MISCEGENATION IN THE MARVELOUS: RACE AND HYBRIDITY IN THE FANTASY NOVELS OF NEIL GAIMAN AND CHINA MIÉVILLE

(Spine title: MISCEGENATION IN THE MARVELOUS)

(Thesis format: Monograph)

by

Nikolai Rodrigues

Graduate Program in English

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in English

The School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies
The University of Western Ontario
London, Ontario, Canada

© Nikolai Rodrigues 2012

THE UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN ONTARIO
SCHOOL OF GRADUATE AND POSTDOCTORAL STUDIES

CERTIFICATE OF EXAMINATION

Supervisory

Dr. Jane Toswell
_____

Supervisory Committee

Dr. Wendy Pearson
_____

Examining Board

Dr. Tim Blackmore
_____

Dr. Jonathan Boulter
_____

Dr. Alison Lee
_____

The thesis by

Nikolai Rodrigues

entitled:

Miscegenation in the Marvelous: Race and Hybridity in the Fantasy Novels of Neil Gaiman and China Miéville

is accepted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

Date Tuesday 21 August 2012

Dr. Steven Bruhm
_____
Chair of the Thesis Examination Board

Abstract

Fantasy literature in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries uses the construction of new races as a mirror through which to see the human race more clearly. Categorizations of fantasy have tended to avoid discussions of race, in part because it is an uncomfortable gray area since fantasy literature does not yet have a clear taxonomy. Nevertheless, race is often an unavoidable component of fantasy literature. This thesis considers J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* as a taproot text for fantasy literature before moving on to Neil Gaiman's *American Gods* and China Miéville's *Perdido Street Station*, both newer fantasy novels which include interesting constructions of race and raise issues of miscegenation and hybridity. This thesis moves towards an understanding of what purpose creating and utilizing races serves, and how fantasy literature allows for the identification and potential resolution of a number of human anxieties regarding race.

Keywords

Race, miscegenation, hybridity, other, fantasy literature, J.R.R. Tolkien, Neil Gaiman, China Miéville, *The Lord of the Rings*, *American Gods*, *Perdido Street Station*.

Acknowledgments

I would like to wholeheartedly thank my supervisor Dr. Jane Toswell, who took a scattered jumble of ideas and made them into something far better than I could have managed to create on my own. I would also like to thank my second reader Dr. Wendy Pearson, who, along with Dr. Toswell, addressed problem after problem, draft after draft, quickly and efficiently. I can only marvel at the academic ability of these two exemplary individuals.

Table of Contents

Title Page……..i

CERTIFICATE OF EXAMINATION ii

Abstract iii

Acknowledgments..... iv

Table of Contents v

Chapter 1 1

1 Constructions of Race in Fantasy Literature 1

1.1 Introduction 1

1.2 Race..... 2

1.3 Miscegenation 8

1.4 Fantasy 14

1.5 Defining Fantasy 18

1.6 Race as a Feature of Fantasy..... 23

1.7 Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* 26

Chapter 2 43

2 Of Gods and Men: Race and Miscegenation in Neil Gaiman's *American Gods* 43

2.1 Introduction 43

2.2 Shadow..... 44

2.3 Whiteness in Fantasy 47

2.4 The Gods 52

2.5 Mr. Wednesday 55

2.6 Mr. Nancy 57

2.7 The Egyptian Gods 60

2.8 Shadow as Demi-God 64

2.9 Conclusion 67

Chapter 3 68

3 A City of Monsters: Weird Hybridity and Miscegenation in China Miéville's *Perdido Street Station* 68

3.1 Introduction 68

3.2 Race in New Crobuzon 71

3.3 Race and Science 77

3.4 The Garuda 81

3.5 Yagharek's Transformation 82

3.6 The Remade 84

3.7 Interspecies Relationships and Remade Prostitution 86

3.8 Slake-moths and the Monstrous Other 90

3.9 Motley 95

3.10 Conclusion 97

Conclusion: The Problem of Endings 100

Works Cited 106

Curriculum Vitae 114

Chapter 1

1 Constructions of Race in Fantasy Literature

> The ways in which race is represented in the fantastic provide a measure of the concern the culture has for matters relating to race. If a horror film is racist, whether consciously or unconsciously, leaving such racism unexamined allows for the perpetuation of it, both by the mass media and by the ordinary moviegoer. Similarly, a movie or novel that works actively to expose and indict racism can influence many people. Examining the systems of racial meaning and stereotypes within a work (or, in this case, within a genre) provides a better understanding of the culture, cultural production, and racial ideology. It is a political act, as Le Guin said of fiction; criticism, and particularly criticism of the popular, must also choose between collusion and subversion.
>
> The second, and related, reason for the study of race in the fantastic has to do with the fantastic's lack of realism; it can serve as a literature of possibility…By presenting alternatives, the fantastic throws into relief 'the real.' Because works of the fantastic are simultaneously situated both within the writer's realm (and thus subject to the codes and conventions of the time in which they are written), and within the realm of the imaginary worlds constructed, they can both reenact and alter racial codes and representations…The imagined has real effects. (Leonard 4)

1.1 Introduction

This thesis addresses race in works of fantasy literature, focusing on racial representation, as well as issues of miscegenation and hybridity. Accordingly, J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* is utilized as a taproot text which has influenced the depiction of races in fantasy. Neil Gaiman's *American Gods* and China Miéville's

Perdido Street Station are each analyzed in later chapters as examples of more recent fantasy which present race and miscegenation in interesting ways which replicate human anxieties about race. All three of these authors are white, male, and British. An investigation into race in a novel by a person of colour, such as Nalo Hopkinson's *Brown Girl in the Ring*, Hiromi Goto's *Half World*, or Nnedi Okorafor's *Who Fears Death*, could have added another perspective to this study of race in fantasy literature. However, these three authors – Tolkien, Gaiman, and Miéville – were chosen because of their own importance within the realm of English fantasy literature. Tolkien wrote arguably the most famous and influential English-language fantasy novel of all time, and Gaiman and Miéville have each won an astonishing number of speculative fiction awards recognizing the importance of their work.

Race and fantasy literature are often closely connected. This introduction discusses ideas of race in their historical contexts, as well as historical theories on miscegenation. Following this are a number of definitions of fantasy, with an attempt to come to a satisfactory working definition for the relevant texts discussed. Finally, J.R.R. Tolkien's constructions of race in *The Lord of the Rings* are analyzed as a preliminary example of how race and miscegenation function in fantasy.

1.2 Race

Race is a highly problematic system of categorization. Not because it notices difference, but because its categorization of differences leads ultimately to the creation of racial stereotypes, which raises the possibility of racism. The problematic nature of the term becomes even more apparent upon the realization – or rather, the scientific conclusion – that there is essentially no scientific basis for categorizations of race, and by extension, there is no scientific basis for any racist thought. The reason for this, of course, is that race is not itself a scientific term, having no biological place in reality. Approximately ninety-nine percent of genes are the same for all members of homo

sapiens sapiens (Tattersall 190). Thus, there is no valid reason for any sort of biological categorizations based on race. Rather, recent studies have shown that race as it is known today is not a scientific fact, but a cultural construction with powerful implications (Tattersall 1).[1] In fact, the "genetic difference between 'races,' for example, Europeans and Africans, is about the same size as genetic difference between people from different European countries" (Tizard 2).[2] Furthermore, even if the scientific community proclaims that race has no basis in biology, and that it is instead a form of cultural and social construction, does not mean that ideas about race and racism simply lose their strength and disappear. However, Paul Gilroy argues that biological difference should not be completely "dismissed as a factor in the formation and reproduction of race" because admitting limited biological factors like skin colour "opens up the possibility of engaging with theories of signification which can highlight the elasticity the emptiness of 'racial' signifiers as well as the ideological work which has been done to turn them into signifiers in the first place" (Gilroy 38-9). Historically, the construction of race has gone through a number of different iterations, and even now race remains a contentious issue.

The majority of the racial focus in this paper as regards scholarship is on race as it pertains to people of African descent. Black people have had much more attention paid to them throughout the last few centuries as regards miscegenation, which is of central importance to this work. Furthermore, of all "racial" qualities utilized for visibly identifying someone as a member of a certain racial group, skin colour is the most immediate and obvious. For this reason, in works of fantasy that frequently make note of

---

[1] An excellent work of biology and physical anthropology, Ian Tattersall and Rob Desalle's *Race?: Debunking a Scientific Myth* separates biology from race in a very straightforward, yet also comprehensive manner. Of particular note are the sections on genetics, which discuss how infinitesimal the differences between the different races are.

[2] For a more in depth discussion of this issue, see Paul Hoffman's "The Science of Race" (1994).

skin colour as an indicator of superiority or inferiority or moral good and evil, "blackness" serves as the best signifier of such ideas.

An important note needs to be made about the term "black" itself. That those first encountering African peoples noted them as black indicates two things. First, it indicates that Europeans had a perhaps understandable tendency to exaggerate to indicate difference, because no person is actually black-skinned, just varying shades of brown. Second, and more important in this context, is that Europeans were already colouring their notions of African people by such a loaded term. Winthrop Jordan, in *The White Man's Burden* notes that prior to the sixteenth century, "black" had a number of connotations, among them "Deeply stained with dirt; soiled, dirty, foul…Having dark or deadly purposes, malignant; pertaining to or involving death, deadly; baneful, disastrous, sinister…Foul, iniquitous, atrocious, horrible, wicked…Indicating disgrace, censure, liability to punishment, etc." (Jordan 6). To put it more simply, and less exhaustively, "black was an emotionally partisan color, the handmaid and symbol of baseness and evil, a sign of danger and repulsion" (Jordan 6). Thus, the binary is established from first contact between the two peoples: "White and black connoted purity and filthiness, virginity and sin, virtue and baseness, beauty and ugliness, beneficence and evil, God and the devil" (Jordan 6). Accordingly, the visible cues of physical appearance could be very easily viewed as representative of such preconceived notions.

In its earlier conceptions in Europe before the sixteenth century race was often used synonymously with nationhood. That is to say that the race of the Scots referred to the people of Scotland. The race of the Spaniards referred to those from Spain, regardless of phenotypic differences among the various peoples living in the country. This construction was also one which influenced Tolkien, as when he was a young man, race was often used to identify and differentiate national cultures: the "English race," or the "French race," for example. Likewise, in this construction "the Serbs, the Croats, and the

Bosnians are arguably three 'races' engaged in warfare" (Twagilimana xvii). To put it more simply, there was very little that solidly defined races, besides arbitrary delineations. As Henry Gates Jr. has argued, "Race has become a trope of ultimate, irreducible difference between cultures, linguistic groups, or practitioners of specific belief systems, who more often than not have fundamentally opposed economic interests" (Gates 49). Twagilimana elaborates this point, saying that "because of their arbitrariness, those categories and the culture they reflect cannot be said to be discrete elements or to have necessary and sufficient terms of definition. They are fluid, volatile, and malleable constructs in the hands of man" (Twagilimana xviii). The arbitrary nature of pre-1500 definitions of race lacked the primary factor of later definitions: differences in physical appearance.

The main thrust of scientific and cultural discourse about race developed later, with the spread of slavery and colonialism to North America. However, there were no uniform approaches to race as regards the Atlantic slave system, which differed greatly from the slave systems amongst indigenous peoples in North America, or Muslim or African slavery, which were much less about racial ideas of inferiority or superiority. Rather, conceptions of race and slavery had much more to do with each individual country's particular concepts of racial purity, hybridity, and, perhaps most importantly, the pragmatism of trade coupled with the population ratio of whites to blacks. Colonies tended to have far fewer whites than blacks or natives, a fact that is of particular relevance to those colonies whose main economic function was the creation of agricultural goods, such as plantation colonies. For example, colonies in the West Indies in the early sixteenth century had much larger numbers of blacks than whites due to the large amount of slave importing that was done there. As such, some ideas about inherent racial inferiority were put to the test and did not entirely become as entrenched there as elsewhere, since often black or mixed-race people had to fill positions of respect that

normally would have been held by whites (Tizard 26). Accordingly, the idea of an inherent inferiority, of social Darwinism, did not develop to its utmost in these areas as it did in others. In fact, laws were eventually put into place in the West Indies which legally recognized the children resulting from interracial couplings which in effect made it possible for the child of a slave to inherit the plantation that his or her mother worked on. Similarly, a number of Portuguese colonies in Africa and South America (Brazil) had different approaches to race since the number of white settlers there was also nowhere near as high as the native Africans, imported slaves, or Indigenous South American populations. For example, fifteenth and sixteenth century Portuguese explorers intermixed with the native West African populations, for they were "more interested in trade and wealth than genetic purity" and the unbalanced population provided them with many opportunities to marry Indigenous or slave women if white women were unavailable (Alibhai-Brown 25). Interestingly, there was a binary to this particular viewpoint. Trade was highly desired, yet there was also a "fear of contamination [amongst the Portuguese], especially with very dark-skinned people…the British were later caught up in a similar web of values" (Alibhai-Brown 26). Even this early in the slave trade there were concerns with racial purity. Similar concerns with racial purity appear in *The Lord of the Rings'* discussions of racial mixing.

In the United States of America the spread of racism, coupled with slavery, was viewed by many as a "necessary evil" simply because it provided a workforce for the developing nation, and allowed a number of the harsher, more undesirable, jobs to be completed by those deemed to be inferior. While not a universally held idea (there were a number of abolitionists in both the United States and Britain)[3], a racial hierarchy was

---

[3] The majority of the more well-known abolitionists were from the United States and Britain. The British side was often more dominated by male abolitionists – Thomas Clarkson, William Wilberforce, Pitt the Younger, Oladah Equiano, and Ottobah Cugoano to name a few. The American abolitionist movements

created as a means of codifying different peoples into levels of superiority and inferiority. This structure provided the idea of "race" that is still so prevalent today, with representations of people based on area of origin, linked to phenotypic physical appearance. The terms Caucasoid, Negroid, Mongoloid, and Australoid were developed as a means of applying generalized physical traits to people from, respectively, Europe, Africa, Asia, and Australia. This connection of physical appearance to specified levels – and often limits – of intelligence and intellectual capacity, physical strength, hardiness, disease resistance, fertility, aggression, and spiritual potential all combined to create what has traditionally been used to codify, separate, malign, and elevate members of one race over another. Anthropologist Stanley R. Barrett has argued that

> For much of the history of physical anthropology, at least up to the Second World War, the basic concept was race, defined in biological terms. An attempt was made to classify the population of the world into phenotypes (for example, Negroid, Mongoloid, Australoid, and Caucasoid), employing observable criteria such as skin colour and hair type. A great deal of mischief was done by these attempts, leading to the assumption that people could be slotted into distinct races in the biological sense, and that these races varied in terms of intelligence, morality, and so on. Today most physical anthropologists have abandoned classifications based on phenotype, and recognize that all contemporary human beings belong to a single species, *Homo sapiens* (the conventional definition of a

---

were much more gender inclusive; some of the best known were women, especially those who published a great deal, and often belonged to families who themselves possessed abolitionist tendencies, such as the Beechers, the Stowes, and the Grimke Sisters. Other notable American abolitionists include William Lloyd Garrison, but the most powerful of abolitionist voices in an American context came from former slaves themselves. Frederick Douglass, Harriet Tubman, and Sojourner Truth all worked tirelessly to create for African Americans a sense of personhood which so many proslavery activists sought to suppress.

> species is that of a breeding population: if a male and female member of a single species mate, they are capable of producing fertile offspring). (Barrett 5-6)

America provides an excellent example of this, as do other places – Portugal, Brazil, Britain, and the West Indies. These areas also provide examples of how the ideas which were formed largely to separate members of one race from another often led to just the opposite: miscegenation. Humans, however, contrary to historical claims otherwise, all belong to the same species. There is no noteworthy biological difference between a black man and a white man, or an Asian woman and a Native American. All humans are capable of producing children together, regardless of the races involved in the coupling. While the human species has some phenotypic and genotypic variations, these differences do not form them into separate species.

In spite of the critical morass that the above has suggested in terms of determining just what race is, Jayne Ifekwunigwe succinctly defines race as "A potent dynamic social and cultural imaginary, the naturalization of which attaches symbolic meanings to real or manufactured physical differences. These create, explain, justify and maintain social inequalities and injustices; and perpetuate differential access to privilege, prestige, and power" (Ifekwunigwe xxii). Hers is perhaps one of the more comprehensive definitions of race, given that it implicitly includes the various historical views of race in its own definition, and accordingly it will be utilized in the majority of this paper, except where references to biological ideas of race become more relevant, as in China Miéville's *Perdido Street Station*.

1.3 Miscegenation

In discussing miscegenation, it is important to note the historical difficulty that interracial relationships have faced, especially in America. There, anti-miscegenatory laws entrenched racist ideas about interracial mixing in the very system of administration. At one point or another, forty U.S. states "enacted laws against 'racially mixed' unions

and marriages." Furthermore, "although the categories forbidden to marry in the various states were not at all consistent, all forbade marriage between black and white people" (Tizard 7). The suggestion here, of course, is that black people were viewed as an absolute other, as something to be avoided and to remain separate from more than any other racial group. Miscegenation between white and black was thus abhorrent. Furthermore, advocates of monogenesis believed that all humans derived from a common ancestor and developed differently from there, while polygenesis posited that races were created separately from one another, with no common ancestor. Such a view of race took for granted that black and white people were inherently different from one another, and that black people were biologically and intellectually inferior to white people. Part of the difficulty in discussing constructions of race is that many modern ideas about race – that there are no such things as different races, and that all people belong to one species – were either not known at the time, or were disregarded as a means of retaining a sense of cultural – often termed "racial" – superiority.

Though it has come to be seen as a pejorative term, miscegenation came from at least an assumed scientific intent. Originally, the term for racial mixing was "amalgamation." However, in 1864 David Goodman Croly deemed this term to be too broad and unscientific for the purposes of discourses on race, which at this point was identified nearly entirely as a biological construct. Accordingly, Croly first coined the term in his pamphlet entitled *Miscegenation: The Theory of the Blending of the Races Applied to the American White and Negro*. Deriving from the Latin words "miscere" (to mix) and "genus" (race), miscegenation literally means "to mix races" (Croly 2). Thus, miscegenation referred to, in a biological sense, the mixing of racially, biologically different types of people, often focusing on one of two components – the act of mixing interracially, and the products of such interracial couplings. The first of these was usually approached from a moralistic and religious standpoint, often citing the impropriety of the

act, and the degradation that would come of lowering oneself, debasing oneself so far down the racial chain of being as to have sexual relations with a member of a race deemed inferior to one's own. The second concern was with the children resulting from such a union.[4] Would they be considered white, if half-black, or black, if half-white? The concern was rarely actually directed at the children themselves; rather, those in power were often concerned that any sort of racial mixing would lead to a deterioration of both races involved from their original purities, which, argued Carl Vogt, Joseph Arthur Gobineau, and Louis Agassiz in the 1850s and 60s, would theoretically make both races weaker, sicklier, and ultimately lead to complete extinction, known as the negative amalgamation thesis (Young 18).

With these concerns in mind, new categories emerged to deal with the obvious lack of foresight by those who developed the preceding categories of race as insoluble monoliths. In keeping with prior attempts to make the study of race scientific, these new terms each applied a mathematical quotient to different mixtures. These mixtures always referred back to the level of "blackness" that an individual allegedly possessed by way of ancestry. These terms occurred most frequently in New Orleans, Charleston, and the West Indies, where mixed-race populations were much more highly concentrated (Tizard 26). One term for a person with one black parent and one white parent was "mulatto."[5]

---

[4] Opponents of interracial marriages often turn their objections away from their occasionally racist ideas, and instead hide their actual concern behind a much more socially acceptable question of "but what about the children?" The claim made by many contemporary objectors is that any child born of a union of two different races would have an identity crisis, never fully fitting in to either community, or being accepted by either, because the child is not fully a member of whiteness, blackness, or any other totalizing form of racial identification.

[5] A hateful term, mulatto is still in use in the common parlance, yet surprisingly few people realize just how negative the term is, and so use it with impunity, which also suggests the lasting effect of racial terminology, and just how much various cultures affected one another with their conceptions and categorizations of race. The term mulatto actually comes not, as is typically assumed, from Spanish, but from the Portuguese term for "mule," referring to the infertile offspring of a horse and a donkey. This was an animal whose only use in a domestic situation was for manual labour, and whose existence was not

Someone with only one black grandparent was a quadroon, and someone with one black great-grandparent was an octoroon (Tizard 26). These strict delineations left no room for complications. For example, what if an individual had one black parent, and another parent who was half black and half white? The terms only allowed for one instance of black ancestry on one side of the family. For the most part, if a person could be visibly recognized as black, that person was considered black. The "one-drop" rule in America, an example of blood quantum, serves as a good example of this, though also extreme in that visible recognition was not even necessary for "blackness" to be determined; one merely required a black ancestor (Pascoe 116). If, however, someone who had a black ancestor (recent, or far back in the family tree) appeared white, they could undergo the process known as "passing," where they could pretend to be completely white, and reap the benefits of being white in a society which elevated whites above all others. This was risky, as the consequences of being discovered could be dire. So, to some extent, race in this construction is less about actual genetics and ancestry, and much more about one's physical appearance. Perception is key, as regards both who is being perceived, and who is perceiving. Furthermore, even abolitionists who were involved in the abolitionist movement might not have been seeking the abolition of slavery out of any feelings of altruism and horror at the atrocities visited upon slaves. In fact, many abolitionists themselves held racist ideas and feelings. Many of these sought not any sort of restitution for slavery, but rather wanted blacks to go back to Africa to be repatriated, so as to remove their supposedly deleterious influence from the presence of white people. After

---

meant to last, as a mule is itself infertile, and so leaves no legacy of its own. This idea most clearly reflected, oddly, not the Portuguese view of racial mixing, but the American one, where miscegenation was viewed as largely undesirable by society at large, and which reflects American ideas of the degrading effects of intermixing on both races involved, as the offspring would be weak and purposeless. For more on this, see Robert Young's *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race*, 8.

all, so the reasoning went, slavery causes sin and degeneration in both slave and slavemaster.

Britain had a much smaller population of slaves, and abolished slavery earlier than America (1833 and 1865, respectively). This, coupled with America's position as a colony-turned-nation and Britain's position as colonizing country, meant that Britain had a much smaller population of black people in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In the mid-1700s Edward Long decried miscegenation "on the grounds that black and white people belong to different species, that hybrids between them are eventually infertile, and that black people are closer to apes than man" (Tizard 28). While his theory was not completely indicative of the general feelings in Britain at the time, after the mid-nineteenth century Long's racial formulations gained support, and "many scientists asserted that race mixture would lead to physical, mental and emotional deformities, or to 'hybrid degeneration'; that is, the offspring of the mixture would inherit none of the good qualities of either parent and would die off after a few generations" (Tizard 33). This idea was elaborated further by Francis Galton, the founder of eugenics, who believed that the English were superior to those of African descent and that intermixture between the two would result in a decline of qualities like intelligence (Provine 790). Despite some differences in American and British constructions of race, both have historically held negative views of miscegenation.

