Jonathan Newell

Abject Cyborgs: Discursive Boundaries and the Remade in China Miéville's *Iron Council*

The BAS-LAG triptych, China Miéville's New Weird fantasy series, contains monstrosities and chimerae of a bewildering variety. "I'm in this fucking business for the monsters," Miéville declares in an interview with *The Believer*; "The monsters are the main thing that I love about the fantastic. And unfortunately, you can't really sell books of monsters to publishers. They insist on stories linking them" (Anders). Of his many imaginative grotesqueries, the Remade are amongst the most memorable: criminals convicted in the sprawling, vaguely steampunk metropolis of New Crobuzon and mutilated in chilling, state-run punishment factories, "bastard hybrids" of prisons and torture chambers, their bodies reconfigured and transformed, grafted with inhuman flesh and crude bionics (Miéville, *Perdido* 17). Invariably, such elaborate punishments fit the crimes of the convicted, notionally serving some form of gruesome poetic justice. Though prominent in all three BAS-LAG books—*Perdido Street Station* (2000), *The Scar* (2002), and *Iron Council* (2004)—the Remade and the complex socio-political dynamics of Remaking are explored most thoroughly in the last of the cycle. *Iron Council*, concerned as it is with revolution and societal transformation, is the most overtly political of the BAS-LAG novels; Miéville describes it as his version of a western (Anders), an appropriate genre considering the frontiers, boundaries, and borders breached by its characters. The novel's eponymous Iron Council is a roaming symbol of revolution, a renegade train hijacked by a group of proletarian rail-workers, some of them Remade. While the railway was originally intended as a continent-spanning catalyst for global capitalism, the revolutionary workers transform it into a transient commune, picking up its tracks and steering the train into the perilous depths of Bas-Lag's wilderness. As the Council's often surreal journey progresses and the hijackers establish a form of vagabond socialism, the novel examines the social distinctions between Remade and non-Remade individuals, mapping their eventual breakdown and dissolution.

Remaking can be interpreted as a fundamentally physical act; the Remade can be read as cautionary allegories warning against the statist abuse of technology, against the potential excesses of technoscience. As Miéville himself has suggested, "Technology is fantastic, but what's done with it is often pretty awful" (Baur 13). Miéville's fiction is highly visceral: even the magic in Bas-Lag, thaumaturgy, is really a form of fantastic materialism, a fantasy science. Miéville goes to great lengths to stress the physical excruciation involved in being Remade, beginning with their first appearance in *Perdido Street Station* in the form of the failed burglar Joshua, "whose Remaking had been very small and very cruel... he had refused to testify

against his gang, and the magister had ordered his silence made permanent: he had had his mouth taken away, sealed with a seamless stretch of flesh … Joshua had sliced himself a new mouth, but the pain had made him tremble, and it was a ragged, torn, unfinished-looking thing, a flaccid wound" (23). But despite the obviously undeniable physicality of Remaking, the hideously tangible nature of the punishment, I contend that Miéville's Remade are constituted out of performativity and discourse as much as technology. To be Remade is constantly to perform a series of pariah identities, to become something unthinkable. As a Remaker's assistant states in Miéville's short story "Jack,"

> People get broken when they get Remade. I've seen it many times. Suddenly, take a wrong turn by the law and it ain't just the physical punishment, it ain't just the new limbs or metal or the change in body, it's that they wake up and they're *Remade*, the same as they spat on or ignored for years. They know they're nothing. (203; emphasis in original)

There is more to the fear of Remaking than either its legal and economic ramifications or even the physical agony of the Remade's torturously transformed bodies. As much psychological and social as physical, Remaking is discursive, a performative state or effect, sustained through collectively constructed and individually realized structures of oppression.

