton noted that “Borlu seemed an archetype more than a fleshed-out character,” but concluded that “that’s OK,” as the cities are the real protagonists of the book.

One critic, Jonathan McCalmon, of Zone-SF.com, went further. In his view, the novel was disappointing due to failed potential, more than anything else. He writes, “The City & the City is, in many ways, an extraordinary piece of writing. But it is not the novel it should have been. It is competent where it should have been challenging, abstract where it should have been concrete and timid where it should have been bold.” McCalmon later expresses the belief that the book, while “not a bad novel,” was not deserving of the BSFA, Arthur C. Clarke, and Hugo awards that it won.
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Additional Resources

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Gale Resources


Open Web Sources

China Miéville’s personal website and blog, “rejectamentalist manifesto,” is located at http://chinamierville.net/. It features thoughts expressed by the author, as well as numerous quotations, author opinions, and vintage photographs.

The Internet Speculative Fiction Database at http://www.isfdb.org/ includes an entry on China Miéville, as well as coverage of speculative fiction authors of all subgenres. A summary bibliography (including links to several interviews) of China Miéville’s work can be found here: http://www.isfdb.org/cgi-bin/ea.cgi China_Miéville

For Further Reading
encyclopedia for fantasy and horror fiction; includes a biographical entry on China Miéville.


Print. Miéville’s book on political theory and international law was adapted from his PhD thesis.

Award and a Bram Stoker Award.

collection of new weird short fiction and essays, includes an examination of the new weird as a genre, as well as fiction by
China Miéville.

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Read-alikes for The city & the city

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The city & the city
By: Mieville, China
Inspector Tyador Borlu must travel to Ul Qoma to search for answers in the murder of a woman found in the city of Beszel.

Read-alikes
1. *The fecund's melancholy daughter*
   Hayward, Brent
   **Reason:** Set in dream-like cities, these lyrical and haunting stories present intricate plots, surreal landscapes, and thought-provoking moral ambiguities. -- Victoria Caplinger

2. *When gravity fails*
   Effinger, George Alec
   **Reason:** These intricately plotted, dark science fiction books blend police procedurals and noir detective stories. Though When Gravity Fails is cyberpunk and The City & the City is more fantastic, both may appeal to fans of gritty mysteries and imaginative, detailed world-building. -- Kaitlyn Moore

3. *Hell's horizon*
   Shan, Darren
   **Reason:** These two books mix the police procedural and speculative science fiction genres together, with dreamlike and sometimes disturbing results. 'Hell's horizon' is more violent and gory than 'The city and the city,' but both novels offer complicated mythologies and intricate plots. -- Victoria Caplinger

4. *Hope to die*
   Block, Lawrence
   **Reason:** These books are Gritty and Intricately plotted, and they share: the genres 'Hardboiled fiction' and 'Mystery stories' and the subject 'Murder investigation'.

5. *Light of the world*
   Burke, James Lee, 1936-
   **Reason:** These books are Gritty and Intricately plotted, and they share: the genres 'Hardboiled fiction' and 'Mystery stories' and the subject 'Murder investigation'.

6. *Long lost*
   Coben, Harlan, 1962-
   **Reason:** These books share: the genres 'Hardboiled fiction' and 'Adult books for young adults' and the subject 'Murder investigation'.

7. *The dark sleep*
   Elrod, P. N. (Patricia Nead)
   **Reason:** These books share: the genres 'Hardboiled fiction' and 'Fantasy mystery stories' and the subject 'Murder investigation'.

8. *Don't look for me*
   Estleman, Loren D.
   **Reason:** These books are Gritty and Intricately plotted, and they share: the genres 'Hardboiled fiction' and 'Adult books for young adults' and the subjects 'Murder investigation' and 'Missing persons'.

12/21/2014
9. High bloods
Farris, John

Reason: These books are Gritty and intricately plotted, and they share: the genres 'Hardboiled fiction' and 'Fantasy mystery stories' and the subject 'Murder investigation'.

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Read-alikes for Mieville, China

Find more read-alikes in NoveList.

Mieville, China
China Mieville writes highly inventive, intricately-plotted Science Fiction and Fantasy that blurs the boundaries between genres. Known for his detailed world-building, particularly the world of Bas-Lag and its prominent city-state New Crobuzon, Mieville's novels incorporate both magic and technology and depict a diverse, usually urban society whose social issues mirror, albeit in a fantastical way, our own. Start with The Scar (Adults); Un Lun Dun (Teens).

Read-alikes
1. Saramago, Jose
   Reason: China Miéville and Jose Saramago both insert fantastic elements into settings that more or less resemble real life, allowing their leftist politics to appear in plain view. Miéville uses a more complex writing style, while Saramago's style is apparently simple but actually quite experimental. Both will satisfy the most discerning literary readers. -- Katherine Johnson

2. Simmons, Dan
   Reason: Simmons and Mieville are both award-winning authors who refuse to be pigeon-holed into a single genre. They excel at creating dark, literary thrillers with plenty of speculative twists that readers bring in more readers with each new title. -- Becky Spratford

3. Bishop, K. J.
   Reason: K. J. Bishop and China Mieville write inventive fantasy fiction that incorporates aspects of other genres. Both use a descriptive writing style to create worlds where science and magic are interwoven. Bishop uses a dreamlike touch of Magical Realism, whereas Mieville's work is more heavily influenced by the Horror genre. -- Keeley Murray

4. MacLeod, Ian R., 1956-
   Reason: These unpredictable, imaginative writers blur the edges between science fiction and fantasy with the magical technology in their vivid worlds. Both often write in the steampunk genre, though MacLeod sets his in an alternate history, while Mieville's settings resemble present-day. Their lyrical novels are atmospheric, dark and frequently disturbing. -- Kaitlyn Moore

5. Crowley, John, 1942-
   Reason: John Crowley and China Mieville both write intricately plotted Fantasy fiction. Their world-building storylines explore science, philosophy, and political intrigue. Alongside these overarching themes, memorable characters experience adventure, romance, and mystery. These richly detailed stories come to life on imagined planets, in futuristic cities, and through alternate histories. -- Keeley Murray

   Reason: These authors' works are Descriptive and World-building, and they share: the genres 'Science fiction' and 'Fantasy fiction' and the subject 'Dystopias'.

7. Oliver, Lauren, 1982-
   Reason: These authors' works are Descriptive, World-building, and Intricately plotted, and they share: the genres 'Science fiction' and 'Fantasy fiction' and the subject 'Dystopias'.

8. Shannon, Samantha, 1991-
   Reason: These authors' works are Stylistically complex and Intricately plotted, and they share: the genres 'Science fiction' and 'Fantasy fiction' and the subject 'London, England'.
9. *Kittredge, Caitlin*

**Reason:** These authors' works are Descriptive and World-building, and they share: the genres 'Science fiction' and 'Fantasy fiction' and the subjects 'London, England' and 'Men/women relations'.

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