Robert Young's excellent *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* outlines the main historical views on miscegenation. Britain's Edward Long (1770s) and the American Josiah Nott (1843) both believed in the "straightforward polygenist *species* argument" which consisted of "the denial that different people can mix at all" and that "any product of a union between them is infertile, or infertile after a generation or two; so that even where people intermingle physically, they retain their own differences" (Young 18). Contrasting sharply with the polygenist theory, the amalgamation thesis

proposed by anthropologists like James Pritchard in the early 1800s argued that "all humans can interbreed prolifically and in an unlimited way" an idea which also included the possibility that "the mixing of people produces a new mixed race, with merged but distinct new physical and moral characteristics" (18). The decomposition thesis was an intermediary approach between the first two, and was promoted by W.F. Edwards. This theory argued that "some 'amalgamation' between people may take place, but that any mixed breeds either die out quickly or revert to one or other of the permanent parent 'types'" (18). One of the more influential theories in the period from 1850 to the 1930s was that of the mixture resulting from "proximate" and "distant" species. This view, supported by both Charles Darwin and Francis Galton,[6] claimed that "unions between allied races are fertile, those between distant either are infertile or tend to degeneration" (18). Finally, the aforementioned "negative version of the amalgamation thesis" espoused most fully by Carl Vogt in 1863 said that "miscegenation produces a mongrel group that makes up a 'raceless chaos', merely a corruption of the originals, degenerate and degraded, threatening to subvert the vigour and virtue of the pure races with which they come into contact" (18). Clearly, there was little consensus in the past about just how race and interracial mixing functioned, often involving constructions that diametrically opposed other competing positions at the time. Such formulations accordingly affected popular ideas about race and miscegenation. These problematic constructions also clearly

---

[6] Galton, in discussing captive animals, argues that many apparently healthy animals prove infertile upon attempting to interbreed them, while "others, often of closely allied species, have their productivity increased" (Galton xxi). Darwin, discussing plant hybrids in *The Origin of Species*, argues that "when pollen of one species is placed on the stigma of a distantly allied species, though the pollen-tubes protrude, they do not penetrate the stigmatic surface" (*Origin* 249). Darwin argues in *The Descent of Man* that the mixing of allied races results first in a heterogeneous mixture that would revert back to one of the parent races, but that "the free intercrossing of a heterogeneous mixture during a long descent would ultimately become homogeneous, though it might not partake in an equal degree of the characters of the two parent-races" (*Descent* 192). Simply put, Darwin argues that the only way in which closely allied races can successfully intermix is when they continually intermix.

affected works of fantasy literature, which is a form of literature in which race is often vitally important.

1.4 Fantasy

While much scholarship has been interested in the colonial and postcolonial literature which focuses on race and racial mixing, there are other areas of literature which have been left virtually untapped. The vast majority of fantasy literature has remained unexamined in terms of the genre's widely ranging representations and constructions of race. Fantasy, like science fiction, has the added element of often including completely fictitious races as well, which complicates readings of race even further.

However, science fiction and fantasy do not function the same way. Though both can be called literatures of the imagination, science fiction functions in the realm of the possible ranging though various degrees of the plausible. Fantasy on the other hand functions in the realm of the impossible. Accordingly, fantasy allows an open-minded reader to approach aspects of his or her own life, culture, and society in a different light by defamiliarizing the ways in which issues are presented and addressed. One such area that has long been a part of – and has haunted – fantasy literature is race. Racial representation and constructions of race in fantasy literature are somewhat problematic issues. Though little work has been done to investigate the issues surrounding race in fantasy literature, that does not mean that authors have not been busily crafting secondary worlds populated by both the mundane creatures of fairy tales and the more wildly imaginative beings born of an author's own imagination. On some level or another, almost all fantasy deals with race in some way, shape, or form. One need only go to a bookstore to see any number of novels and formula fantasy stories which engage with fantasy races. Formula fantasy here in its pejorative sense refers principally to the works promoted by various publishing houses which focus on a number of Dungeons and

Dragons-based lines of novels, such as *Dragonlance* and *Forgotten Realms*. Brian Attebery has a fairly apt – though certainly tongue-in-cheek – outline of the formula fantasy:

> Take a vaguely medieval world. Add a problem, something more or less ecological, and a prophecy for solving it.
>
> Introduce one villain with no particular characteristics except a nearly all-powerful badness. Give him or her a convenient blind spot.
>
> Pour in enough mythological creatures and nonhuman races to fill out a number of secondary episodes: fighting a dragon, riding a winged horse, stopping overnight with the elves (who really should organize themselves into a bread-and-breakfast organization).
>
> To the above add one naïve and ordinary hero who will prove to be the prophesied savior; give him a comic sidekick and a wise old advisor who can rescue him from time to time and explain the plot.
>
> Keep stirring until the whole thing congeals. (*Strategies* 10)

One need only look at any of these novels, as Attebery notes, to see how entrenched race is in much of fantasy. This is especially true for the high fantasy sub-genre of fantasy.[7] Open any formula fantasy novel – *The Icewind Dale* trilogy, or *The Dark Elf Trilogy* by R.A. Salvatore, or the various *Dragons of* novels by Tracy Hickman and Margaret Weis – and the reader is immediately bombarded by any number of different races, all of whom exist in worlds of stereotypes and racism which they either attack or remain complicitly a

---

[7] High fantasy, sometimes called heroic fantasy, or conflated with epic fantasy, adheres to the typical conception of fantasy which exists in the popular consciousness in the post-Tolkien world. That is to say, high fantasy deals with the endings and saving of worlds, with races of elves and orcs and dwarves, of wizards and young protagonists who grow into heroes by the end of the story. This basic formula has however been taken by much of formula fantasy and been mixed with Sword and Sorcery to create a highly marketable but literarily uninspiring niche of fantasy fiction which has in turn caused difficulty for more thoughtful and original works of fantasy to be recognized by the mainstream literati.

part. For example, Terry Brooks' *The Sword of Shannara* is, Farah Mendlesohn argues, "*the* generic quest fantasy" (*Rhetorics* 8). Peter S. Beagle is not as forgiving in his claim that Brooks' novel is "not only a rip-off of *The Lord of the Rings*, but a tenth-rate rip-off at that" (Beagle 12). It is easy to see why Beagle says this, as Brooks' plot follows Tolkien's very closely. But even more apparent than plot similarities are the similarities in racial constructions. The majority of the novel is spent discussing moments of "the Elven people and the Dwarfs fighting against the power of the savage Rock Trolls and the cunning Gnomes" (Brooks 32). The gnomes are thinly veiled orcs, described constantly as having "yellowish bodies" (213) and "wizened yellow face[s]" (215) and the elves are "A remarkable race of creatures…perhaps the greatest people of all" (25). Furthermore, the protagonist, Shea, is a half-elf, and notes that "there were times when being a half-blood bothered him, but Flick had stoutly insisted that it was a distinct advantage because it gave him the instincts and character of two races to build upon" (21). Race in Brooks' novel is constructed simplistically, and does little to deviate from or develop the tropes that Tolkien established in *The Lord of the Rings*. Race in both Gaiman and Miéville, by contrast, deviates sharply from Tolkien's formulation: *American Gods* because it focuses on real-world human races and gods, and *Perdido Street Station* because its races are utterly alien, and far more unique that those present in formula fantasy.

Formulaic and lacking in depth though formula fantasy novels may be, they still highlight fantasy's almost fanatical obsession with race. Certain ideas about certain fantasy races are now taken as a given, with stereotypes and gross generalizations being accepted as the norm, as part of the genre itself. For example, it is not unusual to see a formulaic fantasy where trolls are unintelligent and have poor hygiene, and are demonized as evil creatures with the unique ability to regenerate lost tissue at an accelerated rate, as is the case in Salvatore's *The Crystal Shard* (Salvatore 287). Terry

Pratchett takes a satirical approach to such constructions of race in his Discworld novels. In *The Light Fantastic* he discusses troll physiology:

> "I like trolls," said Twoflower.
>
> "No you don't," said Rincewind firmly. "You can't. They're big and knobbly and they eat people."
>
> "No they don't," said Cohen, sliding awkwardly off his horse and massaging his knees. "well-known mishapprehenshion, that ish. Trolls never ate anybody…No, they alwaysh spit the bitsh out. Can't digesht people, see?" (Pratchett 144-5)

Cohen's speech impediment, coupled with the racial "mishapprehenshion" about troll diets serves to identify and undermine these racial tropes by making reference to these very tropes and mocking them. A few pages later, the trolls actually aid Rincewind and help him to save his friends, while commenting upon the troll inclination to philosophy. Misapprehensions and preconceived notions, Pratchett's novel suggests, serve as the basis for racial constructions in formula fantasies. One of the most straightforward means of determining moral alignment in much formula fantasy is succinctly illustrated in Salvatore's novel in a short exchange. Responding to whether "barbarians" are "friends or foes?" a character named Cassius says "They kill orcs…they are friends!" (Salvatore 298). These tropes permeate much of fantasy, yet exist in their most basic, uninvolved and unexamined iteration in formula fantasy.

Yet in addition to all of the racial tropes that have come to be associated with fantasy, even these formula fantasy stories engage with issues of mixed-race individuals. The most common mixtures that seem to occur in these novels are between similar hominids, namely humans and elves. The main character in a number of Weis and Hickman's novels, for example, is named Tanis Half-Elven, and he is, unsurprisingly, a half-elf. He is also unequivocally a character troubled by his racial identity, being "a child of violence, his mother having been raped by a human warrior during one of the

many wars that had divided the different races of Krynn" (Weis 13). These half-elven are often social misfits, accepted by neither of their cultural heritages, and often, if the novels are to be believed, only finding their place amongst other adventurers and glory seekers.

1.5 Defining Fantasy

The last century has seen a number of different definitions of fantasy emerge. This is because fantasy is a difficult term to define. Brian Attebury clearly demonstrates the difficulty of such an endeavour in his work *The Fantasy Tradition in American Literature*, saying "Perhaps the most satisfying way [of defining fantasy] would be to line up a shelf of books and say: 'There. That is what I mean by fantasy' " (*Fantasy* 1). There is a certain level of truth to his statement, and it is one that is made more and more complicated by the various, occasionally contradictory definitions of what fantasy is. Most definitions focus on the unreal components of a story when defining fantasy, a characteristic which is certainly worthwhile for consideration. One such is C. N. Manlove's definition of fantasy as "a fiction evoking wonder and containing a substantial and irreducible element of supernatural or impossible worlds, beings or objects with which the mortal characters in the story or the readers become on at least partly familiar terms" (Manlove 7). Manlove's definition is a good one, though somewhat vague in terms of whether its effects are focused primarily on the reader or the characters.

The most notable work attempting to apply psychoanalysis to the study of fantasy literature is Rosemary Jackson's *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion*. Jackson builds on Tzvetan Todorov's *The Fantastic*, another foundational text in the study of fantastic literature, yet one which, like Jackson's, is problematic in terms of fantasy literature. Todorov's text defines the fantastic (note: not fantasy, but the fantastic) by saying

> In a world which is indeed our world, the one we know, a world without devils, sylphides, or vampires, there occurs an event which cannot be explained by the laws of this same familiar world. The person who experiences the event must opt

> for one of two possible solutions: either he is a victim of an illusion of the senses, of a product of the imagination – and the laws of the world then remain as they are; or else the event has indeed taken place, it is an integral part of reality – but then this reality is controlled by laws unknown to us. Either the devil is an illusion, an imaginary being; or else he really exists, precisely like other living beings – with this reservation, that we encounter him infrequently. The fantastic occupies the duration of this uncertainty. Once we choose one answer or the other, we leave the fantastic for a neighboring genre, the uncanny or the marvelous. The fantastic is that hesitation experienced by a person who knows only the laws of nature, confronting an apparently supernatural event. (Todorov 25)

Part of the problem is that Todorov is not speaking of fantasy, but of the fantastic. Todorov refers to fantasy as it is commonly known as the "marvelous," yet he spends very little time discussing the marvelous. Rather, his formulation of fantasy allows only a very few novels, most from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and as such is extremely limited. In discussing fantasy Todorov's formulation is essentially useless. Likewise, since Rosemary Jackson develops Todorov's version of fantasy further utilizing psychoanalysis, her work is also of limited use, though she does expand on the otherwise limited texts that Todorov provides, and does to some extent discuss Tolkien's marvelous and "real" fantasy. However, she also occasionally conflates the fantastic, fantasy, and the marvelous, complicating which version she is referring to. She is largely dismissive of fantasy, saying that

> The moral and religious allegories, parables and fables informing the stories of Kingsley and Tolkien move away from the unsettling implications which are found at the centre of the purely 'fantastic.' Their original impulse may be similar, but they move from it, expelling their desire and frequently displacing it

> into religious longing and nostalgia. Thus they defuse potentially disturbing, anti-social drives and retreat from any profound confrontation with existential dis-ease. (Jackson 9)

That is not to say that her book is not without merit though. Dismissive of fantasy though she may be, she does say something which is quite pertinent:

> Like any other text, a literary fantasy is produced within, and determined by, its social context. Though it might struggle against the limits of this context, often being articulated upon that very struggle, it cannot be understood in isolation from it. Recognition of these forces involves placing authors in relation to historical, social, economic, political and sexual determinants, as well as to a literary tradition of fantasy, and makes it impossible to accept a reading of this kind of literature which places it somehow mysteriously 'outside' time altogether. (Jackson 3)

To put it differently, rather than being simply escapist literature divorced from social reality, a work of fantasy is always inextricably a part of the cultural conditions in which it was produced, and reflects on the historical representation of these conditions.

A simpler, more straightforward definition comes from Farah Mendlesohn and Edward James' *A Short History of Fantasy*[8], in which fantasy is "the presence of the impossible and the unexplainable" (*History* 3). They narrow their definition by contrasting fantasy with science fiction, noting that the latter "may deal with the impossible, [but] regards everything as explicable"[9] (*History* 3). Richard Matthews

---

[8] An excellent source for an overall history of the growth and development of the fantasy genre, Mendlesohn and James have also compiled a 28 page chronological list of some of the most influential works of fantasy from the *Epic of Gilgamesh* to more recent offerings in 2009. However, as with all lists, it does not include all relevant works, but only those deemed suitable for the author's needs.

[9] A useful distinction for the purposes of attempting a taxonomy, but by no means an entirely unproblematic one, as this excludes a number of novels which are often considered science fiction, such as

argues that fantasy is "a fiction that elicits wonder through elements of the supernatural or impossible" and that it "consciously breaks free from mundane reality" (Matthews 2). The central concern then for Matthews is a reader's wonderment created through a sense of the unreal. Both of these definitions are fairly simple, and include a vast array of books, including often those texts that Todorov considers the fantastic.

Eric Rabkin, by contrast, sees fantasy in stories where "the perspectives enforced by the ground rules of the narrative world must be diametrically contradicted" (Rabkin 8). However, this is too exclusive a definition, as it only includes those stories where the perspectives of the characters acknowledge that there is a change in the rules of the world at hand. Thus, most of high fantasy, or immersive fantasy, where the fantastic is accepted as natural to the world, is excluded from Rabkin's definition. Thus, *The Lord of the Rings* would not be fantasy according to this too narrow definition, as the characters do not acknowledge that the rules of their world of Middle-Earth have been contradicted, because no such contradiction takes place.

Kathryn Hume in *Fantasy and Mimesis* has a more complex – yet also much more problematic – definition of fantasy as "any departure from consensus reality, an impulse native to literature and manifested in innumerable variations, from monster to metaphor. It includes transgressions of what one generally takes to be physical facts such as human immortality, travel faster than light, telekinesis, and the like" (Hume 21). She then elaborates on her thematic and tropic inclusions, saying "I would include as a departure from consensus reality some technical or social innovations which have not yet taken place, even though they may well happen in the future: cloning of humans and utopian

---

Perdido Street Station, which is included in this paper as fantasy. The breakdown of generic boundaries causes further difficulties when attempting to create a genre taxonomy and canon.

societies are both examples of this sort of fantasy" (Hume 21). The obvious issue with such a definition is that it conflates fantasy with science fiction as if they were one and the same. While fantasy and science fiction can often be difficult to separate, all of the examples that Hume provides above are typical of science fiction rather than fantasy, which places an element of doubt over any further evidence that she provides as it pertains to fantasy in particular.

W. R. Irwin argues in *The Game of the Impossible: A Rhetoric of Fantasy* that "a fantasy is a story based on and controlled by an overt violation of what is generally accepted as possibility; it is the narrative result of transforming the condition contrary to the fact into 'fact' itself" (Irwin 4). He notes that "fantasy results only from the persistence of a main and substantial tendency throughout the whole. No matter what is the central arbitrary nonreality that generates the fantasy-illusion, all elements of the narrative are determined by it. Characters, action, and setting appear more credible than the accepted norm they replace" (Irwin 10). Verisimilitude, the appearance of reality, is central to fantasy, according to Irwin.

Irwin also notes the difficulty in attempting to define any genre, but fantasy in particular, saying that "I have been forced to abandon several ingenious definitions because of results in application either too exclusive and arbitrary or too permissive and undiscriminating" (Irwin 11). This is the problem with trying to attempt any single definition of fantasy, and expecting it to fit all of the works within the genre, because there are simply too many works that range in variety too widely to adequately seek a single definition of fantasy, without actually being far too vague or inclusive. If the definition is broad enough to include all works of fantasy, chances are it is not restrictive enough, and would also allow works of science fiction, magic realism, and even possibly some works of realism. With this problem in mind, there are two fairly successful ways of defining fantasy, as established by Brian Attebery and Farah Mendlesohn. Attebery, in

Strategies of Fantasy, argues that fantasy can be best defined by use of a "fuzzy set," a set of texts which serve to set the parameters of fantasy "not by boundaries but by a center" (Attebery 12). This allows the identification of multiple texts as fantasy without completely constricting the text into fitting or not fitting into a too-strict or too-lenient definition. On the other hand, the fuzzy set requires a fairly comprehensive knowledge of fantasy literature to further identify fantasy literature. Regardless of this potential failing, Attebery uses as his center of fantasy's fuzzy set J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* due to its general recognition as the closest to pure fantasy as literature can get.

Farah Mendlesohn in her book *Rhetorics of Fantasy* argues that the definition of fantasy is "not about defining fantasy" at all (*Rhetorics* xiii). Rather, she sets out to establish that fantasy fits into one (or more) of four categories based on how the fantastic enters into the story. These four categories are "the portal-quest, the immersive, the intrusive, and the liminal" (*Rhetorics* xiv). To elaborate on the somewhat vague terms "in the portal-quest we are invited through into the fantastic; in the intrusion fantasy, the fantastic enters the fictional world; in the liminal fantasy, the magic hovers in the corner of our eye; while in the immersive fantasy we are allowed no escape" (*Rhetorics* xiv). Mendlesohn then describes and defines each of these four categorizations, relying on Attebery's use of the fuzzy set for defining taproot texts for each categorization.

1.6 Race as a Feature of Fantasy

Definitions of fantasy often do not make specific reference to race, yet constructions of race are often an integral component of fantasy literature. Distinct races and mixed races alike possess a special place in fantasy literature. Mixed races, those hybrid individuals who bridge the gap between one distinct fantasy race and another, or between a fantasy race and the human race exist with some regularity in fantasy novels as a whole, be they human-elf hybrids, or human-orc, or even those races who trace ancestry from other, still-existing races, as humans trace themselves back to the T'lan Imass in

Steven Erikson's *The Malazan Book of the Fallen*. As such, the politics of racial representations and construction in fantasy literature are often much more complicated than a mere racialization of moral alignment. That is to say, though there is a certain predilection in fantasy to draw direct correlations between racial identities and good or evil, there is also a resistance intrinsically established within the strictures of fantasy to reject such bold-faced stereotyping. Matters are complicated even further when novels, as is often the case in more modern times, attempt to flesh out these traditionally othered races by providing stories from the perspective of the maligned or "evil" races, or by discussing and elaborating upon a particular races' culture, society, history, or world view. An early example of this is in George MacDonald's *The Princess and the Goblin*, where the goblins are shown to have shared a common ancestry with humans, are capable of producing children from interracial coupling, and are, although maligned by the human characters in the book, clearly not quite evil, as their actions are a result of constantly being forced to relocate due to the humans' imperialistic mining programs which destroy their homes. Another, more recent example is Jacqueline Carey's duology *The Sundering*, which undertook the daunting, though laudable, task of rewriting a story remarkably similar to *The Lord of the Rings*, but from the perspective of the losing "evil" side, taking the form of a tragedy rather than an epic quest to defeat evil. Carey's story is more about survival, and the dogmatic beliefs of those races designated as "good" in their own vindicated war against the morally complicated "evil" characters. Furthermore, these novels also engage in the issue of mixed-race children in the character of Ushahin Dreamspinner, who was born of both human and elven parents. Ushahin was rejected by both parents and cultures, and was raised instead by one of the traditionally "evil" races in the book after he was physically and mentally abused by his own peoples as an abomination.

Fantasy literature reflects the anxieties that still, even now, permeate the complicated issues of racial intermixing in the real world through the representation of race and race relations using the destabilizing effects of fantasy. The traditional representations of racial fantasy tropes as they exist today were established by Tolkien in his landmark Middle-Earth novels, the most influential of which was – and remains still – *The Lord of the Rings*, which is also the centre of Attebery's fuzzy set and one of Mendlesohn's taproot texts, a term she takes from John Clute (Clute 921-2). Accordingly, the rest of this chapter discusses Tolkien's depiction of race in the *Lord of the Rings*, with an emphasis on races involved in miscegenation, like the elves and especially the orcs. Chapter two, "Of Gods and Men: Race and Miscegenation in Neil Gaiman's *American Gods*" moves to the opposite spectrum of the high fantasy tradition of secondary worlds, and looks at Neil Gaiman's real world fantasy *American Gods*, a novel which engages with constructions of race throughout the history of the North American continent as well as with the race(s) of gods who reside there. This chapter looks closely at the protagonist of Gaiman's story, a racially complex individual named Shadow. Finally, chapter three, "A City of Monsters: Weird Hybridity and Miscegenation in China Miéville's *Perdido Street Station*" engages with the complex racial politics of an urban environment populated by a number of different races, some so bizarre and varied in terms of physiology and biology as to reflect directly back on earlier conceptions of race as a biological construction. This sort of imaginative regression actually serves to analyze and deconstruct both historical and current ideas about race and, most interesting in Miéville's novel, miscegenation and hybridity. All three authors are British,[10] so British

---

[10] It should be noted that Tolkien was born in Rhodesia, but spent his life after age six in Britain, and Neil Gaiman currently lives in Minnesota. Likewise, Miéville has spent time in Egypt teaching. There is some element of multiculturalism present in each author's experiences.

historical sources about race and miscegenation have been utilized to provide a racial framework.

1.7 Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*

J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of The Rings* is unreservedly the most popular and influential fantasy text ever written in English.[11] For this reason Brian Attebery chose *The Lord of the Rings* as the center of his fuzzy set defining fantasy, despite his own reservations about the text:

> His may not be the best fantasy: David Lindsay's might be viewed as more inventive, Mervyn Peake's more vivid, Ursula Le Guin's more intense, John Crowley's more intricate. But Tolkien is most typical, not just because of the imaginative scope and commitment with which he invested his tale, but also, and chiefly, because of the immense popularity that resulted. (*Strategies* 14)

It should come as no surprise then that Tolkien's manner of depicting characters and races has likewise been influential. Any number of fantasy texts written after *The Lord of the Rings* was published contain, like Tolkien's texts, elves and dwarves and men, as well as their opponents, trolls and orcs and goblins. Most of Tolkien's races derive from folklore and myth. He did not create them outright, but their lasting presence in fantasy literature is because of how he presented and utilized them. While it would be simple to discard these structures of good versus evil as clichés and stereotypes without substance, their lasting influence on the fantasy genre suggests that there is more to such racial constructs than as simple racist markers of good and evil, beauty and ugliness, nobility and savagery. Given his popularity, as well as his record as an academic of some repute, Tolkien is also one of the most heavily studied fantasy authors. With such scrutiny has

---

[11] For a discussion of Tolkien's influence on fantasy's use of the "three-decker" or "three-volume novel," see Jared Lobdell's *The Rise of Tolkienian Fantasy*, 141-3.

come the suggestion that Tolkien's works are racist, simplistically reinforcing a black-white, good-evil binary, and that races in the novels are thinly veiled representations of real world races.[12] However, Dimitra Fimi has argued that "accusing Tolkien of racism would de-contextualize his writings from their historical period" (Fimi 157), and that considering Tolkien's work in the frame of history is necessary to understanding his depictions of race. Though Tolkien might not have been racist as the term is understood today, and certainly was opposed to the racist and eugenicist actions undertaken by Nazi Germany, there are nevertheless components of his works which could be construed as racist (Fimi 136). The correlations of light and light-skinned races as morally good and dark-skinned races as evil is perhaps the most troubling of Tolkien's literary legacies, though it is a construction shared with many real world cultures. Accordingly, Fimi has argued that Middle-earth is "complex and unpredictable, a fantasy world that reproduces some of the concepts and prejudices of the 'primary' world, while at the same time questioning, challenging and transforming others" (Fimi 159). In order to display how later fantasy texts have followed or deviated from Tolkien's initial establishment of a connection of races with good and evil, these stereotypes need to be identified. However, this cannot be an exhaustive delineation of each of the races that Tolkien discusses, because there are "over thirty-five types of mortals, immortals, and monsters mentioned in Tolkien's works" and any such attempt would be excessive, especially for the purposes of examining race and miscegenation (Noel 57). For this, three races are especially notable: hobbits, elves, and orcs.