In identifying Remaking with performativity, I invoke feminist notions of bodily materialization, dematerialization, and abjection as theorized by Judith Butler and Julia Kristeva. For Butler, identity is not naturally derived from pre-existing bodily signifiers: it cannot simply be extrapolated from anatomy, from the merely physical. Rather, normative identity accretes performatively over time and involves repudiating those possibilities deemed non-normative, construing them as utterly unthinkable and thus foreclosing them (*Bodies that Matter* 111). Those who fail to completely disavow such possibilities in order to construct their normative personae are consigned to a kind of living hell—a state of social abjection. Their bodies effectively no longer matter; they are dematerialized. They become cast off, societal refuse: abject. As Kristeva puts it in *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (1982), the abject is "that which is opposed to *I*" (1), forming a constitutive outside on which normative selfhood and society actually depends: it is "the horror that [civilizations] seize on in order to build themselves up and function" (210). Thus the burglar Joshua, unable to speak (and so participate in discourse), is symbolically abjected and silenced, deprived of a voice by the hegemonic powers that be. In cutting a new mouth for himself, evoking both an unhealed wound and a vagina, he remains caught in a feedback loop of physical violence and discursively sustained dematerialization. I will read the institutional aspect of this set of discursive practices as a form of biopower of the type Foucault thoroughly defines: "the set of mechanisms through which the basic biological features of the human body become the object of political strategy" (1). Specifically, I will read the Remade as a delinquent class created by the New Crobuzon governments through mechanisms of discipline (as opposed to

punishment), mechanisms articulated and sustained through social abjection as part of a strategy that consolidates the state's biopolitical control over its subjects.

Butler and Kristeva are concerned predominantly with gender and sex. In employing their theories, however, I do not want to reduce the Remade to allegorical figures depicting the formation and deconstruction of sexual identity or orientation. Jordana Rosenburg productively reads *Iron Council* as a "massive negative image" (327), a shadowy reflection of our own reality that "casts a queer history" (326), specifically "a queer history of British imperialism" (327); but I want to avoid any kind of totalization. Instead I interpret the Remade (and fReemade) as confronting us with a defamiliarized vision of our own social reality, broadly construed: a reality structured around strictly and largely subconsciously enforced binaries of self/other, us/them, whole/broken. I read *Iron Council* as Miéville's most persuasive deconstruction of these binaries, using a feminist hermeneutic to demonstrate the ways in which Miéville's Remade make visible the everyday despotism of such dualistic hierarchies while simultaneously reminding us of their instability. Following my reading of the social construction and dematerialization of the Remade body in the service of perpetuating New Crobuzon's biopolitical hegemony, I will turn to Donna Haraway to analyze the subsequent deconstruction and rematerialization of the Remade which *Iron Council* effects. While Butler and Kristeva both provide a useful description and critique of the normalizing processes that engender social and psychoanalytic abjection and Foucault effectively articulates the institutional motivations that give rise to normalization, these theorists concern themselves more with exposing the problems of power than with proposing radical solutions to those problems. Haraway's revolutionary cyborg politics, in contrast, offers a vision of a radical, non-dualist future in which individual subjects, irreverent of their capitalist genesis, seize control of their own identities by rejecting binaries (gendered or otherwise) and by embracing instead a holistic mode of being. As William Burling suggests, the novel embodies a spirit of "radical fantasy,"depicting the struggle of "subaltern constituencies" and offering "innovative strategies for representing the ever-changing capitalist totality and the emerging presence of post-human identity" (326). *Iron Council* shows, then, the capacity for fantasy to interrogate the mechanisms by which subjectivity is formed, its ability to call ideologically naturalized boundaries into question by exposing them as discursive constructions through a defamiliarized virtual world uncannily reflective of our own, and its potential to suggest strategies of resistance against those hegemonic forces seeking to maintain an oppressive status quo. By depicting both the discursive nature of identity formation and its chillingly material effects, Miéville's Remade demonstrate how materiality and discourse are always intertwined, and how this fact can be both a means of oppression and one of salvation.

Within New Crobuzon and along the railway, the distinctions between Remade and non-Remade are stark. The Remade have no real rights; to call them second-class citizens would be generous. Early in *Iron Council*, before

the revolution, such rigid boundaries are emphasized, as even the working-class laborers building the railroad sneer at the indentured Remade working beside them: "there are many Remade. They do not look at the whole men, free workers, the aristocracy of this labour" (166). The Remade are not paid; as Weather Wrightby, industrialist and rail tycoon, tells them during the initial strike, the Remade's "lives are not [their] own. [Their] money … [they] have no money" (256). There is certainly a physical level to the Remade's degradation, of course: they are whipped by overseers, herded like cattle, treated with constant brutality (167). Working is doubly more difficult for the Remade than for the free workers, as they must constantly negotiate the awkwardness of their bodies, with "legs replaced with monkey's paws" or "body-length pistons" (167). One man, "his face stoic," must contend with "a fox stitched embedded in his chest where it snarls and bites at him in permanent terror" (166). Even when a Remade individual is unhampered or even helped by the modifications, however, he or she is invariably deemed abnormal:

> A strong man drives a spike down in three strikes. Many men take four swings: cactacae and the most augmented steam-strong Remade two. There are three prodigious and respected cactus-men who can push a spike home in one blow. There is one Remade woman who can do this, too, but in her the ability is judged grotesque. (223)

Despite the merits of her Remade body and the physical advantages it provides, the Remade worker is still considered freakish: useful, perhaps, from a purely utilitarian perspective, but socially worthless. To use Butler's terminology, she has been dematerialized. "That which matters about an object is its matter" (*Bodies* 31), Butler tells us; systems of power relations, which facilitate the actualization of subjectivity, of materialization, are "governed by principles of intelligibility that require and institute a domain of radical *unintelligibility* that resists materialization altogether" (35). The Remade —categorically confused, ontologically spliced and contradictory, their bodies fraught with paradoxes and incomprehensibilities—embody this domain for the citizens of New Crobuzon. Like intersexed, homosexual, transgendered, or otherwise queer individuals, they are construed by normalizing authorities as non-normative and disruptive, and so are deemed abnormal, abject: "the repudiation of bodies for their sex, sexuality, and/or colour is an 'expulsion' followed by a 'repulsion' that founds and consolidates hegemonic identities … the operation of repulsion can consolidate 'identities' founded on the instituting of the 'Other' or a set of Others through exclusion and domination" (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 182). The social order thus creates "axes of differentiation" through which it maintains its exclusionary power: "In effect, this is the mode by which Others become shit" (182). What the Remade and their chimeric bodies make visible are the mechanics of abjection and dematerialization, processes which our own society conceals and naturalizes. Through the defamiliarizing lens of fantasy, Miéville confronts us with our own collectively sustained monstrosity.

While the Remade do not directly allegorize the abjection of non-normative sexuality, neither can they be divorced from sexuality. In *Perdido Street Station* we see illicit brothels full of sex-workers "Remade by the punishment factories according to strange carnal designs and sold to the pimps and madams" (Miéville, 297); a character is blackmailed with heliotypes (photographs) depicting him and a "ruined, cadaverous Remade girl" in a compromising position (298). The parallels are clear: sexual attraction to the Remade is non-normative, deviant, perverse. This correlation is reiterated in *Iron Council*, when young women along the railroad, ignorant of New Crobuzon's social niceties—non-natives in New Crobuzon's discursive community—approach the Remade: "They have yet to learn taboos: some even try to go with the camp's prisoners, the shackled Remade. The Remade are terrified of this, and go to their overseers" (195). Similarly, homosexuality is punishable in New Crobuzon via Remaking. In one scene early in *Iron Council*, the New Crobuzon revolutionary Cutter, an "omipalone" (128) (homosexual), describes a sexual encounter with a man who turns out to be a militiaman. As Cutter's thoughts reel—"What duty's he on? Is he a drugsman? Is he on Depravity watch? Either way he's got me" (140)—the specter of Remaking hovers in the background, a constant normalizing presence: "I ain't going to jail, I ain't going to be Remade," Cutter says, recounting his desperation (141). This entanglement of the Remade and sexuality reinforces its discursive dimension, its role in a disciplinary, biopolitical system of regulation and normalization that abjects those who do not conform to its apparatuses. By associating the militiaman, Remaking, and non-normative sexuality together, Cutter presents us with the chain of biopower, a chain whose links fetter the entire populace of New Crobuzon. Through a set of discursive practices the people of the city must forcibly normalize themselves on pain of becoming abject, Remade. The biopower of New Crobuzon thus lies not only in its mutilation of Remade bodies but also in the regulation of its population as a whole. Remaking is not just a physical punishment for a wrongdoing but rather the social and discursive effect of a technology of power, an instrument of domination and civic control.

Toro, a freedom fighter and urban insurrectionist in *Iron Council,* introduced as a minor character in *Perdido Street Station*, provides a preeminent example of the twisted rationale of Remaking and the processes of abjection which underlie it:

> I [Derkhan] was in court the other day, saw a Magister sentence a woman to Remaking. Such a sordid, pathetic, miserable crime.… Some woman living at the top of one of the Ketch Heath monoliths killed her baby … smothered it or shook it or Jabber knows what … because it wouldn't stop crying. She's sitting there in court, her eyes are just … damn well *empty* … she can't believe what's happened, she keeps moaning her baby's name, and the Magister sentences her. Prison, of course, ten years, I think, but it was the Remaking that I remember. Her baby's arms are going to be grafted to her face. So she doesn't forget what she did. (*Perdido Street Station* 81-82)