---

[12] For more on this subject, see Anderson Rearick's "Why is the Only Good Orc a Dead Orc? The Dark Face of Racism Examined in Tolkien's World" and Helen Young's "Diversity and Difference: Cosmopolitanism and the Lord of the Rings." For more on the dwarves, which this paper largely omits, see Rebecca Brackmann's comprehensive article "'Dwarves are Not Heroes: Antisemitism and the Dwarves in J.R.R. Tolkien's Writing.'"

Hobbits are the first race to appear in Tolkien's first novel, *The Hobbit*, and are identified first in terms of the comfort of their living conditions before they are physically described. They are

> a little people, about half our height, and smaller than the bearded Dwarves. Hobbits have no beards. There is little or no magic about them, except the ordinary everyday sort which helps them to disappear quietly and quickly when large stupid folk like you and me come blundering along, making a noise like elephants which they can hear a mile off. They are inclined to be fat in the stomach; they dress in bright colours (chiefly green and yellow); wear no shoes because their feet grown naturally leathery soles and thick warm brown hair like the stuff on their heads (which is curly); have long clever brown fingers, good-natured faces, and laugh deep fruity laughs (especially after dinner, which they have twice a day when they can get it). (*Hobbit* 4)

The picture presented of hobbits is that of an unassuming people, who are physically separate from both dwarves and humans in their stature, girth, hairiness, as well as their sedentary lifestyle. To call hobbits lazy does not seem right, and epicurean seems too lavish. Hobbits sit somewhere between the two, enjoying the company of others, yet deploring the thought of leaving the safety – and most importantly, the comfort – of home. Yet also of note here is that the hobbits, the race first introduced in the first of Tolkien's published works, are almost immediately introduced as a potentially interracial people. Immediately after the comparison to "bearded Dwarves" and "large stupid folk," the suggestion is raised that one of the Took ancestors "must have taken a fairy wife" (*Hobbit* 5). While this suggestion is immediately quashed as "of course, absurd" (though why this is absurd is never elaborated on, except possibly that fairies in this sense do not exist in Middle-Earth) the mere suggestion raises the question of just what the hobbits are, and where they come from, a question which is never answered in *The Hobbit* or *The*

Lord of the Rings to any satisfactory degree. While Treebeard comments that he has never heard of hobbits, all the while listing the other races he knows (*TT* 78-9), this could be due to their ability to hide, and the relative size difference between them and ents. Furthermore, Tolkien suggests in the prologue to *The Fellowship of the Rings* that hobbits are a "very ancient people," so the idea that hobbits are just a newer race is problematic (*FotR* 17). The suggestion of miscegenation seems apt as well, given the comparison to the other short-statured people, the dwarves. Nevertheless, this suggestion of interracial mixing with fairies is one that is immediately rejected as absurd, and in any case, seems more a joke commenting on the "not entirely hobbit-like" nature of the Took clan (*Hobbit* 5). However, the suggestion of miscegenation is not without precedent in Middle-Earth, most notably in terms of human-elven relations.

The elves of Middle-earth are more complicated than the hobbits. *The Hobbit* mentions a number of different types of elves, including the "Wood-elves" and "High Elves" present in *The Lord of the Rings*, as well as others not present in either text, namely the "Light-elves and the Deep-elves and the Sea-elves" (*Hobbit* 194). However, those discussed in *The Lord of the Rings* are "almost invariably tall, and handsome or comely, and have (the males anyway) strong and athletic bodies. They seem perpetually youthful…the beauty of wisdom and kindness within is manifested by beauty without" (Stanton 101). They are described as having "starlight glimmering on their hair and in their eyes" and, "they bore no lights, yet as they walked a shimmer, like the light of the moon above the rim of the hills before it rises, seemed to fall about their feet" (*FotR* 115). In other words, elves are radiant to the point of glowing, so aligned with light that they seem to emanate it from their very bodies. Glorfindel is described as "tall and straight; his hair was of shining gold, his face fair and young and fearless and full of joy; his eyes were bright and keen, and his voice like music; on his brow sat wisdom, and in his hand was strength" (*FotR* 297). Elrond, by (slight) contrast had a face which "was

ageless, neither old nor young, though in it was written the memory of many things both glad and sorrowful. His hair was dark as the shadows of twilight, and upon it was set a circlet of silver; his eyes were grey as a clear evening, and in them was the flight of stars" (*FotR* 297). Each description of the elves is laden with light imagery, from the blazing sun of Glorfindel to the twilight serenity of Elrond, and both elves, as representative for their respective peoples, are painted as beautiful, wise, just, good people. When Frodo first sees Glorfindel, Elrond, and Arwen he notes that "such loveliness in living thing [he] had never seen before nor imagined in his mind" (*FotR* 298). It is the loveliness and association with light that separates and elevates the elves from the other races of Middle-earth.

The elves' most defining characteristic, however, is their immortality, the one aspect of their being which truly separates them from all other races, however long-lived they may be. Men age and die, but "the Elves die not till the world dies, unless they are slain or waste in grief" (*Silmarillion* 36). Michael N. Stanton has argued that "Elves were Men made wonderful" (Stanton 99). In this sense, the elves are the ultimate goal of humanity. They are something to aspire to emulate, as they exemplify the moral alignment closest to a lawful goodness, eschewing chaos and evil in favour of serenity, wisdom, and an ecological balance with nature. They are also an aspiration that can be attained, in a sense, in that in Tolkien's world, elves and Men are able to procreate and create fertile offspring. In the primary world, this is something which would suggest a shared heredity at some point in the distant past. Here, that is not that case, as the elves were the first race created by Eru, with Men being created later, and called the "Younger Children," or "the Second People" (*Silmarillion* 115) though they are referred to as the "Two Kindreds" collectively (297). Tolkien has eschewed the biological rules of the primary world in favour of those at play in Middle-earth, and so it should come as no surprise that an elf and a Man can procreate and create a half-elven child. Though a rare

occurrence, there are at least two instances of such children available, namely Earendil Halfelven and Elrond. Earendil is described as beautiful, "for there was a light in his face as the light of heaven, and he had the beauty and the wisdom of the Eldar and the strength and hardiness of the Men of old" (*Silmarillion* 289). In his case, being mixed-race is a positive, gaining positives qualities from both races. By contrast, Elrond and his brother Elros "were children of an "Elf-Human union, and being so, had to choose irrevocably to be Human or Elven. Elros chose the latter, and Elrond the former" (Stanton 100). Interesting here is the necessity that those of mixed elven and human heritage cannot exist as liminal figures, as "authentic" mixtures of the two races. Rather, they are forced to choose one race or the other to identify as, echoing in much the same way how people of mixed race origins are socially identified as one race or the other, and are not allowed to exist as a sort of hybrid identity. Strictly demarked racial lines must be maintained in Middle-Earth.

Most men fit into the Anglo-Saxon type, with the exception of the Easterlings and the Southrons.[13] Aragorn is a descendant of the Numenoreans, who themselves are descendants of Elros. So, in this case, an entire race of men trace their origin back to their elven heritage. However, the Numenoreans are a dying people in the time of the fellowship, and their elven-granted lengthened lives lessen with each passing generation's dilution of their elven blood. That the "race of Numenor" is said to have "decayed," (*FotR* 319-20) suggests a sort of appeal to racial purity and maintaining ancestral bloodlines (even though those very bloodlines are themselves not pure but mixed). However, the answer to this decline is not to intermix more with the elves, as Gilraen tells Aragorn, who loves Arwen, that "it is not fit that mortal should wed with the

---

[13] For an excellent analysis of these two groups in Tolkien, see Brian McFadden's "Fear of Difference, Fear of Death: The *Sigelwara*, Tolkien's Swertings, and Racial Difference" in *Tolkien's Modern Middle Ages*, 155-70.

Elf-kin" (*Silmarillion* 419). This anxiety regarding intermixture is only exacerbated by the later statement that "the blood of the Numenoreans became mingled with that of lesser men" (*FotR* 320). In this sense the Numenoreans, a "superior" race by their ancestral association with elves, are, like the elves themselves, failing. As the elves leave, so too do the Numenoreans decline. The elves are beautiful, immortal, and good; they are the apex of Middle-Earth's races, though their time there is coming to an end by the close of *The Return of the King*.

On the other side of the spectrum lie the orcs. Tom Shippey argues that "orcs" is rooted in an Old English term meaning "demon-corpses" and another that means "orc-giant" – meaning that even in their very name, they are constructed as demonic creatures (*Road* 50). Introduced in *The Hobbit* as goblins, the orcs[14] are described as "cruel, wicked, and bad-hearted" before their inventions are described. Of these, "they make no beautiful things, but they make many clever ones" (*Hobbit* 73-4). They keep prisoners and slaves, and invented "the ingenious devices for killing large numbers of people at once, for wheels and engines and explosions always delighted them, and also not working with their own hands more than they could help" (*Hobbit* 74). Also of note here is that the "Great Goblin," leader of the goblins in the Misty Mountains, refers to the company as "thieves," "murderers," and "friends of Elves" (*Hobbit* 75). While the first two are clearly negative, the negative connotation of the last is somewhat ambiguous, until on the next page the revelation of Thorin's sword explains it, for "they knew the sword at once. It had killed hundreds of goblins in its time, when the fair elves of Gondolin hunted them in the hills or did battle before their walls" (*Hobbit* 76). The orcs are understandably upset to see a weapon of mass genocide, forged specifically to harm the orcish people,

---

[14] Thomas Gasque has suggested that Tolkien changed the goblins' name because "he saw in the word 'goblin' overtones of harmless children on Halloween and chose a less familiar and hence less diminished name" (Gasque 153).

and their reaction to seeing such a hateful weapon is reasonable. The orcs have suffered in the past, and are rightfully fearful and angered by the presence of those who possess implements of racial slaughter.

Like the elves, there are numerous types of orcs, though their distinctions are less commented upon than those of the elves. There is also a great deal of physical dimorphism amongst both the different types of orcs, and within each type itself. Aragorn comments on this when searching bodies for evidence of the captured Merry and Pippin, saying "Here lie many that are not folk of Mordor. Some are from the North, from the Misty Mountains, if I know anything of Orcs and their kinds. And here are others strange to me." This last is said when he comes upon "four-goblin soldiers of greater stature, swart slant-eyed, with thick legs and large hands" (*TT* 14). Furthermore, Ugluk, as an example of the Uruk-hai, is a taller, less crooked version of the smaller goblins due to his human blood. Grishnakh, by contrast, is "a short crook-legged creature, very broad and with long arms that hung almost to the ground" (*TT* 56). Interestingly, Grishnakh, the orc described as more physically ape-like, snarls an insult to Ugluk, saying "Ape!" (*TT* 62). This suggests that amongst the orcs, certain physical characteristics are undesirable, and that forms of discrimination exist within the orc race towards other orcs. A hierarchy of inferiority and superiority exists here, and Grishnakh's insult addresses an attempt to place himself above Ugluk in that hierarchy.

Negative descriptions of the orcs are almost always presented from the perspective of one of the "good" races, who admittedly hate the orcs and all evil things. Thus, perspective has a lot to do with orc descriptions. One particular episode demonstrates the construction of the orc race in *The Lord of the Rings*. When Merry and Pippin are captured in *The Two Towers*, Pippin overhears the orcs talking, and to his "surprise he found that much of the talk was intelligible; many of the Orcs were using

ordinary language"[15] (*TT* 54). Instances like this are revealing in terms of bias; they display first a distinct lack of knowledge of those branded as evil, and surprise when the orcs exceed what little is known about them. Furthermore, the ethnocentric bias of orc-speech as being abnormal, and hobbit-speech as "ordinary language" once more acknowledges that a bias in favour of the familiar is evident in the text, as does the comment that an orc speaking "in the Common Speech…made it almost as hideous as his own language" (*TT* 53). However, Pippin can indeed understand the orcs, demonstrating that in terms of language, the races are – or can be – akin to one another; they are not completely and unequivocally separate. Language can transcend racial boundaries and undermine, to some extent, prejudices. This scene is also highly important in revealing the orcs' characters from their own words, rather than from just the generalized statements made by the "good" races about the orcs. The discussions between the Northern orcs, led by Grishnakh, and the Uruk-hai, led by Ugluk, display a level of disorganized infighting, but also a certain level of nobility. Ugluk notes that rather than splitting their forces in the "Horse-country," they "must stick together. These lands are dangerous: full of foul rebels and brigands" (*TT* 55). There are two aspects of this statement which are pertinent: first, the orcs recognize that their common good is best maintained in a community, rather than in individual isolation; second, the orcs view the "good" humans as "foul rebels and brigands." This reversal, if noticed, calls into question just how evil the orcs are, and how much of the arguments made against them are just a matter of rhetoric and perspective. Likewise, Ugluk as a leader follows his own orders obediently, and acts as a sort of peacekeeper between the two factions of orcs in the warparty. When violence erupts, he shouts "Put up your weapons…And let's have no

---

[15] Contrary to Pippin's view, Brian Rosebury argues that the orcs' language is "reduced here to stylized snarls, and bowdlerized suggestions of excremental vituperation," a view which comments only on the denigrated nature of the orcs, without considering their more human elements (Rosebury 83).

more nonsense" (*TT* 56). While he does use violence to stop violence, he does so under circumstances that warrant it: a potential mutiny in enemy territory while carrying valuable commodities (the hobbits) which could be damaged by any extended infighting. Furthermore, he does not revel in the deaths of the slain orcs, but exercises restraint, using just enough force to maintain order in the ranks. The narrator makes a similar concession to Ugluk, noting that when Ugluk healed Merry and Pippin (an act which itself raises questions of good and evil) he "was not engaged in sport. He needed speed and had to humour unwilling followers. He was healing Merry in orc-fashion; and his treatment worked swiftly" (*TT* 58). He is not a violent, sadistic brute. Ugluk is a leader, and while his soldiers cheer at the discomfort that the medicine causes the hobbits, Ugluk does not, but also knows that such an outlet makes his soldiers more amenable, an unpleasant necessity given the tenuous position he holds as leader.

Another instance of perspective comes once more from Ugluk, when he tells the Northern orcs "Let the fighting Uruk-hai do the work, as usual. If you're afraid of the Whiteskins, run!" (*TT* 61). Here is the first instance of whiteness being denigrated, with the Riders being referred to by the colour of their skin, in much the same way that the orcs are constantly referred to as black, black-skinned, or some variation of the two. Many references to the orcs include the epithet black: Gandalf calls the orcs in Moria "black Uruks" (*FotR* 421), and Frodo comments on the "swarming black figures" of "hundreds of orcs" (*FotR* 428). Ugluk himself is described as "a large black orc" (*TT* 57). Ugluk's statement also raises questions of internal racial division amongst the orcs, with the phrase "as usual" suggesting that the Uruk-hai are always forced to do the work that the other orcs either cannot or will not do, while the word "run" suggests an inherent superiority of the Uruk-hai over the other orcs, being braver than their perhaps more cowardly Northern counterparts. It is worth noting that Ugluk uses the phrase "as usual" more than once to refer to the relative bravery and cowardice of the Uruk-hai and

cruelty were corrupted and enslaved; and thus did Melkor breed the hideous race of the Orcs in envy and mockery of the Elves, of whom they were afterwards the bitterest foes" (*Simlarillion* 47). So from their very inception, the orcs are described as hideous, an affront to the beauty of the elves, and created that way for the very purpose of mocking their beautiful brethren. Also, as a mockery of the elves, who procreate slowly, the orcs "multiplied like flies," (*Silmarillion* 347) ensuring that, much like men, the orcs would outlast the long-lived yet unfertile elves, whose population continually decreases as they cross the sea. Such a construction is highly problematic, as it illustrates a version of the negative amalgamation thesis, which argues that miscegenation results in a "mongrel group that makes up a 'raceless chaos', merely a corruption of the originals, degenerate and degraded, threatening to subvert the vigour and virtue of the pure races with which they come into contact" (Young 18). Obviously, the corruption of elves into orcs is not miscegenation, but its effect – the creation of another race from a "pure" race, one which is corrupted, degenerated from the elevated position of the original, certainly resonates with ideas about miscegenation. From this perspective, the orcs, "made in mockery of the Elves" (*Silmarillion* 47) are explicitly established in the world of Middle-earth as irredeemable and inferior to the "pure" races. The creation of such a "mongrel group" is abominable in Middle Earth, as the other races clearly demonstrate in their willingness to kill orcs without any sign of guilt or regret.

More attention is paid to the orcs in *The Lord of the Rings* than in *The Hobbit*, and arguably more attention has been paid to presenting the orcs as purely evil. Also, given the fact that *The Lord of the Rings* also provides a number of physical descriptions of the orcs, something noticeably lacking in *The Hobbit*, the questions of racism seem more apt. Whether Tolkien was or was not a racist is still uncertain, given the revealing statements he made in his correspondences, most notably that the orcs were "squat, broad, flat-nosed, sallow-skinned, with wide mouths and slant eyes: in fact degraded and repulsive

versions of the (to Europeans) least lovely Mongol-types" (*Letters* 274). However, he was also quick to defend Jewish people. When Nazi publishers queried his background, he replied that if they were "enquiring whether I am of *Jewish* origin, I can only reply that I regret that I appear to have *no* ancestors of that gifted people" (*Letters* 37). Furthermore, he was vehemently opposed to what he called "the wholly pernicious and unscientific race-doctrine" of Nazi racial purity (*Letter* 37). What is worth noting, however, is that the races that populate Middle-Earth are themselves racist, or at least prone to immediately stereotype an entire people as all fitting into generalized racial ideas. The elves will kill any orc they see on sight, and, with the exception of Gimli and Legolas, the dwarves and elves have a long standing enmity. However, this exception itself is also one that took time to develop, as initially both Gimli and Legolas share this racial enmity. There is a suggestion underlying their relationship that civil interaction between the races can lead to racial understanding and mutual respect. Tolkien might have been racist, but the interaction between the various races indicates a perceptiveness about racism, and the suggestion that it can be overcome with time and familiarity with the other.

However, the orcs are never granted the time necessary for familiarity to form in the text. The orcs are often described in *The Lord of the Rings* as physically monstrous. In Moria, Gandalf describes the orcs there as "large and evil: black Uruks of Mordor" (*FotR* 421). One of the orc-chieftains in Moria has a "broad flat face" that was "swart, his eyes were like coals, and his tongue was red" (*FotR* 422-3). Their demonization in these instances is self-evident. Yet, even here they are not completely demonized, though the counterpoint is much more subtle. Gimli comments that "Orcs will often pursue foes for many leagues into the plain, if they have a fallen captain to avenge," a comment from one of the "good" races which in essence acknowledges that the orcs have a sense of loyalty to their leaders, to those exemplary orcs in positions of superiority over the others, a

characteristic which seems to contrast with a reading of the orcs as purely and simply evil (*FotR* 437). If they were just evil, then avenging a fallen leader would not remain such a priority. It is far more likely that the orcs would instead seek to keep themselves from harm. This undermines the construction of the orcs as a race that is created as a mockery of elves, as they clearly share at least some more virtuous qualities with the "good" races.

Something which also often goes uncommented upon is that the orcs, in their own conversations, have a severe distaste for the elves, not for being beautiful where the orcs are ugly (from the perspective of the "good" races, that is) but because the orcs see the elves as cowards. Gorbag muses that "The big fellow with the sharp sword doesn't seem to have thought him worth much anyhow – just left him lying: regular elvish trick" (*TT* 439). Tom Shippey notes that there "is no mistaking the disapproval in Gorbag's voice. He is convinced that it is wrong, and contemptible, to abandon your companions" (Shippey 132). That an evil individual sees as contemptible the perceived action of an elf, those who are considered superior to all other races, raises the question of perception once more, and of perspective. To the orcs, the elves are the murderers, not the other way around. While it would be simple to read the orcs as irredeemably, one-dimensionally evil, the fact remains that the orcs are more complicated than is generally realized. The narrative's focalization, limited as it is to the "good" races, highlights the issues attending attempts to represent racial others without understanding them and their lived experiences as a maligned racial group.

Mixing men and orcs is another problematic racial issue in Tolkien's novel. Treebeard raises the possibility when discussing Saruman, saying

> He has taken up with foul folk, with the Orcs. Brm, hoom! Worse than that: he has been doing something to them; something dangerous. For these Isengarders are more like wicked men. It is a mark of evil things that came in the Great Darkness that they cannot abide the Sun; but Saruman's Orcs can endure it, even

> if they hate it. I wonder what he has done? Are they men he has ruined, or has he blended the races of Orcs and Men? That would be a black evil! (*TT* 90-1)

Here miscegenation between men and orcs is considered, though whether accomplished through a breeding program – what Matthew Dickerson and Jonathan Evans call the "biogenetic engineering of a new super race of Orcs" (Dickerson xii) – or through magic, is never specified. Regardless of how it is accomplished, the fact remains that the products of such a mixing are in fact not a sort of degeneration at all. They have gained strength from both their human and orc ancestry. As Treebeard notes, these Isengard orcs are active in sunlight, while goblins typically are not, a benefit gained from their human ancestry. Their orc side, on the other hand, has provided them with an unnatural stamina (*TT* 26), one which parallels that of the elves. Legolas, when pursuing the orcs and kidnapped hobbits with Aragorn and Gimli requires far less rest than his two companions; each morning he is the "first afoot if indeed he had ever slept" (*TT* 31). Yet despite this, Treebeard views the mixing of the races as "a black evil." Clearly he sees it as such because he views such a mixture as an abomination, as a perversion and corruption of man or elf, which again evokes the negative amalgamation thesis. Since that thesis is concerned with the degeneration of distinct races into "a raceless chaos" (Young 18), the further mixture of races is a clear problem. Treebeard's racist statement is partially attributable to his anger at Saruman's turn away from nature to technology and science. Nevertheless, the distaste over racial mixing of humans and orcs is directly contrasted to the mixing of human and elves, which produced at least two highly respected dynasties – that of Elrond Half-Elven, and that of Numenor. Arwen, Elrond's daughter, for example, is described as "fair as the twilight in Elven-home" (*Silmarilion* 419). However, when Merry discusses the "half-orcs" as Aragorn calls them, they are "horrible: man-high, but with goblin-faces, sallow, leering, squint-eyed" (*TT* 212). The

mixing of the orcs and men is viewed as abhorrent, and horrible, with the height and light tolerance of men added to the otherwise unpleasant features of the orcs.

None of this is to ignore that in the novels, orcs do commit atrocities: they eat man-flesh, they kill, and they torture. However, to contextualize their actions, they are in a time of war, and, more important by far, the orcs are slaves: "And deep in their dark hearts the Orcs loathed the Master whom they served in fear, the maker only of their misery" (*Silmarillion* 47). Morgoth did not make creatures who inherently reveled in serving him; instead, they hate their master, and, the possibility exists that they hate what they are made to do as well. Yet, rather than blindly following Morgoth, and later Sauron, reveling in evil, devoid of personality as the "good" races colour them, the orcs are also supremely pragmatic: they eat man-flesh, yes, but in Mordor, little grows, and meat itself is scarce without grazing land. Yet even more important, as Gorbag says, the orcs must live the only life available to them: "Always the poor Uruks to put slips right, and small thanks. But don't forget: the enemies don't love us any more than they love Him, and if they get topsides on Him, we're done too" (*TT* 436). A surprising insight, at the end of the second volume, reveals that the orcs serve Sauron because they are afforded no other option. They are reviled by all of the "good" races, and so, they must align themselves with the only power available to them, dark or otherwise, in order to survive.

Clearly, there are elements of the orcs which indicate that they are not pure evil, and that there are extenuating circumstances which explain some of their more negative behaviour. Tolkien rarely allows the orcs to speak for themselves in the novel, but when they do, they often reveal that the orcs are far more complicated than is apparent from the perspectives of the other characters. Rather, the construction of race in Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* illustrates that the orcs are far more fleshed out and "human" than what the limited perspectives of the "good" races present. The orcs are not simplistically evil, and some of their leaders, those most exemplary orcs, inspire loyalty in their soldiers, and

display morally admirable traits. Tolkien's construction of the orcs, though certainly problematic, is also far more rich than is generally realized. This is partly attributable to the focalization of the novels; the story is told from the perspectives of the "good" races, who possess their own biases, and who ultimately succeed in their quest. The orcs, demonized as evil brutes through the majority of the text, are then killed or pushed into dark places underground, while the "good" races are allowed to live their lives as they wish. Any narrative attempts to present the orcs as complex individuals rather than as a faceless horde are subsumed beneath the biases of the focalizing characters, who refuse to see the orcs as anything other than evil monsters.

Chapter 2

2 Of Gods and Men: Race and Miscegenation in Neil Gaiman's *American Gods*

> People believe…It's what people do. They believe. And then they will not take responsibility for their beliefs; they conjure things, and do not trust the conjurations. People populate the darkness; with ghosts, with gods, with electrons, with tales. People imagine, and people believe: and it is that belief, that rock-solid belief, that makes things happen. (*AG* 536)

2.1 Introduction

Neil Gaiman's novel *American Gods*[17] is a fantasy novel that accomplishes something arguably more difficult than the world building in heroic fantasy novels like *The Lord of the Rings*: it manages to create fantasy in the real, recognizable everyday world of America. In Neil Gaiman's *American Gods*, Gaiman's treatment of race is a function of his presentation of the gods. Gaiman's gods reflect the racial profiles of those who have arrived in America over a number of centuries, and therefore a treatment of race in this novel will focus on the gods and their offspring, most notably Shadow. One of Gaiman's most ambitious works, *American Gods* engages with the concept that America is populated by a number of different people of different racial backgrounds, linguistic families, and religious and cultural histories, and that all of these peoples brought with them their respective gods, spirits, and monsters. These beings are born out

---

[17] One of the more interesting fantasy authors writing in the last decade, Gaiman is an Englishman who moved to Minneapolis, Minnesota in the United States. *American Gods* won a number of speculative fiction awards, including the Bram Stoker Award, the Hugo Award, the Nebula Award, and the Locus Award.

of the belief of individuals who travelled or were transported to the New World.[18] Accordingly, America is populated by the members of a number of different pantheons, from Norse to West African, German to Cherokee, to name only a few. Indentured Irish servants sentenced to transportation might bring with them their superstitions regarding the fair folk, while West African slaves might bring the various loa and the ghede with them. In each case, the gods arrive in the Western Hemisphere in the minds of their worshippers. These gods are in a conflict with the new gods, the gods of technology and celebrity, of television and drugs. The belief in these beings is what carries the old gods over to the New World, and what ultimately unites them, both new gods and old gods alike. This chapter engages with Gaiman's representation of the gods and their half-divine offspring to analyze his construction of race.

2.2 Shadow

American Gods begins by introducing Shadow, the protagonist of the novel. There are a number of instances in *American Gods* which hint at Shadow's background, most notably in his interactions with other characters, both gods and mortals. The first intimation of his racial heritage is established, fittingly, in one of the most racially problematic institutions in North America: the prison system. Just before his release, Shadow has a conversation with Sam Fetisher, another inmate, who was "one of the blackest men that Shadow had ever seen" (*AG* 10). The conversation begins:

> "Where you from?" [Fetisher] asked.
>
> "Eagle Point. Indiana."
>
> "You're a lying fuck, said Sam Fetisher. "I mean originally. Where are your folks from?"

---

[18] The idea of gods requiring belief to survive is not Gaiman's invention; Harlan Ellison's *Deathbird Chronicles* and Terry Pratchet's *Small Gods* both make use of this trope.

> "Chicago," said Shadow. His mother had lived in Chicago as a girl, and she had died there, half a lifetime ago." (*AG* 10-1)

Because Shadow is not immediately identifiable as a single race, Sam Fetisher questions, in a rather roundabout manner, where Shadow's family is from as a means of discovering his background. Fetisher immediately disregards the first answer of Indiana in the hopes that the second answer would tell him something more revealing – that is to say, something which would more clearly identify Shadow's racial heritage. Shadow denies him this. When compounded with the various other queries about Shadow's background, this instance, like the others, gains greater importance and relevance in revealing a societal need to identify, and consequentially categorize, people according to racial signifiers.

Only a page later Shadow's racial identity is questioned once more, this time by a guard named Wilson, who, with none of Sam Fetisher's indirect delicacy, asks

> "And what are you? A spic? A gypsy?"
>
> "Not that I know of, sir. Maybe."
>
> "Maybe you got nigger blood in you. You got nigger blood in you, Shadow?"
>
> "Could be, sir." Shadow stood tall and looked straight ahead, and concentrated on not allowing himself to be riled by this man. (*AG* 12)

That Shadow answers in such an indefinite, uncommitted way is justified by trying to avoid being drawn into a fight with Wilson, who makes an obvious effort to provoke Shadow with his line of questioning. Coupled with his "sandy blonde hair with a sandy blonde face and a sandy blonde smile," Wilson's line of questioning reveals him as a thinly-veiled racist, and at worst a white supremacist (*AG* 12). Yasmin Alibhai-Brown notes that "however mixed-race couples and mixed-race children choose to live their lives, they cannot shake the historical baggage or isolate themselves from the assumptions and bigotries of the outside world" (Alibhai-Brown 14). Conceptions of race

and preconceived notions of racialized individuals plague peoples of mixed race; encountering the issue is often an unavoidable fact of life. That Gaiman chooses to address this issue within the first chapter shows a clear identification of race's centrality to American society.

Putting Wilson's racism aside for a moment, much is revealed about Shadow's ancestry in this seemingly unimportant conversation. He might be African-American, or Hispanic, or Roma – here, possibly meaning Middle Eastern, Mediterranean, or Eastern European, depending on the cultural interpretation of the phrase. Shadow commits to none of these potential identities, but their presences persist throughout the remainder of the novel, hovering like shadows over their namesake's shoulders. Accordingly, they also serve to solidify Shadow's identity as an unidentifiable void, which absorbs any and all queries of racial identities without providing anything in return. There is no certainty with Shadow; all that is known is that he is most certainly not identifiable as purely white, which serves the plot as a sort of red-herring to misdirect from the identity of his father. Despite this, many people who read the novel believe that Shadow is a white character, possibly because Wednesday, a Nordic god, is Shadow's father, but also potentially because Gaiman is subtle in his physical description of Shadow and his mother. His mother is mentioned only as a woman ill with what is thought to be "just another sickle-cell crisis" (*AG* 473), presumably referring to sickle-cell anemia, a problem which sociologist F. James Davis notes is often purported to occur in higher frequency in people of African descent (Davis 20-1). [19] All that is said of her appearance is that, ill with lymphoma, "there was a lemonish-gray tinge to her skin" (*AG* 473). Given the ambiguity

---

[19] Davis is also quick to point out that while sickle-cell anemia is "frequent among Americans blacks and the West African peoples from which slaves came," it is also "frequent among non-negroid populations in Greece, Southern India, and some other areas of the world," arguing that the "sickle-cell trait was found in regions that had high rates of malaria, and it appears to have been an adaptive response to that disease" (Davis 20-1).

with which Gaiman describes Shadow's mother, her racial ancestry and phenotypic appearance are nearly indiscernible; her race is obscured and occluded by her illness. Likewise, Shadow only describes her through the negative; what she is not. When he walks past a few women in Iceland Shadows notes that they are "very beautiful. Slender and pale. The kind of women that Wednesday had liked. Shadow wondered what could have attracted Wednesday to Shadow's mother, who had been beautiful, but had been neither of those things" (*AG* 585). Shadow's mother is the opposite of what is typified as a particularly white beauty standard. The suggestion here is that, rather than being slender and pale, Shadow's mother was curvy and dark-skinned. The lack of clear and direct declarative descriptions of Shadow's mother also affects Shadow, who is much more complicated in terms of race, but who is also not wholly and identifiably white.

2.3 Whiteness in Fantasy

A disconcerting trend in fantasy literature and speculative fiction in general is the idea that certain characters of colour, if likable, or important to a story, are perceived by readers as white, regardless of the details an author provides stating otherwise. Anna Holmes, writing for *The New Yorker*, aptly notes that "the heroes in our imaginations are white until proven otherwise, a variation on the principle of innocent until proven guilty that, for so many minorities, is routinely upended" (Holmes). This same sort of inattention to detail, or self-inflicted ignorance, also afflicts reader perceptions of Shadow in *American Gods*. On the neilgaimanboard.com messageboard, there are a number of questions raised regarding Shadow's race. One thread, entitled "Question about Shadow" asks "is Shadow black? Because I'm pretty sure his mother was white, and…well, Wednesday is" (neilgaimanboard.com). While a few respondents reply that Shadow is likely half-black, or that his mother was black, or partially black, the majority of the responses actually make the claim that Shadow is white, but "just tanned." Clearly, the majority of these respondents did not closely read the novel.

In an interview with *The Inkwell* messageboards on *The Well* website, Gaiman addressed this issue, noting how perception of Shadow's race is problematic among a number of different readers. While many have viewed Shadow as white, Gaiman conceived his protagonist as "one of those people whose race doesn't read easy – in the celebrity world, Vin Diesel's[20] an example of the same kind of look. But it seemed appropriate in a book about America that the hero was of mixed race" (Soukup 2). Appropriate indeed, given the country's troubling history of miscegenatory and anti-miscegenatory legislation, and the fact that the 2000 United States census found that "seven million people…identified themselves[21] as belonging simultaneously to two racialized groupings" (Tizard 24). Miscegenation and multiraciality become an important part of discussing Shadow's place in the novel. A description of his physical appearance (excluding the frequent references to his large stature) only appears near the end of the novel, where a young Shadow is described as having "cream-and-coffee skin" (*AG* 473), a term only used one other time in the text to refer to the biracial black and white daughters of the African slave Wututu, who were "cream-and-coffee colored" (*AG* 332). Anthropologist Kimberly Simmons notes that this term is often utilized in discussing mixed-race people, especially in South America, where the term "Café con Leche" or "Coffee with Milk" refers to lighter-skinned individuals who identify as black, but who are made to feel by others that they are not "Black enough" (Simmons 88-9). The suggestion here is that Shadow is a mixed-race person, with some African American ancestry; likely he is at least biracial, black and white, although this is not conclusive given Shadow's own reluctance to self-identify with any of the various races and

---

[20] Vin Diesel is of Italian and African-American ancestry.

[21] This also implies that, since the respondents identified themselves as mixed race, the number could be far higher, given that some people might instead identify with one race over another, or to the exclusion of another. This is especially true regarding age: "those born after 1965 tended to claim biracial identities, while those born before did not" (Tizard 49).

ethnicities suggested to him throughout the novel. Shadow's very reluctance to identify as any single race acts as an implicit criticism of the general urge to categorize based on phenotype: his own racial identity, so elusive throughout the entirety of the novel, serves to undermine the relevance or use of such physical signifiers of race.

Samantha Black Crow further complicates the matter. Samantha is another mixed-race character, but unlike Shadow she knows and acknowledges her racial background and identifies as Cherokee. When Shadow asks her if she is "full-blooded" Cherokee, she responds by saying "Nope. Only four pints. My mom was white. My dad was a real reservation Indian. He came out this way, eventually married my mom, had me, then when they split he went back to Oklahoma…He doesn't like me. Says I'm half-breed" (*AG* 172). Later Sam elaborates on her maternal descent, noting that her mother is "European Jewish" who "liked the idea of being married to a Cherokee. Fry bread and chopped liver" (*AG* 390). Clearly, though she identifies as Cherokee and acknowledges her white ancestry, she has little attachment to either of her parents, and also little attachment to the social relevance of her ethnic identification.

She, like Sam Fetisher and Wilson the guard, questions Shadow's racial background, asking "You got Indian blood in you?" to which Shadow responds "Not that I know of" (*AG* 166). Her reason for asking is much the same as Fetisher and Wilson: Shadow is visibly recognizable as Other, yet not so recognizable that his Otherness can be identified and categorized with any accuracy. He "looked like" he was Native American to Samantha, and she recognizes a part of him that she can identify with, to the point where she again queries him, asking "Are you sure you aren't part Indian?" (*AG* 169). Shadow's response, like all of his responses regarding his racial background, is as frustratingly vague as it is suggestive: "Not that I know of. It's possible. I don't know much about my father. I guess my ma would have told me if he was Native American though. Maybe" (*AG* 169). Shadow's answer here is far more frank than his answer with

Wilson was. He is no longer in prison, no longer at the whims of prison guards. His tongue does not need to be as guarded since Shadow feels as comfortable with Samantha as she feels with him. Shadow's conversations with Wisakedjak, or Whiskey Jack, also suggest some potential Native American ancestry, as Whiskey Jack advises that Shadow find his "tribe" (*AG* 354), and refers to him as "cousin" when he comes to revive Shadow near the end of the novel (*AG* 510). This familiarity is far different from how Whiskey Jack consistently refers to Wednesday, who he calls, along with Apple Johnny, "white men" (*AG* 350). In any case, Shadow's response to Sam is interesting, as he immediately suspects that if either of his parents were Native American, it would be his father, which is obviously not the case, as Wednesday is a Norse god. Shadow at least thinks he knows that his mother was not Native American. He does undermine this supposition with that uncertain "maybe" at the close of his statement. Shadow betrays his own burgeoning doubts about his ancestry, and it seems reasonable to assume that if his mother never specified his father's ancestry, then she might not have specified her own either. His reticence in definitively identifying himself to Wilson might be more than just avoidance; Shadow does not seem to know who he is, or what race his parents belonged to, and he never asks or wonders about it unless prompted with a question he must respond to. More than that, to Shadow, who never dwells on the issue, it doesn't seem to matter what race, or races, he belongs to. To Shadow, race as a signifier is empty of anything meaningful, and accordingly he eschews all such identifying and categorizing labels. However, this can also be attributed to the trauma he experiences at the beginning of the novel – emerging from prison after three years only to discover his wife is dead and had been unfaithful to him during his imprisonment. Gaiman, in an interview, stated that "in order for the story to work, it was just going to have to have this very shocked affect. Probably some of that was going to be the idea of Shadow as a character. He's spent three years in prison, he has come out of prison to tragedy, and tragedy such that he has shut down.

Everything that happens emotionally in his life is just — dial it down to zero" (Faircloth). A significant portion of Shadow's character, his lack of responsiveness, and his overall passive, drifting ambivalence throughout the novel can be attributed to the details established in the first chapter. Regardless, Shadow's reluctance to confirm or deny a racial background once more undermines the importance of biological definitions of race, and stresses that race only exists as a cultural construction because people choose to enforce such categorizations.

Shadow's name is never revealed in *American Gods* as anything other than Shadow, and so he becomes a shadow, a mere empty space in the world. Gaiman has commented on this, saying that Shadow

> has no personality unless he's with somebody. At which point he will adopt a personality, or occasionally mirror them. His speech patterns are ever so slightly flexible. People would get very confused. Someone who's in the middle of the book said about Shadow, "But he's just this big, dumb guy." "No, he's not," I say. "He was *with* big, dumb guys at the time, so he was talking like a big, dumb guy." (White 1)

Shadow literally becomes a shadow, a mimic, for those he encounters. In fact, the only other name he ever goes by in the novel (excluding a brief stint as Andy Haddock) is the assumed name that Mr. Wednesday provides for him, Mike Ainsel (*AG* 243), which sounds very much like the title of Part Two, "My Ainsel" (*AG* 231). "My Ainsel," or "my own self" provides no further clues. This name suggests that Shadow is no one but himself, while Shadow suggests that he can only be himself by expressing himself through others. He is a contradiction. He maintains no patronymic or matronymic throughout the novel, so there is no last name to provide any sort of identity as to lineage. While his father is eventually revealed to be Wednesday, this only reveals half of his lineage as part Scandinavian-American. The other half of his ethnic and racial

background is never directly revealed. Though he stands at the center of the novel, Shadow remains elusive and indeterminate, a "big, solid, man-shaped hole in the world" (*AG* 370).

2.4 The Gods

While the first chapter of *American Gods* is concerned largely with a societal desire to define and categorize mixed-race individuals like Shadow, the novel itself begins with an epigram concerning immigration and culture from Richard Dorson's *American Folklore and the Historian* which discusses "what happens to demonic beings when immigrants move from their homelands." Dorson's "informants" reply that "They're scared to pass the ocean, it's too far" and that "Christ and the apostles never came to America" (Dorson 207). This indicates something significant about the gods residing in America: that they do not actually leave their home country, travel across the ocean, and arrive in America. Certainly, the gods are also not already in existence in America before their worshippers arrive. When Vikings land in America in 813 A.D., they state that "Here on the edge of the world we will be forgotten by our gods," suggesting the alienness and remoteness of the land to the Vikings (*AG* 67). However, when they begin to tell stories and sing songs of their gods in this new land, when they sacrifice a Native American to Odin, the All-Father's presence becomes apparent to them in the form of two ravens (*AG* 68-9). The Native Americans kill the intruding Vikings, and for a hundred years there are no Vikings in North America. Yet when they arrive once more, their gods were already there: "They were waiting" (*AG* 69). In other words, their gods are either summoned across an ocean by worship and belief and then trapped there, or else they are created anew in the New World by the belief and stories told of them. Wednesday's response to Shadow in a short exchange suggests the latter:

"So you've been to lots of other countries, then?"

> Wednesday said nothing. Shadow glanced at him. "No," said Wednesday, with a sigh. "No. I never have." (*AG* 116)

Simply stated, in either case, gods in Gaiman's construction are not born in the same way that humans are. Humans are creatures of biology, whereas gods are creatures of belief made physical. Mama-ji complicates this problem by noting that multiple different incarnations of a god or goddess can exist at the same time in different places: "We've lived in peace in this country for a long time. Some of us better than others, I agree. I do well. Back in India, there is an incarnation of me who does better, but so be it" (*AG* 138). The "race" of gods differ from the "race" of humans. Mr. Wednesday comments on the difference between gods and humans, saying

> "My kind of people see your kind of people…" he hesitated. "It's like bees and honey. Each bee makes only a tiny, tiny drop of honey. It takes thousands of them, millions perhaps, all working together to make the pot of honey you have on your breakfast table. Now imagine that you could eat nothing but honey. That's what it's like for my kind of people…we feed on belief, on prayers, on love." (*AG* 287)

Gods are born from, and sustained by, belief. Regardless of their differences from other gods, each god is a being of belief given physical form. In this sense, the main identifying categorization of the gods is not their physical similarities or differences, nor their ancestral place of origin, but rather their creation as a result of religion. They are, in other words, a different race – almost, but not quite a different species – from humans. Wednesday's analogy, comparing humans to bees, suggests a superiority of gods over humans, which, given the very term "gods," seems fitting. Yet for all that such a comparison places the race of gods above the races of mankind, there is a flaw to such a claim. A beekeeper seeking honey requires bees. Bees seeking to manufacture and maintain a hive do not require beekeepers; the ability of bees to manufacture honey is

natural to them, intrinsic to their very nature. This bee analogy, far from suggesting the inferiority and mindlessness of humans, in reality draws attention to the inferiority of gods, who require humanity to survive. Shadow aptly describes the difference near the end of the novel when he says to the collected camps of old and new gods "I think I would rather be a man than a god. We don't need anyone to believe in us. We just keep going anyhow. It's what we do" (*AG* 539). Humanity can exist in isolation; gods cannot exist without humans.

Likewise, each gods' racial background ties them back to the people who gave them birth. Wednesday was born from the beliefs of Vikings, so he looks like they did. Mr. Nancy was born of African slaves in the West Indies and the United States, and so appears black. The gods follow a sort of phenotypical primer, a racial profile which determines their racial identities and physical appearances in their respective human forms. Accordingly, the gods in Neil Gaiman's *American Gods* are as diverse as the cultures and religions which gave birth to them, and the most immediately discernible difference between them is their respective racial appearances. To begin, each of the gods possesses a number of different physical incarnations in keeping with their various religious and historical representations. For example, an animal god might have his or her animal form – a spider, an eagle, a bull – but would also possess an anthropomorphic form which is representative of his or her own believers' racial identity. Mama-ji (Kali) is at once a "dark-skinned, matronly woman in a red sari" (*AG* 133), on whose forehead is "a small dark blue jewel" (*AG* 138), and "a naked woman with skin as black as a new leather jacket, and lips and tongue the bright red of arterial blood…Around her neck were skulls, and her many hands held knives, and swords, and severed heads" (*AG* 138). Her initial appearance is attributable to the fact that Hinduism is originally an Indian belief system, and the Hindu gods were created by Indian people. Thus, Kali's anthropomorphic human form reflects that of her "parent" people. In this way, race is perpetuated through

belief; it is literally a cultural construction as far as gods are concerned. While Kali is black-skinned in her deity form, as an icon of Hinduism reflecting the image attributed to her by her believers, her human form reflects that of the Indian people worshipping her. Her physical appearance directly correlates to the racial appearance of those who birthed her. Metaphorical birth in *American Gods* follows the same sort of rules of genetics that literal birth does.

2.5 Mr. Wednesday

Mr. Wednesday is introduced as "a bearded man in a pale suit" (*AG* 20) with "reddish gray" hair, and "his beard, little more than stubble, was grayish red" (*AG* 21-2). He has a "craggy, square face with pale gray eyes," and his suit was "the color of melted vanilla ice cream" (*AG* 22). His god form changes little of his actual appearance; most of his changes are in attire; all that is mentioned of his Odin form is that his "right eye glittered and flashed, his left eye was dull. He wore a cloak with a deep, monklike cowl, and his face stared out from the shadows" (*AG* 132). Besides his false eye, Wednesday's most clearly identified trait is his association with paleness. This is fitting, since Odin, as a member of the Norse pantheon, would look like a Scandinavian, a group of peoples who are traditionally thought of as pale-skinned, pale-eyed, and pale-haired.[22] In other words, Wednesday is very easily identifiable as white, yet his race plays little immediate role outside of his part in Shadow's ambiguous identity, and in his own identity as a Norse god. Wednesday's main racial purpose in the story does not occur until near the end of the novel, when Shadow travels to Iceland and meets Odin. The Odin he meets, though, is not his father, but rather another Odin – the Odin of the people who stayed in

---

[22] Admittedly, phenotype is not always definitive of race. For example, while Ukrainians appear phenotypically similar to Scandinavians, throughout the first half of the twentieth century they were excluded from being categorized as "white." Similarly, Serbian, Croatian, and Polish people, along with the Irish, were not considered "white" (Davis 161).

Iceland in a land whose culture and history are immersed in the stories and legends of which he is ineffably a part. As this Icelandic Odin notes, "He [Mr. Wednesday] was me, yes. But I am not him"[23] (*AG* 587). That Wednesday can remember all of the things that he has done in Europe is not a result of his having actually done them; it is a result of the immigrants remembering these things, attributing them to him, shaping him anew in a land without Odin. In that sense, none of the gods are immigrants at all. They are instead the children of immigrants, born in the new land of a human parent and a culture's thoughts. The Odin of Iceland looks different from Wednesday, but the main difference is in their demeanour. Odin is more genial than Wednesday, who is in most instances gruff and grim. Odin and Wednesday differ because the cultural conceptions which brought the two into being differ. The image of Wednesday, born of Viking warriors killed by Native American warriors when they landed on the new continent, gave birth to a grimmer god.