Toro's Remaking violates multiple boundaries. With her baby's arms sutured to her head, she possesses multiple bodies in one, a characteristic which Istvan Csicsery-Ronay, Jr., identifies as fundamental to the grotesque, the aesthetic category fuelled by the abject's repulsiveness (195). Combining both young and old, mother and child, she undoes the primal repression, the original act of abjection, which all subjects undergo—the abjection of the maternal body on the part of the child in order to establish its sense of individuality. As Kristeva notes, "The abject confronts us … with our earliest attempts to release the hold of *maternal* entity [sic] even before ex-isting [sic] outside of her" (13): Toro recombines mother and child, embodying Kristevan mother-phobia. She also combines the dead and the living; the corpse, according to Kristeva, "is the utmost abject … death infecting life" (4). In *Iron Council,* Toro becomes a revolutionary terrorist, part of a movement protesting New Crobzuon's corrupt government in an increasingly violent rebellion that culminates in a full-scale uprising, an insurrection that is ultimately quelled by the brutal authorities. Toro tracks down the judge who sentenced her, but he does not even remember her case (394). Those he sentenced to Remaking have become an indiscriminate mass in his memory, undifferentiated and beneath his notice: dematerialized, abject, forgotten.

Other examples of the discursive dematerialization of the Remade abound in the early chapters of *Iron Council*. When one of the Remade workers is beaten to death by a guard and the Remade "refuse to work the next day … [carrying] the corpse in a raucous funeral" (222), their social valuelessness—their dematerialization—becomes atrociously apparent when the gendarmes line the Remade up, pivot the train's guntower towards them, and nonchalantly fire on the massed workers to discourage further disobedience. In contrast, when the free men picket and strike they are treated with toleration and annoyance rather than violence, and the Remade must consequently work twice as hard as unwilling scabs, earning the ire of the free workers in the process (221). In the city of New Crobuzon things are no better. "Men and women with tusks or metal limbs, with tails, with gutta-percha pipework intestines dangling oil-black in the cave of bloodless open bellies" (19), the Remade are a constant visual reminder to other citizens to maintain the socio-legal status quo or else be doomed to abjection: the Remade are a deterrent, a display of authoritarian power. Despite their constant visibility, their ubiquitousness, however, the Remade are also strangely invisible, ignored and maligned by "whole"—that is to say, normalized—citizens. By breaching a social boundary and deviating from the mores and morals of the city, the Remade are transformed into embodiments of their own fundamentally social transgression. Their physical metamorphoses establish a technology of monstrosity, encoding the particular content of their perversion: in other words, the technological and physical aspects of Remaking are only given meaning through social context, through a continuous performative logic.

In essence, Remaking, though clearly physical on one level, is only made intelligible through a process of societal abjection, in which Remade bodies, previously regarded as whole subjects, are forcibly dematerialized. As Joan

Gordon notes, Remaking constitutes the apotheosis of Foucauldian discipline, of the state's biopolitical control of individual bodies (460); Remaking is only intelligible because of the discursive practices that reify it. As a disciplinary process, Remaking "constantly codifies in terms of the permitted and forbidden, or rather the obligatory and the forbidden, which means that the point on which the disciplinary mechanism focuses is not so much the things one must not do as the things that must be done" (Foucault 46): the citizens of New Crobuzon become normalized and regulated, compelled into a state of dutiful complacency in relation to the authoritarian powers that be. The Remade are the necessary concomitant to normalization, the abject by-product of biopower: they are "the abnormal, that which is incapable of conforming to the norm" (57). The extra limbs and alien tissues of the Remade, however, are merely signs of dematerialization, markers of abjection, rather than constituents or true referents of that status: though undeniably physical transformations, the Remade identity itself is a performative effect that uses the mutilated Remade body as its excuse, its alibi for oppression. Co-opted into the biopolitical project of the state, Remade bodies obfuscate the very processes of social abjection producing them. Being Remade is not simply a physical state that can only be "escaped" through surgical intervention, it is also a socially constructed and discursively sustained performative identity which renders the Remade body abject in the services of anatomo-political state regulation and regulatory control over New Crobuzon's population. Because the boundaries between Remade and whole create themselves through discourse, then, they can likewise be blurred, breached, and rejected on a discursive level, with material consequences.