Mr. Wednesday represents the negative manifestation of a god whose worshippers have abandoned him. He serves to display the depths that a god can reach in desperation at the prospect of his own inevitable demise. Wednesday is, in a sense, a race traitor. There is essentially no difference between the new gods and the old gods. The two groups just reenact an old cycle of newer gods replacing older ones. The new gods rise to ascendancy not because they are objectively better than the others, but because they are for some reason or another more memorable, more relevant, or because the culture that believed in them endured, rather than being wiped out or dominated or colonized by another. Mad Sweeney suggest as much during his own wake where he tries to "explain the history of the gods of Ireland, wave after wave of them as they came in from Gaul

---

[23] An idea that Gaiman admits in an interview that he took from a short story by Gene Wolfe in which Wolfe "has St. Nicholas explaining his relationship to Santa Claus. 'He is me, but I am not him.' It seemed to encapsulate the relationship between my Odins very well" ("Author Interview: Neil Gaiman on *American Gods*").

and from Spain and from every damn place, each wave of them transforming the last gods into trolls and fairies and every damn creature until Holy Mother Church herself arrived and every god in Ireland was transformed into a fairy or a saint or a dead King" (*AG* 227). However, if Wednesday is a race traitor for standing opposed to his newer brethren, the new gods, so too are all of the other old gods who war against the new near the end of the novel. Rather, he is a race traitor because he betrays all of the gods, both new and old, hoping for their deaths so that he might live, that their deaths might renew his own dwindling lifespan. Something like that is almost expected of the more mischievous and chaotic trickster figure Low Key Lyesmith, but for Wednesday to be not only a part of such a plan, but the lynchpin of it, is a betrayal of his very identification as the All-Father, as the paternal leader of the deities.[24] He betrays both his own race of people, and his own identity as well.

2.6 Mr. Nancy

Nancy is the second most frequent god to appear in the novel, after Wednesday himself. Whereas Wednesday is a Norse god of death, the battlefield, and wisdom, Nancy is an African trickster god. Furthermore, unlike Wednesday, Mr. Nancy appears in another novel, which allows him to be fleshed out from a different perspective – that of his son, Fat Charlie. This novel, *Anansi Boys*, is much more lighthearted than *American Gods*, as it does not concern itself with a clash of gods vying for survival, but rather the familial struggles of a son discovering he had a brother, and that his recently deceased father was a god. Though Anansi appears only in recollections and stories in *Anansi*

---

[24] Admittedly, Odin also engages in trickery, like when he steals Suttungr's Mead from the giants. Yet even here, Odin's trickery is used to benefit the gods: he brings the mead to both gods and men so that they would be gifted with the ability to compose poetry and stories (Sturluson 93-6). Here his trickery benefits the gods, instead of damning them. The *Prose Edda* refers to Odin as the "Allfather" because "he is the father of all the gods," the "God of Gods" (Sturluson 33). His trickery is a part of him, certainly, but it is a tool to improve his parental ability to provide for and defend the other gods.

Boys, the focus of the novel distinguishes a primary difference between Nancy and Wednesday: that of belief and worship. While all of the gods exist only so long as people believe in them, each of the gods also draws power in a manner unique to their own mythological construction. Wednesday gains power from battles and deaths that are dedicated to him, which becomes the central plot point of *American Gods*. In fact, as indicated by the final battle between the gods, Wednesday derives most of his power from battles which are dedicated specifically to him, requiring worshippers to have a specific knowledge of Odin and his required rituals in order to empower the Allfather. Anansi on the other hand gains power through storytelling, especially the telling of stories which include him as a character. Other version of African American Anansi stories present the trickster not as a spider, but rather as a woman named Aunt Nancy, which in turn creates more instances of his presence in stories (Hyde 338-9). Regardless of his form, what this means is that Anansi is remembered, sung about, and his stories are told and he draws strength and longevity from this tradition of worship. More importantly, all stories with "wit and trickery and wisdom," not just those including Anansi, as Nancy says, are Anansi stories (*Anansi* 252). In *Anansi Boys*, Nancy tells Maeve that

> Maybe Anansi's just some guy from a story, made up back in Africa in the dawn days of the world by some boy with blackfly on his leg, pushing his crutch in the dirt, making up some goofy story about a man made of tar. Does that change anything? People respond to the stories. They tell them themselves. The stories spread, and as people tell them, the stories change the tellers. (*Anansi* 253)

Anansi, owner of stories, is indirectly worshipped by the mere act of song, of stories being told, especially stories of wit and trickery. Whether they involve Anansi or not matters less than the fact that all clever stories belong to Anansi, so the telling of stories is the worship of Anansi. Wednesday, as *American Gods* shows, requires that battles and

deaths be specifically dedicated to him. Therefore, there could never be a dearth of power for Anansi, unlike for Wednesday. Despite both being gods, their forms of worship separate them, and make Wednesday far more desperate than Anansi to accrue power. Baba Singh notes that "all gods are subject to doubt, and adoration must be earned. Once earned this admiration must be sustained as well" (Singh 163). Anansi provides the storyteller's art, and enjoyment at a tale well told, something which people can approve of. Anansi, by owning stories, provides a service, provides entertainment. Wednesday's worship, by contrast, provides little immediate satisfaction for the worshipper. While violence, executions, and death certainly exist in modern American society, the specificity demanded by Odin's rituals significantly reduces the effect that such actions have upon Wednesday himself. There is a separation of god and ritual, action and effect in *American Gods*. Only Shadow's vigil on the tree after Wednesday's death, an explicit mirroring of Odin's dedication on the tree, empowers Wednesday to any significant degree – though it arguably empowers Shadow even more. In modern American society, where battles are not traditionally dedicated to Odin, Wednesday's worship is outdated.

The primary physical difference between Wednesday and Nancy is that Wednesday is white, and Nancy is black. This makes sense, given that the gods reflect, to carry the parenting image further, the people who conceive them. The gods are a direct reflection of those who believe in them. Nancy first appears in the novel as "an elderly black man wearing a bright checked suit and canary-yellow gloves" who grins "as if he were astonishingly pleased with himself," and has a "faint twang in his voice, a hint of a patois that might have been West Indian" (*AG* 124-5); a representation which reappears in the pages of *Anansi Boys*. Shadow sees a number of Nancy's god forms, including his god spider form ("a jeweled spider as high as a horse, its eyes an emerald nebula"), his man spider form ("an extraordinarily tall man with teak-colored skin and three sets of arms, wearing a flowing ostrich-feather headdress, his face painted with red stripes"), his

child form ("a young black boy, dressed in rags, his left foot all swollen and crawling with blackflies"), and Anansi's spider form ("a tiny brown spider, hiding under a withered ocher leaf") (*AG* 131). However interesting these images may be, Nancy always reverts back to his elderly gentleman form, though, tellingly, his shadow "shook and shivered and changed in the flames of the fire, and what it changed into was not always human" (*AG* 133). These other incarnations are intrinsic to Nancy – he is all of these things at once: injured child, celestial spider, gentleman, man-spider, and real spider. While not all of Nancy's forms are human, he is, like Wednesday, clearly still a part of the human species, as he is, like Wednesday, able to procreate with human women and create fertile offspring. Fat Charlie Nancy in *Anansi Boys* is, like Shadow, half-god. Unlike Shadow, at the end of *Anansi Boys*, Charlie has a son. Andrew Wearring argues that this, like Shadow's rebirth on the tree, is a "definite kind of rebirth" of the divine, where "the divine is neither eradicated nor eclipsed; rather, as it is no longer opposed to the profane, it is given a new lease on life" (Wearring 246). Such an outlook suggests that the half-human offspring of gods are founts of new possibilities, of hope for the future. It suggests that while successful interbreeding between gods and humans is rare, offspring are possible and fertile, which suggests that gods and humans are not truly so different – even if the god also happens to be, interestingly enough, an invertebrate species: a spider. *American Gods* consequentially takes an extreme approach to race, suggesting that gods, and race, as conceptions of the mind, do not adhere to any known laws of reality or biology. They work independently of reason, to the point where a spider god can take human form and create life with a human woman.

2.7 The Egyptian Gods

The Egyptian pantheon includes the gods most focused on the issue of race. Shadow first encounters Mr. Jacquel in his canine form, that of a "black dog with [a] long snout" (*AG* 180). When Shadow later meets Mr. Jacquel in his human form, he is "a very

tall, dark-skinned man, holding a large metal scalpel" (*AG* 198), but his eyes remain "dark brown eyes as quizzical and cold as a desert dog's" (*AG* 201). When Shadow later hangs on the tree he meets Jacquel (and Horus, Bast, and Ibis) again, in his Anubis god form, that of a "god-headed creature the size of a grain silo" with "huge, dark hands" (*AG* 481). Mr. Ibis, by contrast, is described frequently as "a crane-like man with gold-rimmed spectacles," (*AG* 180) whose bird-like appearance often occludes the fact that he too, like Jacquel, also possesses a darker complexion: "Mr. Ibis wore a hat. It was a sober brown hat that matched his sober brown blazer and his sober brown face" (*AG* 193). References to Ibis' skin colour are far less frequent than those of his height, as he is "well over six feet in height, with a cranelike stoop" (*AG* 194). Fittingly, his Thoth god form is that of "a half-human creature with the head of a river bird" (*AG* 479). Mr. Ibis is in a sense deracialized in his descriptions, as they only rarely draw attention to his phenotypic racial signifiers, focusing instead on those characteristic most important to identifying him as Thoth: his crane-like features.

While Jacquel and Ibis' physical descriptions are necessary in order to analyze their racial construction, even more important are the discussions that Ibis has with Shadow regarding race and perception, which highlight the conception of race as an intrinsically cultural construction. Ibis tells Shadow that he and Jacquel

> go back a very long way. Of course, it wasn't until after the War Between the States that we found our niche here. That was when we became the funeral parlor for the colored folks hereabouts. Before that, no one thought of us as colored – foreign maybe, exotic and dark, but not colored. Once the war was done, pretty soon, no one could remember a time when we weren't perceived as black. My business partner, he's always had darker skin than mine. It was an easy transition. Mostly you are what they think you are. It's just strange when they talk about

> African-Americans. Makes me think of the people from Punt, Ophir, Nubia. We never thought of ourselves as Africans – we were the people of the Nile. (*AG* 195)

Perception is key when discussing race and its status as a cultural construction in *American Gods*. Here, Ibis provides a passage of central importance to understanding not just Gaiman's construction of gods, but also America's protean construction of race. The changing definitions of race and racial categorizations indicate that perception – itself already wholly subjective – of race is the only socially viable indicator of race, meaning that race itself is only created and perpetuated by the whims of society. Both Ibis and Jacquel are dark-skinned peoples of ostensibly African descent living in America, yet neither identify as either African or African-American. The Egyptians are clearly identified and self-identify as 'other,' as not white, being "foreign," "exotic," and "dark" (*AG* 195). They also perceive themselves as separate from the rest of the "colored" people of African descent. Yet in American society they are identified as black, as African-American, regardless of their own claims to the contrary. This correlates with African-American attempts beginning in the 1830s to claim Egypt as their own. Historian Bruce Dain has argued that for African-Americans "the Egyptians' mixed but nevertheless predominantly black appearance and character corresponded to their own, a claim challenging and repudiating the idea of blackness as a natural category" (Dain 108). Thus, both black and white sides of American society viewed darker-skinned peoples as black. Historian Jack D. Forbes notes that both Britain and America used the terms "black" and "Negro" in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to refer not only to people of African descent, but also mixed-race individuals, Native Americans, and Asians (Forbes 84-5), highlighting how racial identification is ambiguous, arbitrary, and, in such cases, how race as a signifier is ultimately useless, saying nothing about the people so defined. Nevertheless, perceptions of race have real, material consequences, so that the cultural construction of race makes it "real" without actually being real. For all

that science acknowledges the uselessness of race as a term and a category, cultural constructions of race continue to inform and perpetuate ideas about race which are perhaps even more powerful and more influential than scientific fact.

The ambiguity and flexibility of race as a cultural construction with little scientific validity emerges in another of Ibis and Shadow's discussions. Race, as an abstract concept possessing no realistically demarcated limits – especially in instances of miscegenation – determines nothing of substance. Discussing whether he and the rest of the Cairo, Illinois pantheon are Egyptians, Ibis responds

> "Well, yes and no. 'Egyptian' makes me think of the folks who live there now. The ones who built their cities over our graveyards and palaces. Do they look like me?"
>
> Shadow shrugged. He'd seen black guys who looked like Mr.Ibis. He'd seen white guys with tans who looked like Mr. Ibis. (*AG* 195)

The Egyptian (for lack of a term that Ibis might approve of) pantheon, ostensibly African in origin, do not identify as Africans. Clearly, they also do not identify as white in its American conception either. In this sense, in their own perspective, they exist in an intermediate, liminal position between the two. Yet, because of Antebellum America's laws restricting and codifying miscegenation and those born as a product of interracial mixing, anyone who appeared to possess even the smallest percentage of African ancestry and could not prove otherwise were considered black, a decision most well-known in the "one-drop" manifestation of blood quantum. Accordingly, American society identified and codified those deemed 'other' and so Ibis and his associates are proclaimed coloured. Again, the cultural construction of race refers less to any factual basis in genetics, ability, or intellect, but to perception, which is purely subjective, and in the case of the Egyptian pantheon's racial identity, intrinsically faulty.

2.8 Shadow as Demi-God

In *American Gods* the mixed-race character is a figure under constant scrutiny, and the novel is essentially about a minority culture (the old gods) struggling to maintain their own dying culture of worship. Rather than avoid the issue of race through racial intermixing, Shadow serves as a constant reminder of racial difference, of the psychological necessity felt by many to identify and label a person so as to categorize them and compartmentalize their identity within the strictures of previously conceived stereotypes. That Shadow never admits to any single identity, and that his background is constantly in question highlights how modern society still has not come to terms with the reality that concepts of race are not static and objective, but rather are fluid and prone to change over time, and that mixtures of race often defy simple categorizations. Simultaneously, in Shadow Gaiman has created a character that no one is excluded from identifying with on racial grounds, because at some level his racial ambiguity includes any and all racially-mixed possibilities.

However, in another way Shadow is a minority among minorities, one of the few people fathered by a god and a mortal. When Shadow questions Wednesday about the latter contracting sexually transmitted diseases or impregnating the women he sleeps with, Wednesday replies

> "I don't worry about diseases. I don't catch them. Unfortunately – for the most part – people like me fire blanks, so there's not a great deal of interbreeding. It used to happen in the old days. Nowadays, it's possible, but so unlikely as to be almost unimaginable. So no worries there." (*AG* 242)

Shadow, Wednesday's son, is demi-god in his own right, that rare synthesis of human and god. Wednesday here suggests to Shadow that the likelihood of his fathering a child is slim at best. Gaiman's formulation of miscegenation does not fit with any of the preexisting anthropological and biological race theories: mixture of human and god does

not create a "raceless chaos," nor does it result in a child which is sickly. It is closest to the amalgamation theory, yet does not precisely align with it, as the likelihood of successful procreation is extremely limited and rare (Young 18). A new "race" is created in the union of human and god, one which is not limited by godhood's diet of belief, nor in a human's mundane limitations to the "real" seen world. Shadow, like Fat Charlie Nancy, has access to the world backstage, the gods' world. Mr. Nancy tells Shadow that he has "a son, stupid as a man who bought his stupid at a two-for-one sale, and you remind me of him" (*AG* 126). While the reference here might be to either Fat Charlie Nancy, or to his brother, Spider, from Gaiman's novel *Anansi Boys*, the reference may just as easily be to another child he fathered, and the very suggestion of such a child, unspecified though the date of conception might be, questions the rareness of these unions bearing fruit. Complicating matters even further, Shadow's discussion with a ghostly Wednesday near the end of the novel suggests that his original statement concerning conception was true:

> "We couldn't have done it without you," said Wednesday, from the corner of Shadow's eye. "I'd been with so many women…"
>
> "You needed a son," said Shadow.
>
> Wednesday's ghost-voice echoed. "I needed *you* my boy. Yes. My own boy. I knew that you had been conceived, but your mother left the country. It took us so long to find you. And when we did find you, you were in prison. We needed to find out what made you tick. What buttons we could press to make you move. Who you were." (*AG* 533-4)

Shadow, already a minority racially, is also a rarity in that he is a demi-god, and is made rarer by fitting into the specifications which Wednesday required in order to successfully complete his con. Shadow needed to be more than just a son for Wednesday. He needed to be a tool, something that Wednesday could use, manipulate, and ultimately dispose of

in a manner which suited him best. While there are hints of genuine affection between Shadow and Wednesday, Wednesday wanted Shadow so that he could be manipulated into advancing Wednesday's plans, convincing other gods to join, and so that he could hold Wednesday's vigil. What Wednesday needed was a son, but more importantly a son whom he could control, and whom he could expect to follow orders – to honour promises – even after Wednesday's own death. This passage characterizes Shadow as an object to be manipulated, something which his own father would utilize as a means of labour. In a sense, Wednesday, the white father, has colonized his non-white son, for the sole purpose of exploiting him for the father's gain, fully cognizant of the deadly price the son will have to pay. Here, Shadow, the mixed race son, is unable to escape the history of race relations in America, where a white man could sleep with a slave, father a slave, and use that mixed race child as a tool to benefit the father.

There is the potential, hinted at in the text, that Shadow is the Norse God Balder. Balder was Odin's son, as is Shadow. In Norse mythology, Balder was killed by a sprig of mistletoe, which was the only object which had not sworn not to harm Balder (Sturluson 71). Low Key makes this connection quite clear in his conversation with Laura before she kills him, saying that "When this is all done with, I guess I'll sharpen a stick of mistletoe and go down to the ash tree, and ram it through [Shadow's] eye" (*AG* 525-6). This would make Shadow not just a demi-god, but a full ranking member of the Norse pantheon himself. However, for all that Shadow is here compared to Balder, he is not Balder, for his humanity keeps him from being a god in Gaiman's conception, as gods are not born of women (which Shadow was), and gods die without worship, and Shadow does not. For all that Shadow is part god he is in actuality still part human, and is not comfortable being identified as a god at all, preferring humanity over godhood. Even if he is part god, he is not a god in the same sense that the other gods are. He requires no belief to sustain his existence. He simply exists as a separate individual. Furthermore,

born of a mortal mother, he was not birthed into the North American continent in the same way that the other Old Gods were through the beliefs, prayers, and traditions of those who believed in them. Shadow as a demi-god identifies the problematic nature of seeking to cast labels upon mixed-race individuals, in hope of categorizing them. As sociologists Barbara Tizard and Ann Phoenix say, generally "people of mixed parentage view themselves as neither black nor white" (Tizard 50). They are, like Shadow, something new.

2.9 Conclusion

American Gods is deeply concerned with race, reflecting the reality that the United States is indeed a racially complex place, where not only diverse races and ethnicities exist, but where intermixing between these groups is a social reality. Race, while a cultural construction, still exists in the hearts and minds of the vast majority of people, and as such, the urge to racially categorize people will continue to be perpetuated. Gaiman's construction of the gods undermines the belief in biological conceptions of race, emphasizing instead that race is a social construction, albeit a social construction with real consequences. Certainly, Shadow's ancestry influences his life, but most of the problems he experiences are external, from other people troubled by their inability to racially categorize him. Recently, HBO has bought the rights to adapt *American Gods*, with Gaiman signed on as a screenwriter. Given that race is vital to the complexity of a number of the more interesting characters in the novel, it remains to be seen if the casting of characters like Shadow and Samantha Black Crow will remain faithful to the novel. Previously Gaiman has made it clear that he will not bend on the issue of race in *Anansi Boys*, refusing to work with production studios which sought to whitewash the actors in a proposed film adaptation, and has said that "It bothers me in fiction going in that white is the default" (Soukup 1). It remains to be seen if this will remain true for *American Gods* as well.

Chapter 3

3 A City of Monsters: Weird Hybridity and Miscegenation in China Miéville's *Perdido Street Station*

> It was when she ate that Lin was most alien, and their shared meals were a challenge and an affirmation. As he watched her, Isaac felt a familiar trill of emotion: disgust immediately stamped out, pride at the stamping out, guilty desire.
>
> Light glinted in Lin's compound eyes. Her headlegs quivered. She picked up half a tomato and gripped it with her mandibles. She lowered her hands while her inner mouthparts picked at the food her outer jaw held steady.
>
> Isaac watched the huge iridescent scarab that was his lover's head devour her breakfast…He smiled at her. She undulated her headlegs at him and signed, *My monster*.
>
> *I am a pervert*, thought Isaac, *and so is she*. (*PSS* 10)

3.1 Introduction

China Miéville is a British author, and one of the current stars of speculative fiction. A contemporary of Neil Gaiman, Miéville has also won a number of genre fiction's prestigious awards, among them the Arthur C. Clarke Award, the Locus Award, and the British Fantasy Award. Mark Bould and Sherryl Vint have argued that "[p]erhaps more than any other contemporary fantasy writer, Miéville exploits the power of imagining otherwise for the purpose of social change," a claim which indicates Miéville's importance as an author of speculative fiction (Bould 107). His Bas-Lag novels are perhaps his best-known works, and of these, the first, *Perdido Street Station*, is the most jarringly alien of the three, where he has consciously created a "kind of anti-Tolkien secondary world" (Marshall). In *Perdido Street Station*, China Miéville creates a world

where the very city seems to breathe with a life of its own, where structures become projections of those who people them, and edifices of the dead loom over others, all while the waste and filth of teeming life swirls and rots along the streets. It is "a huge plague pit, a morbific city" where "[p]arasites, infection and rumour were uncontainable" (*PSS* 9). The vast, sprawling city of New Crobuzon is a densely populated metropolis, inhabited by a number of races, all of whom come into varying levels of contact with one another. Combining elements of fantasy, science fiction, horror, the grotesque, and the weird, races in Miéville's novel are not the traditional high fantasy fare. Here is a world where cactus men (and women) live in greenhouse ghettoes, patterning their photosynthetic flesh with their own spiny barbs. A world where the tallest parts of the city are inhabited by diasporic groups of garuda, flying amongst the thermals, though devoid of any knowledge of their people's rich culture; a world where the red-skinned bodies of khepri women are crowned with heads like giant scarabs.

Miéville's novels are often referred to as "New Weird," an outgrowth of weird fiction from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Weird fiction is "usually, roughly, conceived of as a rather breathless and generically slippery macabre fiction, a dark fantastic ('horror' plus 'fantasy') often featuring nontraditional alien monsters (thus plus 'science fiction')" ("Weird Fiction" 510). H.P. Lovecraft is perhaps the best-known of weird writers, and for him the "horror of modernity is above all horror of 'inferior' races, miscegenation, and cultural decline, expressed in his protean, fecund, seeping monsters" ("Weird Fiction" 513). A major part of Miéville's fiction is teratology, the study of monsters, and it is this sort of interest which author and editor Jeff VanderMeer has argued characterizes the New Weird, saying that "Transgressive horror, then, repurposed to focus on the monsters and grotesquery but not the 'scare,' forms the beating heart of the New Weird" (VanderMeer 47). To put it differently, the New Weird

involves monsters that are divorced from a sense of fear, which allows them to address other important questions, such as those concerning race.

Drawing from various world mythologies, Miéville creates a number of races, most of whom are anthropomorphic. This chapter focuses largely on the issue of what the crime lord Mr. Motley terms "the hybrid zone" (*PSS* 37) and "the bastard-zone" (*PSS* 100) as it pertains to race. That is to say, this chapter is concerned with not just figures of hybridity, such as Lin the khepri, but also just what function this hybridization has in the novel, and in the larger context of representations and constructions of race and hybridity. *Perdido Street Station* has a decided focus on the blurring of physical boundaries, evident in the patchwork nature of New Crobuzon itself, but which is most successfully realized in Miéville's construction and representation of the city's various races. A number of these races are identified not just by their distinct physical characteristics, but by the grotesque[25] juxtaposition of their alien physiologies with those that are identifiably human, as with the scarab-headed khepri. Furthermore, the intimate relationships which occur throughout the novel between humans and "xenians" – the umbrella term applied to all of New Crobuzon's non-human races – complicates readings of racialized concepts of beauty. Anti-miscegenatory practices reinforce the notion of societal taboos related to – and perhaps in fear of – racial intermixing. Yagharek the garuda's mutilated wings present an interesting study in the slippage of species categorizations. The existence of brothels catering to specific xenian tastes also appear in the novel. To complicate this matter even further, the Remade raise questions of just how much physical appearance can be used to determine racial identity, and to query what sort of purpose race serves if

---

[25] "Grotesque" in this context refers not to the more modern usage concerning matter deemed distasteful or sickening, but rather to the artistic term "consisting of representations of portions of human and animal forms, fantastically combined and interwoven with foliage and flowers" (OED). In other words, the grotesque here is found at the intersection between the human, animal, and vegetable.

physical appearance can be altered to such a degree as to make races unrecognizable. The slake-moths are radical Others in the text, demonized because of their nature, diet, and incomprehensible hybridity, a concept which reaches its apotheosis in the mysterious conglomerate form that is Mr. Motley. While races in *Perdido Street Station* and the other two Bas-Lag novels are more accurately identified as species, the manner in which these species are treated reflects real world social anxieties regarding race and miscegenation, all while criticizing those same anxieties.

3.2 Race in New Crobuzon

Miéville is careful to construct races which are not demonized as evil by the narrative, with varying degrees of success. Nevertheless, most of New Crobuzon's xenians are normal individuals, sympathetic victims of cultural and societal prejudice. Miéville is aware of the fantasy trope of the evil Other, and attempts to take responsibility for how he represents his own creations:

> If you have a world in which Orcs are evil, and you depict them as evil, I don't know how that maps onto the question of "political correctness." However, the point is not that you're misrepresenting Orcs (if you invented this world, that's how Orcs are), but that you have replicated the logic of racism, which is that large groups of people are "defined" by an abstract supposedly essential element called "race," whatever else you were doing or intended…Does that mean being politically correct? If that is deemed to mean being conscious of and careful about the political ramifications of our writing, then surely that's the only decent way to proceed. (Goodreads)

Accordingly, a number of the races in Bas-Lag have opportunities to represent themselves in the narrative, and the complexity of their societies, especially in terms of

the khepri, garuda, and in *The Scar*, the grindylow, are often the subject of discussion.[26] The grindylow, who finally materialize at the end of *The Scar* are presented not as a race of tribal, shamanistic primitives, but as a highly advanced society unconcerned with the theft of trinkets. Rather, they only want to retrieve stolen information which puts the security of their country and species at risk. One grindylow speaks to Bellis Coldwine, deriding her ignorance of the grindylow people: "For this you think we came? This stone thing? Our magus fin? Like primitives you think we abase before gods carved in rock? For hocus-pocus in trinkets?...You think we are children, we siblings, to cross the world for a puissant toy?"[27] (*Scar* 518). Preconceived notions of superiority and inferiority informed by ignorance are identified and opposed by the grindylow speaker, the very object of such objectification and scrutiny.

Lin, like the grindylow speaker in *The Scar*, is a representative in *Perdido Street Station* of the khepri experience, and to some extent the experience of the other xenian peoples in human-governed New Crobuzon. As a khepri, Lin is a very clear instance of an uncanny sort of racial construction, one that is at once familiar in its human form, yet absolutely alien with regards to its insectile crania. She is introduced in the text as "an anatomical atlas" (*PSS* 9) with red skin and compound eyes, whose head is a "huge iridescent scarab" (*PSS* 9). The rest of her body is essentially human, joining at the throat "where the pale insectile underbelly segued smoothly into her human neck" (*PSS* 9). Lin is at once an object of intense sexualized desire, and yet simultaneously a source of disgust. What is most unnerving and intriguing about the khepri – or at least the female

---

[26] Miéville's grindylow are not to be confused with J.K. Rowlings' grindylow, who are by contrast far less intellectually advanced than Miéville's, and accordingly, far less interesting.

[27] The grindylow's speech, like Lin's hand-signing in *Perdido Street Station*, is italicized in the text as a means of differentiating the modes of communication as different from the normal vocalization patterns of humans and other xenians. The grindylow speaker holds its mouth "open and still, its throat flexing with the precision of human lips" to speak (*PSS* 517).

khepri, since the males are mere "mindless scarabs like the females' headbodies" (*PSS* 121) – is what Motley identifies as "the hybrid zone," that area where a khepri's soft human skin merges into the chitinous exoskeleton of the scarab-head. In other words, the hybrid zone here is the location of intersection between her human and alien insect traits. Lin is notable not only for the grotesque juxtaposition of insect and human in her physiology, but for how these otherwise disparate parts meld together into a whole being. This notion of wholeness is important. The khepri do not view themselves as humans with the heads of scarabs, as hybrids, but as natural completed wholes. Instead, Lin notes that "*humans have khepri bodies, legs, hands; and the heads of shaved gibbons*" (*PSS* 10). This reversal serves the function of de-centralizing the human as the norm from which each xenian species deviates, and instead creating a sort of running parallel, where each species sees every other species as different from its own, rather than its own differing from the other. Here, the normative human is abnormal. Perspective, as with all things pertaining to race – and species – is of vital importance.

Miscegenation, that is to say, interracial sexual coupling, is at the center of the sole romantic relationship in *Perdido Street Station*. Isaac Dan der Grimnebulin, a hairy, dark-skinned "dirigible, huge and taut and strong," (*PSS* 9) is unavoidably human, and he and Lin the khepri have a secret affair made all the more scandalous by the nature of their respective human and xenian backgrounds. This overarching separation of human and xenian categories endorses the scientific mindset of the novel's society which is centered first and foremost on the accomplishments of the human, a fact reinforced by the unavoidable fact that "Xenian students had only been admitted as degree candidates in New Crobuzon for twenty years" (*PSS* 12). The refusal to allow xenians entrance to university education collectivizes the various races as Others, segregating them all from positions of power and the potential for advancement. In the words of Mr. Auld, Frederick Douglass's slavemaster, one of the best ways to keep an oppressed people

oppressed is to keep them from learning: "Learning would *spoil* the best nigger in the world…It would forever unfit him to be a slave. He would at once become unmanageable, and of no value to his master" (Douglass 39). Thus, while New Crobuzon society is slowly advancing, having for the last twenty years admitted xenian students, it is deeply troubled by the thought of xenians standing equally with humans, which is made clear by the city's violent response to the vodyanoi dock workers' attempts to organize and strike. While nerve gas and neurotoxic man-o-wars are used against the gathered human crowds, lethal firearms are used against the vodyanoi: "The bullet burst through the gusts of gas, sending it coiling in intricate wreaths, and buried itself in the neck of the target. The third member of the vodyanoi strike committee fell squirming into the mire, the water dissipating in arcing spray" (*PSS* 261). Clearly, those who govern the city do not want xenians organizing and gaining equal status any more than they relish the possibility of an alliance of "HUMAN AND VODYANOI AGAINST THE BOSSES!" (*PSS* 257), as any attempts at unifying the races is suppressed.

The city's collectivization and elision of xenian "racial" difference is problematic, as the novel is adamant in its constant acknowledgement of the variety of differences which each xenian race presents. Wyrmen like Teafortwo are "[b]arrel-chested creatures like squat birds, with thick arms like a human dwarf's below those ugly, functional wings…Their hands were their feet, those arms jutting from the bottom of their squat bodies like crows' legs" (*PSS* 47). Isaac describes them as "more intelligent than dogs or apes, but decidedly less than humans" (*PSS* 47), a statement which, although certainly species-ist, might actually be true, given that it is never contradicted in any of the three novels. Nevertheless, it is a problematic construction, as it allows a clear hierarchy of inferiority to be established; some of the races are simply intellectually superior to others. Certainly hierarchies are not always negative, as they often allow for the preservation of law and order on which civilization stands. However, hierarchies become problematic

when they determine inferiority and superiority from arbitrary characteristics like skin colour, nose size, and eye shape, rather than from objective, scientifically verifiable facts like strength, speed, and intelligence.[28] Silchristchek the vodyanoi has "huge webbed hands and frog's legs" and his body "wobbl[es] like a bloated testicle, seemingly boneless…a bag of old blood with limbs, without a separate head" (*PSS* 23). Isaac characterizes him as "ancient and fat and grumpy, even for a vodyanoi," (*PSS* 23) and reveals his own unnoticed prejudice in his offhand stereotyping of all vodyanoi. Of course, Gedresechet, the "librarian of the Pagolak church" (*PSS* 59) is the exception that proves the rule for Isaac's perception of the vodyanoi, as Ged is "generally held to be the most anomalously good-humoured vodyanoi anyone had ever met," having "none of the glowering snappiness typical of that cantankerous race" (*PSS* 60). The cactacae are cactus people with vegetable flesh. The cactacae guard employed by Mr. Motley is "seven feet tall, thick-limbed and heavy. His head broke the curve of his shoulders like a crag, his silhouette uneven with nodules of hardy growth. His green skin was a mass of scars, three-inch spines and tiny red spring flowers" (*PSS* 30). Clearly, there is very little in common between the various races which populate Bas-Lag, and this does not even include some that appear in the other novels, such as the hotchi, the stiltspear, the grindylow, anophelii, scabmettlers, thanati, or vampir. There is perhaps even less in common between any of these races and the Construct Council, a sort of collective consciousness of machine bodies, and who are never referred to as xenian in *Perdido Street Station*. Nevertheless, the term xenian is still utilized throughout the novel by a number of characters, which reinforces the idea that, though humans are but one species amongst many, they are still elevated above the others, such that the term "xenian" is

---

[28] Though, admittedly, these more objective traits are also often subject to interpretation, which can often result in flawed determinations, for example, that blacks in Antebellum America were weaker, less intelligent, and more prone to illnesses than white people, resulting in erroneous conclusions of inferiority.

only ever used to refer to non-human peoples. This sort of racial terminology serves to highlight the similar problem existing in the real world, where white is the norm, and any other race of people are often referred to collectively as "minorities," a term which at once diminishes and collectivizes most of humanity, eliding and ignoring the differences between such culturally – and in some cases phenotypically – diverse peoples.

When Isaac attempts to study some of the city garuda, he is met with anger and derision, a response which he does not understand until Lin, herself a victim of ghettoization and prejudice, explains the situation:

> Because they're xenian and poor and scared, you cretin… Big fat bastard waving money comes to Spatters, for Jabber's sake, not much of a haven but all they've got, and starts trying to get them to leave for reasons he won't explain. Seems to me that Charlie's [the head garuda] bang-on right. Place like this needs someone to looks after its own. If I was garuda, I'd listen to him, I tell you. (*PSS* 134-5)

Isaac, a privileged human male – and regardless of his employment difficulties, Isaac is privileged by nature of being human in New Crobuzon – does not understand why the garuda is "so fucking antagonistic" (*PSS* 134). He does not understand why Charlie is convinced that "anthros," humans, are "the worst, they'll tear you up, take your wings away, kill you dead!" (*PSS* 134). For all that Isaac sympathizes with the various species inhabiting the city, he does not understand them and does not know very much about them in the first place, as becomes clear when he speaks with Yagharek.

By contrast, Yagharek notices that the garuda he meets in the streets of New Crobuzon are not truly garuda in the sense of how he understands his people, but are – to him – devolved, base forms. These garuda are not part of the proud family of warrior-hunters to which the Cymek-dwelling garuda belongs, but are instead a form of bastardized birdmen – mere humans with wings. To Yagharek, the city garuda have forgotten who they are. After a violent, shaming experience with one such garuda,

Yagharek refers to him as "the little boy who I will not call garuda, who was nothing but human with freakish wings and feathers, my little lost non-brother" (*PSS* 50). Yagharek recognizes the heredity they share, the possibility of a mutual expression of belonging, yet of necessity must place such a relation under erasure; though there remains a bond between them, it is a bond which is blocked by a wall of different experience, of culture and assimilation. To Yagharek, the city garuda, estranged from the skies and winds of the desert, have forgotten who they are. Assimilation does more than merely de-culture; in some sense, it also de-racializes.

3.3 Race and Science

Science in the novel is often used as a means of identifying and codifying physical and cultural differences while justifying prejudice. Accordingly, Isaac and Lin's relationship is complicated by Isaac's position as a scientist. However, it is not simply his career which complicates their relationship, but rather his entire mindset. He has, in his words, "a mind that ran and tripped and hurled itself down the corridors of theory in anarchic fashion" before losing interest and finding something new to study (*PSS* 12). Isaac becomes interested in Lin in a similar manner; he becomes fascinated and then bored with Lin as a scientific object. Specifically, he becomes interested in her eyes and the way in which khepri sight functions. For the span of a week and a half, Isaac "subjected Lin to tedious experiments in depth-perception and distance-vision; and reading, which impressed him most" (*PSS* 15). This emphasis on the eyes is central to the construction of race, as the primary indicator of racial difference in the novel is in visual description of deviation from the human norm. However, in an interesting reversal, the emphasis here is on the radical Other's eyes, on the alien khepri whose "bulging mirrored eyes saw the city in a compound visual cacophony. A million tiny sections of the whole" (*PSS* 14). Lin, and the khepri by extension, see no single detail at once, but rather process entire images piece by piece simultaneously, so that "each tiny part has integrity, each

fractionally different from the next, until all variation is accounted for, incrementally, rationally" (*PSS* 15). There is no totalizing vision for the khepri; instead, there is the acknowledgement that to understand something, it must be looked at in its entirety, emphasizing how all of the parts make up that whole. This is the reason why Motley reveals himself to Lin. Only a khepri could even attempt to understand him, because only a khepri could see all of him at once. Only a khepri's compound vision could possibly hope to comprehend the multiplicity of hybridity which is embodied in Motley's body.

Isaac objectifies Lin scientifically, analyzing her eyes without coming to understand what it is to see as a khepri does. He takes "pages of notes and sought books on insectile vision," and even more problematically, Isaac "subjected Lin to…experiments" (*PSS* 15). His approach to Lin becomes not one of a lover, but of a biologist studying anatomy. His experiments on Lin reflect the manner in which race needs to be categorized and understood, to be placed safely within racialized compartments forming racialized hierarchies. Isaac's focus on khepri crania is at once obvious, given khepri physiology, but also recalls the craniology craze of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which sought to racialize intelligence based on the size and shape of different races' skulls. Craniology "revealed the unchanging characteristics of human races. And those unchanging characteristics indicated…a racial order that accorded the largest share of the world's power and wealth to white men" (Fabian 128). Here, as with Isaac, science is utilized to determine a hierarchy of superiority and inferiority. This is evident in how impressed Isaac is by Lin's ability to read, since reading does "not come naturally to" the khepri, due to their ocular structure (*PSS* 15). The ability to read indicates that a sort of human benchmark has been reached, that a race that can understand written language proves its potential for racial superiority (*PSS* 15). However, such a view fails to take into account that different societies and different peoples have varying perspectives and ways of looking at the world. Of central

importance here is that Isaac gives up on his study of Lin's sight after only a week and a half, becoming bored with the endeavor, but more importantly, as Lin points out, because "the human mind was incapable of processing what the khepri saw" (*PSS* 15). Here, the scientist is found to be lacking, as his perspective proves too limited to comprehend the alien, the unknown. Here, the objectified subject is elevated above the scientist, and Lin pronounces the inferiority of both human physiology and of human intellectual ability. Only in focusing on difference is inequality itself is made apparent; the khepri subject proclaims the inferiority of those who attempt to study her without truly understanding her. Biological and anatomical species-isms are refuted here by accentuating the failings of such unscientific and unethical approaches, especially when such approaches are undertaken and abandoned on a whim.

In New Crobuzon peoples of different species clearly intermingle with relatively few issues in public areas. Humans can go drinking with cactacae, vodyanoi can joke with garuda, and khepri can dine with humans. Racism of this otherwise fairly racially integrated society is largely academic. The first overt example of racism that the reader is presented with is academic, in the ban on xenian entry into the university. Furthermore, this academic racism becomes more apparent in the apparently "unsurpassed" survey of races known as "*A Bestiary Of The Potentially Wise: The Sentient Races Of Bas-Lag*" (*PSS* 49). The text is vodyanoi in origin, not human, implying that racial tendencies in the novel are not solely the purview of the dominant human population. Isaac notes however that this text, originally written in the "Lubbock vodyanoi" by one Shacrestialchit, was "updated a hundred years ago by Benkerby Carnadine, human merchant, traveller and scholar of New Crobuzon" (*PSS* 49) a statement which reasserts the question of racism, in that it raises the question of just how much updating was done, and how much of the original meaning altered with colonial or racist assumptions. Regardless of the possibility of human tampering, the title of the book is rank with presuppositions of superiority.

Referring to all of the "sentient" – and thus by extension, "human" in its basic sense – races as "potentially wise" presents the possibility that some xenians may be excluded from this formulation. Evidently, in its original vodyanoi incarnation, humans were included in this categorization, as the vodyanoi would have been the book's norm, from which humans would have physiologically deviated.

The bestiary's usefulness is questionable, at best. Clearly the bestiary does not explain anything to Isaac about the advanced social hierarchy of the garuda, or their tradition of speaking and reading a diverse corpus of languages and texts, or even their physiology. He is ignorant of these facts until Yagharek unveils them to him, despite what is a more than passing intimacy with the bestiary itself, as evinced by his introduction of the text as "unsurpassed" and "exquisite," and his fond stroking of the cover (*PSS* 49). In New Crobuzon there are no existing works which accurately enunciate the various differences, similarities, cultures, physiologies, and societies of the species inhabiting Bas-Lag. This is a world where ignorance is more prevalent than knowledge, where racism exists in large part because differences exist, and where species are often wildly variable and unknown. With its constant references to xenian peoples and descriptions of their physical traits and cultural characteristics, the novel itself reads as a *Bestiary Of the Potentially Wise*. The focus on species to such a totalizing degree creates of the novel an anthropological – or more properly, xenthropological – treatise. The novel is itself a bestiary, using its plot merely as a means of introducing and fleshing-out the far more interesting xenians who inhabit New Crobuzon. Accordingly, Miéville's approach to species in *Perdido Street Station* is problematic, as it objectifies and generalizes most races into categorizations, and those that do not clearly fit into categorizations are deemed monstrous.

3.4 The Garuda

Nicholas Birns notes that Miéville's Bas-Lag novels "characterize" xenians "not just as mythical creatures but as 'animals' in the way that humanity has conventionally defined the 'animal,' drawing a parallel between the kind of perceived gap that historically existed between humanity and animals in our world with the different species's awareness of each other in Bas-Lag" (Birns 203). When Yagharek is first introduced, he is compared to different types of birds: he has a "great inscrutable bird face" and his "sharply carved beak was something between a kestrel's and an owl's" (*PSS* 27). Certainly this comparison is understandable, as the garuda are anthropomorphic avians, yet the physical comparison is soon followed by a comparison of linguistic ability. Isaac comments on Yagharek's difficulty speaking Ragamoll:

> Like a parrot trained to speak, the shaping of consonants and vowels came from within the throat, without the aid of versatile lips. Isaac had only ever conversed with two garuda in his life. One was a traveller who had long-practised the formation of human sounds; the other was a student, one of the tiny garuda community born and raised in New Crobuzon, which grew up shouting the city slang. Neither had sounded human, but neither had sounded half so animal as this great birdman struggling with an alien tongue. It took Isaac a moment to understand what had been said. (*PSS* 39)

The comparison to a parrot is problematic in the same way that comparing a human to an ape is problematic. Certainly there might be some similarities on a basic level, but the differences are far more numerous and noteworthy. The use of such pejorative terminology in such an offhand manner suggests an ignorance of racial identifiers and the loaded meaning of certain terminologies. Furthermore, comparisons to base animal types reflect a hierarchical worldview, and Yagharek's difficulty with language reinforces the notion of human superiority.

The problem of language is partially addressed when Isaac notes that "Yagharek spoke like a poet. His speech was halting, but his language was that of the epics and histories he had read, the curious stilted oration of someone who has learnt a language from old books" (*PSS* 41). However, while this statement does detract somewhat from Isaac's earlier comments, the description of Yagharek as animalistic continues throughout the text, making this observation of Yagharek's poetics an empty gesture. However, the descriptions of Yagharek as advanced and savagely atavistic vacillate back and forth throughout the text, indicating an uncertainty of the garuda's place in New Crobuzon society, and uneasiness with alien figures of hybridity in general.

3.5 Yagharek's Transformation

Yagharek undergoes the most drastic changes of all the characters in the novel. He is Remade – though not through the New Crobuzon process – beginning with the amputation of his wings in the Cymek. The scene as Yagharek recalls it is graphic in its violence:

> I remember the touch of the metal. The extraordinary sense of intrusion, the horrific in-out-in-out motion of the serrated blade. It fouled with my flesh many times, had to be withdrawn and wiped clean. I remember the breathtaking inrush of hot air on tissue laid bare, on nerves torn from their roots. The slow, slow, merciless cracking of bone. I remember the vomit that quenched my screams, briefly, before my mouth cleared and I drew breath and screamed again. Blood in frightening quantities. The sudden, giddying weightlessness as one wing was lifted away and the stubs of bone trembled shatteringly back into my flesh and ragged fringes of meat slithered from my wound and the agonizing pressure of clean cloth and unguents on my lacerations…and the knowledge, the unbearable knowledge that it was all about to happen again. (*PSS* 619)

As shocking as Yagharek's Cymek punishment is, it seems at least partially vitiated because of his crime, a correlation which New Crobuzon Remakings do not always follow. Nevertheless, this is the first step in Yagharek's Remaking into a human. The intermediary steps between this first physical Remaking and the final, self-inflicted one at the novel's close are no less important. When Yagharek first meets Isaac, he says that "Flight is not a luxury. It is what makes me garuda" (*PSS* 41). The loss of his wings is the first step in his humanization process; without his wings, Yagharek begins a metamorphic process of avian creature to terrestrial city-dweller. Swaddled in a cocoon of protective rags, Yagharek rejects his prosthetic wings: "His feet were wrapped in rags and his head was hidden in a hood. He had discarded the wooden wings. He was not disguised as whole, but as a human" (*PSS* 323). Yagharek's winglessness leads to him viewing himself as a broken garuda, and then as a human. This is first introduced as a means of remaining incognito, that "[i]t was much easier to hide as a human than as an unwounded garuda," (*PSS* 363). Soon it becomes apparent that Yagharek's human guise is more apt than his garuda one, since "He's *not* garuda-shaped, is he? That's the problem. He's more of a man-shaped absence" (*PSS* 428). Yagharek's final self-Remaking is problematic. The first Remaking is punishment, and the intermediate Remaking is expedient, given the protagonists' outlaw status. Yet the final Remaking occurs because Yagharek feels he is not garuda, but has become human. He notes that "I am not the earthbound garuda anymore. That one is dead. This is a new life. I am not a half-thing, a failed neither-nor" (*PSS* 623). This reference to "half-thing" seems at first glance to refer to Yagharek's contradiction as a grounded creature of the air, a wingless flying being. Yet Yagharek goes on to call his feathers "misleading quills," an "avian affectation" (*PSS* 623). Yagharek is not "half-thing" because he is a wingless garuda, but because he is a garuda. The final lines of the novel posit the problem quite succinctly when Yagharek says "I turn and walk into the city my home, not bird or garuda, not miserable crossbreed. I turn

and walk into my home, the city, a man" (623). The term crossbreed here is loaded, implying that the garuda are some sort of bastardized cross between human and bird, rather than a discrete species in their own right.

Yagharek's final transformation is troubling in its implication that the only way to live in New Crobuzon as a xenian is to discard xenian identity and attempt to becomes human, itself an exercise in futility; one's own species cannot be escaped. Only the external appearance can be altered, and that only so much. Despite this, Yagharek, having lost his final hope of flying, becomes, at least in his own mind, a human. Shorn of his feathers, Yagharek becomes "more ape than bird" (*PSS* 451). Yagharek cannot survive in New Crobuzon as a wingless garuda, cannot survive unable to fly, and so rejects his ancestry, rejects his identity as a garuda, and becomes what he believes himself to be underneath the "affectation" of feathers: a human. However, this realization is in part overshadowed by the description of Yagharek's new physical appearance: "My face a mass of raw and ragged flesh, bleeding copiously from a hundred little punctures where the feathers left my flesh. Tenacious fluffs of down that I have missed patch me like stubble. My eyes peer out from bald, pink, ruined skin, blistered and sickly. Trickles of blood draw paths along my skull" (*PSS* 622). The horrific description of violence, which would normally reinforce the problematic nature of such a drastic and irreparable physical change, here overshadows the underlying importance of the reason for the transformation. Violent physical mutilation becomes an end in itself, rather than a means of learning about the effects racial and cultural othering have upon alienated individuals.

3.6 The Remade

Yagharek's final Remaking is his own doing, a feat accomplished by his own strength of will. New Crobuzon's Remade population possess no such privilege. In New Crobuzon "punishment was *for* someone. Some interest was served" (*PSS* 611). Remaking, the city's most visible punishment, punishes the criminals and simultaneously

creates a workforce. In many cases, the Remaking is tailored to suit a specific need, often for physical labour. While the Remade are not technically a species, given that anyone of any species can be Remade, they still serve the purpose of questioning the viability of utilizing physical characteristics to categorize race and species. This is most obvious with "King Garuda" at the Circus of Weird, who stole a painting of a garuda and was Remade in mockery of one as punishment (*PSS* 81-2). The thief's head is "swathed in feathers, but feathers of all sizes and shapes, jammed at random from its crown to its neck in a thick, uneven insulating layer…The beak was nothing but a roughly made fixture shoved and sealed into place like a gas-mask over the nose and mouth" (*PSS* 78-9). Like Yagharek's transformation, such a Remaking artificially blurs the lines between the various species, and often sets out to create entirely new hybrid beings of flesh and steel. However, unlike Yagharek's transformation, King Garuda's Remaking is excessive for his crime. Furthermore, while Yagharek's punishment maimed him, he still ultimately chose to approximate human form; King Garuda did not choose to become a garuda, especially not such a poor mockery of such a proud people. Derkhan observes that

> It's a difficult job, dealing with the Remade […] There's so much contempt, prejudice against them. Divide, rule. Trying to link up, so people don't…judge them as monsters…it's really hard. And it's not like people don't know they've got fucking horrendous lives, for the most part…it's that there's a lot of people who kind of vaguely think they deserve it, even if they pity them, or think it's Gods-given, or rubbish like that. (*PSS* 81)

As Rich Paul Cooper notes, "Remade in New Crobuzon, as a *created race,* serve to splinter and subdivide the social field" (Cooper 219). By creating an overtly alien Other, one which can be controlled and created specifically as desired, New Crobuzon can demonize these Others, and separate and subdivide them from the various xenian and human groups in the city. By creating a controllable "race," the city maintains its own

monster, which in turn keeps the rest of the population focusing their fear and aggression on the Remade, rather than uniting against the government's own problematic policies.

It is left unclear why a given person is Remade. Certainly, a number of Remakings have nothing to do with a crime at all. Motley's slake-moth troops are all custom-ordered Remade for the purpose of slake-moth husbandry (*PSS* 427) with heads twisted one hundred and eighty degrees around to avoid seeing the slake-moths' beguiling wings. Likewise, the flight scientist Calligine went "through a few experimental subjects before getting his sums right" and "Probably called in a few favours with Mayor Mantagony…a few felons sentenced to death had a few more weeks of life than they'd expected" (*PSS* 167). These prisoners were Remade in the spirit of experimentation to perfect one scientist's theorem regarding flight and wing attachment. Hybridity achieves its artificial form in the Remade; parts are scavenged from machines, animals, or even xenians and humans, postulating a future in which the body is not constrained by the limits of species or appearance. At the same time, the Remade act as a reminder of the basest possibilities – the tendency to torture, alter, and destroy things and people merely for the pleasure of doing so. Remaking is "creativity gone bad. Gone rotten. Gone *rancid*" (*PSS* 82). It is the end result of alienating the physical form from its function, creating of the body an Other to itself. Like the xenians, the Remade are not necessarily deserving of their category of Otherness; rather, Otherness is forced upon them by those in power.

3.7 Interspecies Relationships and Remade Prostitution

Otherness in the novel is revealed most directly in interspecies relationships. New Crobuzon's laws governing interspecies relationships are unwritten, with an undercurrent of social rather than legal alienation if one is "caught" in such a relationship. Isaac does not fear that he will be arrested if his and Lin's relationship is discovered, but rather fears "that he be seen not trying to hide it" and be reduced to "pariah-status" (*PSS* 12). In 2000

Britain had the "highest rate of interracial marriage anywhere in the western world" (Alibhai-Brown 77), yet 42 percent of people questioned in a British poll believed that "people should only marry within their own ethnic group" (Alibhai-Brown 83). It is unsurprising then that a significant portion of Miéville's novel focuses on the social constraints upon those who engage in interspecies relationships. "Cross-love," as Isaac terms his interspecies relationship, is acceptable only amongst the renegades, the rogues, and the artists of New Crobuzon's society, those whose very acts of rebellion serve only to reinforce their status as transgressive figures. Yet for all Isaac's rebelliousness, he is still circumscribed by his fear that he will be alienated completely from academia, that he will not be able to write, experiment, and publish, as Lin so aptly puts it, "for people you despise" (*PSS* 12). Alibhai-Brown argues that those who engage in interracial relationships "receive the message that they are deviant, wrong, a danger, guilty of base and uncontrolled sexuality" (Alibhai-Brown 126). The abuse directed towards those in such relationships has a very clear correlation with those in New Crobuzon, and thus dictates the lengths that Isaac is willing to go to maintain the secrecy of his relationship.

Nevertheless, xenians are fetishized in New Crobuzon. Fittingly, the existence of brothels that appeal to different xenians is more than just a possibility, but exists as a fact of New Crobuzon's social and spatial reality. Xenians can engage sexually with other xenians – khepri with khepri, cactacae with cactacae, vodyanoi with vodyanoi. However, such seemingly rigid boundaries are not quite so rigidly adhered to. David, one of Isaac's friends, notes while travelling through the city that "drunken youths cheered each other on to rites of passage, fucking khepri or vodyanoi women or other more exotic breeds" (*PSS* 295). Here inter-species sex is described through male comparison of sexual relations amongst themselves, bragging of their sexual conquests over the various xenian women whose bodies they had briefly purchased. This scenario is remarkably similar to one which bell hooks describes in *Black Looks*, where she found herself

> walking behind a group of very blonde, very white, jock type boys…Seemingly unaware of my presence, these young men talked about their plans to fuck as many girls from other racial/ethnic groups as they could "catch" before graduation. They "ran" it down. Black girls were high on the list, Native American girls hard to find, Asian girls (all lumped into the same category), deemed easier to entice, were considered "prime targets." (hooks 23)

David's observation in *Perdido Street Station* highlights the problem of fetishizing and eroticizing race, here in the guise of species. Sexual conquest becomes a rite of passage, which can only be achieved by getting, in British slang terminology, "a bit of the Other" (hooks 22). The object here is not physical attractiveness, and certainly not intellectual ability or emotional interest, but rather the act of physically copulating with a representation of race. The majority culture claims its dominance over various racial minorities by laying sexual claim to representations of these races (and species), so as to highlight that while such cross-loving may not be socially sanctioned for the purposes of love, it is certainly permissible for the purposes of re-enacting racial dominance.

However, there is yet another form of brothel in New Crobuzon, one which caters to less savoury individuals – the types of individuals whose sexual kinks are less easy to satisfy. David enters one such brothel to meet with a government official to inform on Isaac. This brothel does not simply cater to the sexual fantasies of clients engaging in sadomasochism, or who desire a specific xenian sexual encounter. Far more disturbing, far more grotesque, this particular establishment employs Remade prostitutes. David notes that "the city crawled with Remade prostitutes," observing that "it was often the only strategy available to Remade men and women to keep themselves from starving" (*PSS* 296). Though they are not a species, the Remade are often treated as a monolithic people, to be feared, pitied, and despised. These types of prostitutes, of course, as deviances from the ideal norms, often had to undersell their bodies, as their Remaking

was essentially just a "bizarre hindrance [to] their sex-work" (*PSS* 296-7). However, in one particular establishment, "the whores were Remade specifically for the profession. Here were expensive bodies Remade into shapes to indulge dedicated gourmets of perverted flesh" (*PSS* 297). In this brothel physical hybridity achieves its most nauseating effect, as punishment becomes sexualized commodity, and the limits of the body are stretched to a moral and physical breaking point. David feels simultaneously horrified and aroused, shamed and intrigued by these physiological monstrosities, noting "This was where he shamed himself, in this brothel of Remade whores" (*PSS* 296). He glimpses, for example, "a girl of no more than fifteen. She crouched on all fours…her arms and legs were hairy and pawed…dog's legs" (*PSS* 296). Yet the perversions only increase from there. Walking down the hall, he sees a number of different Remade through the doors he passes, eloquently described as "a nightmare garden. Each room contained some unique flesh-flower, blossom of torture" (*PSS* 297). He lists a number of such "flesh-flowers," including:

> naked bodies covered in breasts like plump scales; monstrous crablike torsos with nubile girlish legs at both ends; a woman who gazed at him with intelligent eyes above a second vulva, her mouth a vertical slit with moist labia, a meat-echo of the other vagina between her splayed legs. Two little boys gazed bewildered at the massive phalluses they sprouted. A hermaphrodite with many hands. (*PSS* 297)

Here hybridity is not natural, as it is with the various xenian races. In this brothel, hybridity is not something that can be made positive, something that can be lived with, even used to an advantage, as many Remade manage to do. Here, hybridity creates "prisons of blood and bone and sex" (*PSS* 297). In other words, humans do to others the most horrific things for sexual gratification. The ethical implications of Remaking a child are difficult to come to terms with. The subsequent sale of such an altered child to a brothel is even more shocking. The fact that the child was Remade specifically for the

purpose of becoming a sexualized object is incomprehensible, suggesting that the entire juridical system in New Crobuzon is based not on crime and punishment, but the random, abstract exercise of power for monetary gain. Here, individuality is defined by one's modifications and the sexual gratification such modifications can produce for a paying customer. Yet there is not even the agency of using modifications for personal gain, because here the Remade do not own their bodies or the alterations which make them commodities. Rather, the "pimps and madams" who buy Remade from the punishment factories benefit most (*PSS* 297). The Remade prostitutes are wholly objectified, the lowest rung on New Crobuzon's societal ladder. Yet their position is undeserved; their Otherness is an imposed physical alteration, a violation which, rather than evoking sympathy for their plight, instills a sense of disgust at their unnatural alienness.

3.8 Slake-moths and the Monstrous Other

For all that khepri and garuda are designated as Other, they are still recognizable as sentient species. Part of this unavoidably relates back to their anthropomorphism. All of the sentient races in New Crobuzon are humanoid bipeds. The cactacae, vodyanoi, khepri, garuda, even the vast majority of the Remade are upright and recognizably humanoid; they possess traits which allow human identification and some level of empathy between the otherwise diverse species. The introduction of the slake-moths challenges the human-centric view of sentience in the novel. The slake-moths are characterized as "unimaginable" monstrosities: "It had no eyes that they could recognize, only two deep sunken hollows sprouting thick, flexing antennae like stubby fingers, above rows of huge slab-teeth. As Isaac watched, it cocked its head and opened that unimaginable mouth, and from it a huge, prehensile, slavering tongue unrolled" (*PSS* 315). There are no human traits identifiable in the slake-moths. Of the conglomerate parts which make up slake-moth physiology, the only trait which is remotely humanoid are their "clutching half-simian paws" (*PSS* 565). Their diverse parts are described in

compartmentalized portions; rarely are they described in their totality. Without the term "moth" in their name, their overall shape would be difficult to discern, as most descriptions merely describe protrusions and texture, rather than overall shape. They each possess an

> enormous mouth and chattering teeth, eyesockets with their clumsy antennae stubs like fumbling maggots, a hundred extrusions of flesh that whiplashed and unfolded and pointed and snapped shut in a hundred mysterious motions…and the wings, those prodigious, untrustworthy, constantly altering wings, tides of weird colour drenching them and then retreating like sudden squalls. (*PSS* 565)

Their physical totality, indescribable though it may be, separates them from the other species. It gives them the appearance of animalistic monsters instead of sentient beings.

The slake-moths do not communicate with the other xenians, but only feed on them, which separates them from the other species even more. They are never acknowledged as sentient creatures themselves, thought they certainly demonstrate the ability to think, and more importantly, the ability to feel. When Isaac kills three of the slake-moths, the sole remaining member of the decimated family goes "mad with grief. It keened in ultra-high frequencies and spun aerobatically, sending out little calls of sociality, echo-locating for other moths, fumbling through unclear layers of perception, with its antennae and clutching empathetically for any trace of an answer" (*PSS* 571). The moth is clearly suffering and afraid, alone and mourning the loss of its family. Yet the realization that the slake-moth is sentient and suffering is overlooked, since its vampiric succubus existence is deemed a threat to New Crobuzon – which it admittedly is. Nevertheless, neither Isaac nor his companions feel the slightest empathy or pang of remorse for killing supposedly mindless animal killers. Any sympathy that the slake-moths might evoke is blotted out by the horror that their "huge, terrifying presence[s]" elicit in both characters and readers (*PSS 582*). In the slake-moths, the horror component

of the Weird is not excised, but amplified, which in effect alienates the reader from sympathizing with the slake-moths, even though they were held in captivity and exploited for monetary gain. In this manner, the slake-moths are similar to the Remade prostitutes. The primary difference between them is that once the slake-moths reclaim their freedom, they possess the ability to fight back. Nevertheless, this very ability to fight back is also the factor which causes the city to – perhaps understandably – view them as monsters, since their form of resistance, which also happens to be their form of feeding, is mind-rape.

The Weaver is also analogous to the slake-moths, since it is a non-humanoid xenian that is not intrinsically benevolent or helpful to the cause of the governing status quo. The Weaver's movements are "slow, sinister and inhuman" (*PSS* 287) and like the slake-moths, it is described as "utterly alien" (*PSS* 287). Unlike the slake-moths, however, the Weaver is clearly identified from the outset as "a spider" (*PSS* 286). As inscrutable as the Weaver's thinking process is, it is firmly anchored in its formulation as a giant sentient spider. The only vague anthropomorphism the slake-moths possess are their "simian hands." By contrast the Weaver's legs are "thin and bony as human ankles," its head is "the size of a man's chest…as smooth and spare as a human skull in black," and two of its multiple "deep blood-red" eyes are "as large as newborns' heads" (*PSS* 287). The Weaver's most frequently mentioned anthropomorphic trait is its "pair of thin and tiny hands" which are "[f]ive-fingered and slender, only smooth fingertips without nails and skin and alien, nacreous black of pure pitch distinguished them from the hands of human children" (*PSS* 288). These hands, which the Weaver "clasp[s]… in a very human motion of delight" (*PSS* 344), set the Weaver apart from the slake-moths, who are also multi-dimensional insects that subsist on intangible, metaphysical diets. The comparison of the two species' hands reveals a very human-oriented approach to race: the slake-moths possess primitive simian hands, and are demonized as mindless, atavistic

animals. The Weaver's hands are graceful and human, able to approximate human gestures, and the Weavers are considered are considered sentient, powerful agents of aesthetic chaos.

While the Weaver might surgically remove ears, it does not orally invade bodily orifices with its long, slavering tongue, does not ravage and consume the minds of those it encounters, as the slake-moths do. Its humanity is affirmed by its ability to communicate with the other species. Though its speech is often barely comprehensible, obfuscatory and indirect, it is still speech. The slake-moth language is by contrast "some high, gibbering sound" (*PSS* 487), an animalistic "chittering" (*PSS* 557). While the slake-moths are relegated to linguistic atavism, the Weaver demonstrates its eloquence in writing, telling Isaac and Derkhan that it is impressed by their "exquisite tapestry skills" and that it "extricate[d] [them] from an unfortunate situation" for the "furtherment of [their] craft" (*PSS* 361). The Weaver identifies itself as an artist in both its aesthetic urge to improve the worldweave and in its poetic approach to language. The contrast between the two species reveals the human-centric categorization of sentience. The Weaver is understandable, in its own fashion. The demonization of the slake-moths reveals the city's racialization of linguistic ability. The khepri, unable to vocalize, are considered sentient because they can perform sign language to communicate. The slake-moths are incomprehensible in thought process and linguistic ability, and remain mere animals in both the city's view and in Miéville's construction.

The slake-moths feed not on "the meat-calories slopping about in the brainpan, but the fine wine of sapience and sentience itself, the subconscious" (*PSS* 326). Arguably, their entire purpose is the pursuit of experience, of "sentience itself." To this end, first the government, then Motley, fed humans and xenians to the slake-moths, so that they could produce dreamshit for their offspring. The bio-thaumaturge Vermishank says that

> Dreamshit is baby food. It is what the moths feed their young. They exude it all the time, but in great quantities when they are parenting. They are not like other moths: they're very caring. They nurture their eggs assiduously, by all accounts, and *suckle* the newborn caterpillars. Only in their adolescence, when they pupate, can they feed themselves. (*PSS* 328)

Vermishank reinforces the assumption that the slake-moths are merely primitive animals when he observes that "One has to husband the moths carefully, stud them regularly, milk them. Like cows. They can be manipulated – by someone who knows what they're doing – fooled into exuding milk without having born grubs" (*PSS* 328). The concept of milking cows is palatable only because cows are considered beneath human level of sentience – they are inferior to humans. However, the slake-moths are much more advanced, possessing intelligence far exceeding that of a typical complacent bovine. The comparison identifies the slake-moths as commodified beings. One positive benefit of such a comparison is the admission that the slake-moths care for their young in a nurturing, traditionally mammalian fashion. Yet Isaac and his companions overlook this, and the exploitation of a sentient species, concerned instead with the danger slake-moth freedom creates. The slake-moths are the evil that must be expunged from society for the maintenance of peace and order. They are an Other made monstrous, their multifaceted physiques representing all the compartmentalized portions of xenians and animals found too ugly, disgusting, or dangerous. The murder of the slake-moths is a catharsis of the racialized violence simmering beneath the surface of New Crobuzon's society; a violence which cannot be legitimately committed unless rationalized as the expunging of a demonized evil. No species is more Other, more alien, more incomprehensible than the slake-moths in *Perdido Street Station*. They are the sacrifices whose deaths revitalize the troubled city.

3.9 Motley

For all that the slake-moths are constructed as monstrous Others, they are still natural, in that they are born slake-moths, and produce slake-moth offspring (after a brief period as larva and pupae). Mr. Motley is much more complicated. The crime lord is obsessed with "Transition. The point where one thing becomes another… The zone where the disparate becomes part of the whole. The hybrid zone" (*PSS* 37). Fittingly, Motley's entire body acts as a hybrid zone. Every disparate piece of animal physiology finds its place in his body, incorporated into an irregular whole. If the slake-moths are natural monstrous Others, then Motley is an unnatural monstrous Other. Like the slake-moths, Motley is described in compartmentalized portions which form an incomprehensible whole. William J. Burling argues that Motley's form is "strikingly metaphorical…defying any attempt at rational classification, being a chaotic combination of many (all?) other forms of life" (Burling 333-4). Motley thus stands as the sole individual in the novel whose species is so ambiguous that it becomes a completely empty signifier. For all that Miéville's construction of species in *Perdido Street Station* is unwavering in its human-centric focus and its attempt to categorize xenians, Motley proves uncategorizable. His introductory description establishes this point:

> Scraps of skin and fur and feathers swung as he moved; tiny limbs clutched; eyes rolled from obscure niches; antlers and protrusions of bone jutted precariously; feelers twitched and mouths glistened. Many-coloured skeins of skin collided. A cloven hoof thumped gently against the wood floor. Tides of flesh washed against each other in violent currents. Muscles tethered by alien tendons to alien bones worked together in uneasy truce, in slow, tense motion. Scales gleamed. Fins quivered. Wings fluttered brokenly. Insect claws folded and unfolded. (*PSS* 38)

Motley is made of so many different disparate parts that any one part's significance is immediately subsumed beneath another, which in turn is subsumed. No racial identifiers

exist to categorize Motley as human, garuda, khepri, or something else entirely. He is not a unified whole; his body is made up of the "ragged discordance of his flesh" (*PSS* 67). He is chaos personified, made physical. Lin speculates on the incongruities of his form, and the mystery of his origin, noting that he has

> one hand terminating in five equally spaced crabs' claws; a spiraling horn bursting from a nest of eyes; a reptilian ridge winding along goat's fur. It was impossible to tell what race Mr. Motley had started out as. She had never heard of Remaking so extensive, so monstrous and chaotic. Anyone as rich as he must be could surely afford the best Remakers to fashion him into something more human – or whatever. She could only think that he chose this form.
>
> Either that, or he was a victim of Torque. (*PSS* 67)

Not only is Motley's form incomprehensible; his origin is too. Every other instance of Remaking in the novel is obvious: victims of fleshshaping are easily identified. Indeed, such recognition is intrinsic to the social purpose of Remaking. Yet Motley, if Remade, has been altered to such a degree that the seams holding him together do not show. If Remade, Motley has created of his own body a canvas of aesthetic abstractions made flesh. If he is a victim of Torque, then he is mutated, his very form not added to, but shaped by a radioactive power which is just as random and incomprehensible as Motley's own body. The former is intentional, the latter, accidental. Regardless of his origins, Motley, like the khepri and the garuda, and other xenians whose bodies approximate hybridized human forms, views himself as a collective whole. He states that his body is "not error or absence or mutancy: this [is] image and essence" (*PSS* 99-100). Motley calls into question all of the other species in the novel. If physical appearance is not a valid identifier of species then the entire New Crobuzon taxonomy falls apart. Without physical characteristics to conclusively identify a species, then species-specific inequalities such as ghettoization and exploitation cannot properly function. Motley acts

as a catalyst for decentralizing the importance and validity of species identification. Simultaneously, Motley functions as a fully realized example of a miscegenatory "raceless chaos" (Young 18). Yet rather than reclaiming this term as a positive suggestion of hybridity's power to transform the Other into something no longer bound by categorizations, Motley's form evokes only shock and horror at his impossible, unfeasible multiplicity. The potential his body implies is further subsumed beneath his exploitation of the slake-moths, his materialistic endangerment of the city, and, most shockingly, by his vicious abuse and violation of Lin. Rather than causing the reader to realize the potential that lies in hybridity, Motley's mere existence in the novel acts as a deterrent against hybridity. Unchecked physical mixing results in Motley: not a man, not a xenian, but a monster.

3.10 Conclusion

China Miéville's constructions of race and hybridity are at once immensely interesting and highly troubling. His Bas-Lag is inhabited by a wide variety of physically divergent species, each with their own abilities, cultures, and specialized requirements. They engage in miscegenation, bypassing the socially constructed categories that seek to separate them, and each xenian represents the potential for positive change that is embodied in the process of hybridity. Joan Gordon argues that "Lin's coupling with the human Isaac suggests new hybrid forms to come. Here, in terms of the novel's speculations, is a biological model of the hybridity cycle" (Gordon 458). Gordon's formulation of the novel as hopeful about hybridity is accurate insofar as it concerns the potential for new hybrid forms. However, this formulation fails to take into account the numerous problems which also emerge by the novel's end. After his first coupling with Lin "Isaac had been overcome with revulsion, and had almost vomited at the sight of those bristling headlegs and waving antennae" (*PSS* 381), yet his growing love for her eventually overpowers his prejudice: "the atavistic disgust and fear had gone, leaving

only a nervous, very deep affection" (*PSS* 382). The horror Isaac feels from Lin is a direct response to her alien-ness, stemming from her status as a racial other. As he comes to learn more about her and understand her, the horror of their coupling decreases. Familiarity leads to attachment and a decrease of racial prejudice, and an expansion of narrow beauty standards. However, by the end of the novel Motley, the penultimate image of hybridity, abuses and violates Lin, suggesting that if any future hybridity is to occur, it will be born from and tainted by violence and violation. The slake-moths, the novel's other form of monstrous hybridity, rape Lin's mind, effectively removing the possibility of future hybridity in Isaac and Lin's relationship. There is a triangulation of rape in the novel. Lin is raped both mentally and physically by the slake-moths and Motley, her employer-turned-captor. The slake-moths are killed, yet Motley remains alive at the novel's close, an injustice that the novel never truly addresses. However, at the end of the novel Isaac meets Kar'uchai, who reveals that the crime Yagharek committed was rape, and as punishment his wings were cut from him. Here there is justice, though of a bittersweet quality. After all that Yagharek has done for Isaac, all that he has helped Isaac to accomplish, Isaac is unable to fulfill his side of their bargain; he refuses to grant Yagharek flight and flees the city. He does this not because he is shocked and horrified by what he learns (though he is shocked and horrified), but because when he looks upon Lin's brutalized body and sees bruises that had "mottled her in suggestive patterns around her lower belly and inner thighs" (*PSS* 611). He sees Lin, and his rage and hurt at what was done to his lover forces him to renounce Yagharek, withdrawing from the garuda the last hope for flight that had dangled before him, just out of reach. Yagharek's punishment in the novel is not without pathos, but it is fitting – nothing could punish him more than the removal of the only hope he had to ever fly again.

The novel ends with not just violence, but the extremes of violence: self-mutilation; insanity; enslavement; abuse; mental and physical rape; the destruction and

reconstruction of bodies; and death. The violence is shocking, but its visceral presentation conceals rather than reveals the potential that hybridity and miscegenation present in the novel. Sandy Rankin argues that Miéville "situates hope in miscegenation, misbegot things, *un*beauties by conventional capitalist and patriarchal standards" (Ranking 242). This is true. There is hope, but it is thin, pulled nearly to the breaking-point. If Miéville has formulated the future as a time in which hybridity and miscegenation are recognized as positive agents in promoting racial peace, then the road leading to that point in time will be built on the corpses of those who have tried and failed to promote the peaceful intermixing of different peoples. The failure to achieve a positive, stable form of hybridity in the novel, one that is not considered alien, monstrous, or Other, leads ineluctably to the novel's conclusion. Despite the hope implied by Lin and Isaac's relationship at the beginning, the ending suggests a despairing view that hybridity has failed, that life is only bearable when hybridity is rejected. Yagharek cannot live as a walking bird, an avian being made terrestrial, forced to live a hybrid life as both garuda and human. He chooses to reject hybridity, to reject his avian heritage, and embrace the ape he feels he has become. He becomes, in his own mind, a discrete form, a hybrid no longer. A garuda dies, and a man is born.

Conclusion: The Problem of Endings

Fantasy literature is a field which includes widely divergent stories; everything from high fantasy, to contemporary fantasy, to urban weird fantasy fits somewhere along the genre's spectrum. Something which is a problematic unifier amongst these varied forms is their endings. This is not to claim that fantasy literature, as a genre, always ends the same way. Any such essentializing statement is inherently flawed. However, there is a troubling trend in the endings of many fantasy stories regarding race. At the end of *The Lord of the Rings*, the orcs are killed, or pushed into hiding in "dark lightless places far from hope" (*RotK* 274). The elves leave the land of men, dwarves are left unmentioned, and the hobbits' Shire has been invaded and tainted by the dehumanizing effects of early-stage industrialization. The only people who really benefit at the end of the trilogy are Men, whose ascendancy has finally arrived.

American Gods, though very different in content, plot, and setting from Tolkien's story, has a similarly problematic racial issue at its end. Though the threat of Wednesday's war is over, and the immediate fate of the gods is more stable than before, the fact remains that the gods are dying, and Shadow, the only one who really knows this, seems unperturbed by this inevitability. The gods are dying, and nothing can be done to stop it. The old gods linger, shambling inexorably to their individual and collective demise. The new gods burn brightly for but a moment, only to be replaced immediately as technology or taste changes. Culture and history dies with the old gods, and the vapid consumerist gratification of modern society is personified in the cycle of death embodied by the new gods. The worst part of it is that no one cares that there is a slow extinction occurring, an extinction that an entire world is ignorant of. Certainly this is attributable to the understandable fact that very few people even know that the gods exist, but even those few who do – especially Shadow – do absolutely nothing about this problem, and seem for the most part unconcerned. Shadow's statement about preferring to be a human

rather than a god is certainly a claim which questions the supposed superiority of the gods over humans. But his statement also simultaneously indicates apathy towards the gods' impending doom; Shadow essentially tells the collected groups of gods that they will all die, while humans will, as a species, live on, birthing and starving more and more gods without any responsibility for their divine offspring. There is no ethical imperative in the novel's close which admits a responsibility to aid these troubled, dying beings. Certainly the novel is fairly positive in its approach to mixed-race individuals, but in the end, Shadow turns his back on an entire half of his ancestry, rejecting not just his divine father, but all other gods as well, good and bad, victim and villain alike.

One of the truly problematic issues in Miéville's novels is that his heroes are always human, and, at least in *Perdido Street Station*, the enemies, the oppositional, antagonistic force is completely alien, xenian in their extremity. Miéville's stories are supposed to be anti-Tolkienian, yet like *The Lord of the Rings*, the humans in *Perdido Street Station* remain dominant at the expense of racial Others. The Construct Council is betrayed because Isaac feared its ability to evolve. The handlingers are nearly eradicated because they were forced to combat the slake-moths or risk exposure by the government. Most importantly, an entire city united to destroy the slake-moths, who were transported from their home, escaped from slavery, and sought only to live in their own way. Certainly, the human Lovers in *The Scar* are villainous, but they do not evoke the same level of fear and dread as the much more ideologically sympathetic grindylow do. Likewise, while Mayor Rudgutter is certainly villainous, he is human, sympathetic to some degree. Motley and the slake-moths, both radically Other, are sources of fear and grotesque loathing, and are objectified as monsters of disgusting hybridity. Lin is absent from a significant portion of the latter half of *Perdido Street Station*, and even when she reappears her body has been ravaged and abused, her mind consumed in the frenzy of a slake-moth's thirst. She is reduced to a state of complete infantile reliance on Isaac, her

human lover. Miscegenation in the novel comes to a shocking and abrupt halt, as Lin and Isaac's continued relationship becomes an impossibility. While Yagharek's presence is certainly more evident throughout the narrative, and he actively partakes in the novel's adventure arc, he eventually rejects his physical and cultural identity as a garuda, and in his own personal form of Remaking, creates of his own scarred flesh a human form. For all that xenians push the novels forward, and pervade every page of Miéville's novels, their agency is often questionable at best. The human always seems to prevail, and the xenian to suffer the consequences. Only Isaac and Derkhan emerge from the conflict relatively unscarred. Certainly Isaac is in emotional shambles, but he does not Remake his own body, and his mind, while troubled by Lin's infantile state, is otherwise intact.

There is an undercurrent of troubling racial issues which lies beneath these fantasy authors' approaches to ending their stories. While in all three novels the antagonistic force is defeated, the fact remains that other, perhaps more troubling and institutional problems lie unacknowledged and unaddressed. Inequality and apathy remain as notable factors. Though each of the novels focuses on race to a significant degree, they each ultimately discard the power of their constructed races and focus only on the human, and the notion that, ultimately, humans prevail where all others fail. The dominant normative culture in each novel is defended, while those races deemed Other suffer unnoticed as casualties of conflict. The status quo is maintained, and the subsequent fates of Others are ignored.

In his article entitled "The Third Space" Homi Bhabha writes that:

> the importance of hybridity is not to be able to trace two original moments from which the third emerges, rather hybridity to me is the 'third space' which enables other positions to emerge. This third space displaces the histories that constitute it, and sets up new structures of authority , new political initiatives, which are inadequately understood through received wisdom. (Bhabha 221)

Bhabha presents an interesting position from which to approach the issue of hybridity which eschews issues of race, choosing instead to approach hybridity from the perspective of culture. However, problematically, Bhabha's third space is supposedly separate from the histories which formed it, a problem which, when applied to race and racial hybridity, proves flawed; history is inescapable, as are its effects. To claim otherwise is to claim the impossible. However, the impossible is the material that fantasy literature is made of. The concept of a third, new space created from two parent spaces becomes more plausible when applied to fantasy races. The orcs are created from corrupted elves, but the uruk-hai are bred from Men and orcs, creating a new form which benefits and suffers from both parent races. Shadow is a clear example of a new form created from two others, as though he identifies as human, he is a demi-god, not quite human, not quite god. Finally, of all of the races in Bas-Lag, none are explicitly created from two parent species – there are no mentions of humans and scarabs breeding to create khepri, and no mentions of humans and khepri procreating a hybrid child either. However, Bhabha's third space hybridity achieves its apex in Motley, who alone among all of the different species in Bas-Lag is something truly new. He alone escapes his parent histories, and disdains the relevance of "received wisdom" about racialized identity.

This thesis set out to articulate some of the issues surrounding race and racial mixing in fantasy literature. The focus at the outset was to illustrate how race, miscegenation, and hybridity in fantasy literature reflect real-world anxieties about the same issues. More than simply illustrating that "racism is bad," this paper has argued that fantasy literature allows new approaches to race and racial mixing which criticize the continuing problematic representations of races in fantasy literature. The simple fact that race continues to be used in fantasy novels speaks to the sense of importance that is still attributed to racial constructions. However, the lack of critical work dealing with race in fantasy literature simultaneously speaks to a problem with race as an area of inquiry;

while fantasy literature by definition deals with the impossible, race is in some ways all too possible. Race might be recognized as a scientific fiction, but it is all too real, and the violence and prejudice experienced by maligned fantasy races such as Tolkien's orcs, Gaiman's gods, and Miéville's xenians and Remade have their corresponding reactions. The orcs murder, plunder, and ravage the landscape of Middle-earth, Wednesday orchestrates a battle from which only he (and Loki) would emerge triumphant, the slake-moths feed on a slumbering city, and Motley drugs, rapes, and corrupts the city from his underworld lair. Each of these three novels illustrates the violent effect that racial inequality has on the victims, while also acknowledging the explosive and violent reactionary effects that such violence can in turn evoke. Each of the three novels acknowledges a certain inequality in power, a problem of hierarchies which categorizes these problems of power through race. Anxieties about created races reflect those same anxieties about real world races, and about the validity of using problematic terms and categorizations like "race" in the first place. These anxieties are further exasperated by the mixing of races, and the corresponding creation or dissolution of races that follows.

Though there is a certain predilection in fantasy to draw direct correlations between racial identities and good or evil, there is also a resistance established within fantasy to reject such bold-faced stereotyping. Fantasy races can be simplistic and unexamined, as in Terry Brooks' novels, or, as in Miéville's Bas-Lag novels, the very problematic representation and mixture of the races can be a criticism of stereotyped racial representations. Perhaps paradoxically, the fantasy novels discussed in this paper are distrustful of the concept that racial prejudice can be completely bypassed or overcome. The three fantasy novels analyzed in this paper remain pessimistic about the eradication of the hate and prejudice which race evokes. Racial utopia in Tolkien is only attained by rejecting other races – by destroying the evil orcs, and the exodus of the elves. Gaiman's Shadow remains ever a shadow, a liminal figure not entirely existing or

accepted among the gods or humans. Lin and Isaac's love is never accepted in New Crobuzon, and the violence which all xenians and cross-lovers face is a realistic illustration of the social and cultural roadblocks that interracial couples face in the real world. This remains true in more recent fantasy novels as well. N.K. Jemisin's Yeine Darr in *The Hundred Thousand Kingdoms* is considered inferior and barbarous because of her mixed-race ancestry, and Onyesonwu in Nnedi Okorafor's *Who Fears Death* is feared (and later respected) because she is mixed-race, and as such thought to be a bringer of violence and death. Homi Bhabha argues that a third space hybridity allows for a utopian rejection of existing power structures and prejudices, and the establishment of new authority structures. Such a claim is naïve; hybridity on its own cannot remove and restructure inequalities and power struggles.

Works Cited

Alibhai-Brown, Yasmin. *Mixed Feelings: The Complex Lives of Mixed-Race Britons*. London: The Women's Press, 2007. Print.

Attebery, Brian. *The Fantasy Tradition in American Literature: From Irving to Le Guin*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1980. Print.

---. *Strategies of Fantasy*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1992. Print.

"Author Interview: Neil Gaiman on American Gods." *HarperCollins Canada*. n.d. Web. May 13, 2012.

Barrett, Stanley R. *Anthropology: A Student's Guide to Theory and Method*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009. Print.

Beagle, Peter S. "Introduction." *The Secret History of Fantasy*. Ed. Peter S. Beagle. San Francisco: Tachyon, 2010. 9-14. Print.

Bhabha, Homi. "The Third Space." *Identity, Culture, Community Difference*. Ed. J. Rutherford. London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990. 207-21. Print.

Birns, Nicholas. "From Cacotopias to Railroads: Rebellion and the Shaping of the Normal in the Bas-Lag Universe." *Extrapolation* 50.2 (2009): 200-11. Print.

Bould, Mark and Sherryl Vint. "Political Readings." *The Cambridge Companion to Fantasy Literature*. Eds. Edward James and Farah Mendlesohn. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2012. 102-12. Print.

Brooks, Terry. *The Sword of Shannarah*. New York: Del Rey, 1977. Print.

Burling, William J. "Periodizing the Postmodern: China Miéville's *Perdido Street Station* and the Dynamics of Radical Fantasy." *Extrapolation* 50.2 (2009): 326-44. Print.

Clute, John and John Grant, eds. *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy.* London: Orbit, 1997.

Cooper, Rich Paul. "Building Worlds: Dialectic Materialism as Method in China Miéville's Bas-Lag." *Extrapolation* 50.2 (2009): 212-23. Print.

Croly, David Goodman. *Miscegenation: The Theory of the Blending of the Races Applied to the American White and Negro*. Ithaca, New York: Cornel University Library, 1864. Print.

Dain, Bruce. *A Hideous Monster of the Mind: American Race Theory in the Early Republic*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2002. Print.

Darwin, Charles. *The Descent of Man*. 2nd ed. London: John Murray, 1882. Print.

---. *The Origin of Species By Means of Natural Selection*. 6th ed. London: John Murray, 1873. Print.

Davis, F. James. *Who is Black?: One Nation's Definition*. University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State UP, 1991. Print.

Dickerson, Matthew and Evans, Jonathan. *Ents, Elves, and Eriador: The Environmental Vision of J.R.R. Tolkien*. Lexington, Kentucky: UP of Kentucky, 2006. Print.

Dorson, Richard. "A Theory for American Folklore." *The Journal of American Folklore* 72 no. 285, 1959. *JSTOR*. 197-215. Web.

Douglass, Frederick. *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1999. Print.

Fabian, Ann. *The Skull Collectors: Race, Science, and America's Unburied Dead*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2010. Print.

Faircloth, Kelly. "Neil Gaiman reveals the Future of *American Gods*." *io9*. 24 June 2011. Web. 14 May 2012.

Fimi, Dimitra. *Tolkien, Race and Cultural History: From Fairies to Hobbits*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009. Print.

Forbes, Jack D. *Black Africans and Native Americans: Color, Race and Caste in the Evolution of Red-Black Peoples*. New York: Basil Blackwell, 1988. Print.

Gaiman, Neil. *American Gods*. New York: HarperTorch, 2001. Print.

---. *Anansi Boys*. New York: HarperCollins, 2005. Print.

Galton, Francis. *Hereditary Genius: An Inquiry into its Laws and Consequences*. 2nd ed. London: Macmillan, 1982. Print.

Gilroy, Paul. '*There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack': The Cultural Politics of Race and Nation*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991. Print.

Gates, Jr., Henry Louis. "Writing, 'Race,' and the Difference it Makes." *Loose Canons: Notes on the Culture Wars*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1992. 43-69. Print.

Gasque, Thomas. "Tolkien: The Monsters and the Critters." *Tolkien and the Critics: Essays on J.R.R. Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings*. Eds. Neil D. Isaacs and Rose A. Zimbardo. Notre Dame: U of Notre Dame P, 1969. 151-63. Print.

Gordon, Joan. "Hybridity, Heterotopia, and Mateship in China Miéville's 'Perdido Street Station'." *Science Fiction Studies* 30.3, November 2003. *JSTOR*. 456-76. Web.

Hickman, Tracy and Margaret Weis. *Dragons of Autumn Twilight*. Lake Geneva, Wisconsin: TSR, 1984. Print.

Hoffman, Paul. "The Science of Race." *Discover*. 15.2 1994. 4. Print.

Holmes, Anna. "White Until Proven Black: Imagining Race in *Hunger Games*." *The New Yorker*. 30 March 2012. Web. 11 May 2012.

hooks, bell. *Black Looks: Race and Representation*. Toronto: Between the Lines, 1992. Print.

Hume, Kathryn. *Fantasy and Mimesis: Responses to Reality in Western Literature*. New York: Methuen, 1984. Print.

Hyde, Lewis. *Trickster Makes this World: Mischief, Myth, and Art*. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2010. Print.

Ifekwunigwe, Jayne O. "Notes on Terminology." *'Mixed Race' Studies: A Reader*. Ed. Jayne O. Ifekwunigwe. New York: Routledge, 2004. xix-xxii. Print.

"Interview with China Miéville." *Goodreads*. June 2009. Web. 19 January 2012.

Irwin, W. R. *The Game of the Impossible: A Rhetoric of Fantasy*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1976. Print.

Jackson, Rosemary. *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion*. New York: Routledge, 1981. Print.

Jordan, Withrop D. *The White Man's Burden: Historical Origins of Racism in the United States*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1974. Print.

Leonard, Elisabeth Anne. "Introduction: 'Into Darkness Peering' – Race and Color in the Fantastic." *Into Darkness Peering: Race and Color in the Fantastic.* Edited by Elisabeth Anne Leonard. Greenwood Press: Westport, Connecticut, 1997. 1-12. Print.

Lobdell, Jared. *The Rise of Tolkienian Fantasy*. Chicago: Open Court, 2005. Print.

Manlove, C. N. *Modern Fantasy: Five Studies*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1975. Print.

Marshall, Richard. "The Road to Perdido: An Interview with China Miéville." 3 AM Magazine. 2003. Web. 21 February 2012.

Matthews, Richard. *Fantasy: The Liberation of Imagination*. New York: Routledge, 2002. Print.

McFadden, Brian. "Fear of Difference, Fear of Death: The *Sigelwara*, Tolkien's Swertings, and Racial Difference." *Tolkien's Modern Middle Ages*. Ed. Jane Chance and Alfred K. Siewers. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005. 155-69. Print.

Mendlesohn, Farah. *Rhetorics of Fantasy*. Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan UP, 2008. Print.

--- and Edward James. *A Short History of Fantasy*. London: Middlesex UP, 2009. Print.

Miéville, China. *Iron Council*. New York: Del Rey, 2005. Print.

---. *Perdido Street Station*. New York: Del Ray, 2000. Print.

---. *The Scar*. New York: Del Ray, 2002. Print.

---. "Weird Fiction." *The Routledge Companion to Science Fiction*. Edited by Mark Bould, Andrew M. Butler, Adam Roberts, and Sherryl Vint. New York: Routledge, 2009. 510-5. Print.

Noel, Ruth S. *The Mythology of Middle-Earth*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1977. Print.

Pascoe, Peggy. *What Comes Naturally: Miscegenation Law and the Making of Race in America*. New York: Oxford UP, 2009. Print.

Pratchett, Terry. *The Light Fantastic*. London: Corgi Books, 1986. Print.

Provine, W. B. "Geneticists and the Biology of Race Crossing." *Science*. 182: 790-6.1973. Print.

"Question about Shadow." *Neil Gaiman Message Board*. 24 May 2009. Web. 17 March 2012.

Rabkin, Erik. *The Fantastic in Literature*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1976. Print.

Rankin, Sandy. "AGASH AGASP AGAPE: The Weaver as Immanent Utopian Impulse in China Miéville's *Perdido Street Station* and *Iron Council*." *Extrapolation* 50.2 (2009): 239-57. Print.

Rosebury, Brian. *Tolkien: A Cultural Phenomenon*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003. Print.

Salvatore, R. A. *The Crystal Shard*. Lake Geneva, Wisconsin: TSR, 1988. Print.

Shippey, T. A. *J.R.R. Tolkien: Author of the Century*. London: HarperCollins, 2000. Print.

---. *The Road to Middle-Earth*. Boston: George Allen and Unwin, 1982. Print.

Simmons, Kimberly Eison. "A Passion for Sameness: Encountering a Black Feminist Self in Fieldwork in the Dominican Republic." *Black Feminist Anthropology: Theory, Politics, Praxis, and Poetics*. Ed. Irma McClaurin. New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 2001. 77-101. Print.

Singh, Baba. "Catharsis and the American God: Neil Gaiman." *The Neil Gaiman Reader*. Ed. Darrell Schweitzer. Rockville, Maryland: Wildside Press. 154-64. Print.

Soukup, Martha. "New York Times Bestselling Author Neil Gaiman: *American Gods*." *The Well*. Salon. 28 June 2001. Web. 22 April 2012.

Stanton, Michael N. *Hobbits, Elves, and Wizards: Exploring the Wonders and Worlds of J.R.R. Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings*. New York: Palgrave, 2001. Print.

Sturluson, Snorri. *The Prose Edda*. Trans. Arthur Gilchrist Brodeur. New York: The American-Scandinavian Foundation, 1929. Print.

Tattersall, Ian and Rob Desalle. *Race?: Debunking a Scientific Myth*. College Station, Texas: Texas A&M UP, 2011. Print.

Tizard, Barbara and Phoenix, Ann. *Black, White or Mixed Race?: Race and Racism in the Lives of Young People of Mixed Parentage*. New York: Routledge, 2002. Print.

Todorov, Tzvetan. *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell UP, 1975. Print.

Tolkien, J.R.R. *The Hobbit*. London: HarperCollinsPublishers, 2006. Print.

---. *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*. Ed. Humphrey Carpenter. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1981. Print.

---. *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring*. London: HarperCollins, 1993. Print.

---. *The Two Towers*. London: HarperCollins, 1993. Print.

---. *The Return of the King*. London: HarperCollins, 1993. Print.

---. *The Silmarillion*. Ed. Christopher Tolkien. London: HarperCollins, 1999. Print.

Twagilimana, Aimable. *Race and Gender in the Making of an African American Literary Tradition*. New York: Garland Publishing, 1997. Print.

VanderMeer, Jeff. "The New Weird – 'It's Alive?'." *Monstrous Creatures: Explorations of Fantasy through Essays, Articles and Reviews*. Bowie, Maryland: Guide Dog Books. 2011. 46-54. Print.

Wearring, Andrew. "Changing, Out-of-Work, Dead, and Reborn Gods in the Fiction of Neil Gaiman." *Literature and Aesthetics* 19.2, 2009. *ProQuest.* 236-46. Web.

White, Claire E. "Interview with Neil Gaiman." *Writers Write: The International Writing Journal*. July 2001. Web. June 2, 2012.

Young, Robert J. C. *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race*. New York: Routledge, 2006. Print.

Curriculum Vitae

Name:	Nikolai Rodrigues
Post-secondary Education and Degrees:	University of Western Ontario London, Ontario, Canada 2006-2010, B.A. The University of Western Ontario London, Ontario, Canada 2011-2012, M.A.
Honours and Awards:	Western Graduate Research Scholarship 2011-2012
Related Work Experience	Graduate Teaching Assistant The University of Western Ontario 2011-2012