We see just how tenuous the construction of the Remade actually is when the train catches up with a group of tunnellers who have been out in the badlands for months. By this time the normally rigid hierarchies and social categorizations enforced in both New Crobuzon and on the rails have begun to ebb, as Judah, one of the novel's protagonists, notes:

> There are differences between the crews. Judah sees how the tunnellers and bridgemen who have been trapped so long in the badland that they have become part of it do not differentiate as his workmates do. That though the Remade here are billeted separately, and there is still some effort made to segregate them, the punitive landscape here does not support divisions so strongly as among his own. It is as if the iron link to New Crobuzon conducts its prejudices. The iron-road Remade watch the local Remade. Judah sees them see, sees the gendarmes and the overseers see. (229)

Without the constant reinforcement of social boundaries, faced with the harsh material realities of the wilderness, the Remade and the free men begin to abandon their divisions. The discursive dematerialization of Remade bodies starts to break down. This scene heavily foreshadows the dramatic rematerialization of the Remade that takes place only a few chapters later, during the strike that spawns the Iron Council. During the strike—initiated by prostitutes but perpetuated by the rail workers—the Remade body becomes a locus of revolution, a site of transgression and transformation. The first revolt is

provoked when a Remade boy with a ruff of twitching insect limbs is beaten after refusing to work, standing in solidarity with other Remade and the rest of the workers (241). Following this initial revolt the Remade are freed, provoking the anxiety of many free workers, but as the rebel leader Ann-Hari boldly declares to a gathered crowd of strikers, "why did you fight the gendarmes? Because *they*, the Remade, wouldn't scab. They *wouldn't*. They took the beating for you. To not break *your* strike. And they did it for *us*. For *me*" (246). In an act of unprecedented and naked defiance she proceeds to kiss the Remade man called Uzman, who will also become a leader of Iron Council (246). The boy's beating and Ann-Hari's kiss are both acts of deliberate social rebellion centered on the Remade body, a body whose previous state of abjection is harnessed and reconfigured, so that it is made to matter once more. The blatant, startling physicality of both actions reminds the onlookers of the essential humanity of the Remade and thus the arbitrariness of their labels, their dematerialization: the kiss and the beating are both material acts made significant and intelligible by the discursive context surrounding them. Perhaps most significantly, the Remade are no longer termed such after the train is hijacked: they become fReemade, a linguistic transformation which perfectly represents the discursive nature of Remade and fReemade identity, the social distinctions between the two that play out in the material world. In Butler's terms, the free workers' latent identification with the abject Remade has been activated. As Butler states in *Bodies that Matter*, "a radical refusal to identify with a given position suggests that on some level an identification has already taken place, an identification that is made and disavowed" (113).

In the days following the strike and the creation of the Iron Council, and during the later uprisings in New Crobuzon, the discursive rematerialization of the Remade is characterized by cyborg politics of the type Donna Haraway envisions. Haraway notes that "the main trouble with cyborgs, of course, is that they are the illegitimate offspring of militarism and patriarchal capitalism, not to mention state socialism" (151), and indeed the train that becomes the Iron Council was conceived of as a means of advancing New Crobuzon's economic imperialism, a line of capitalist power cutting across the continent of Rohagi, a "metal trail from New Crobuzon to the swamps, the split, to Cobsea to Myrshock … iron stretched from sea to sea" (*Iron Council* 523). Like the Remade themselves, the Council was intended as an instrument of power, a tool to perpetuate the status quo, to safeguard the wealth and influence of the few at the expense of the many. Before being commandeered, the train leaves a wake of destruction and genocide wherever its rails appear, spreading across the land like a contagion. A community of indigenous creatures, the stiltspear—whose beautiful and unique culture is described painstakingly—is all but wiped out when the rail moves through their swamp. "They will not stop for you," Judah tells their elders, "They will not move for you…. If you do not go you will see what the men will bring" (160). When the stiltspear refuse to move, "bloodprice hunters" appear, mercenaries hired by Weather Wrightby to force the indigenes away: "A woman seven feet tall fights with two flails and hauls off many stiltspear dead. A witch from the

Firewater Straits snares many pairs of hands, makes a grotesque bouquet of them, sleeping a hunt-sleep to conjure dreamdevils that prey upon the camp" (163). The Iron Council, and by extension those who labor to construct it, thus constitute what Haraway would call "the final imposition of a grid of control on the planet" (154). It seems, at this stage, to be a purely oppressive entity, allied to hegemonic forces, perpetuated through the labor of abjected workers.

As Haraway also observes, however, "illegitimate offspring are often exceedingly unfaithful to their origins" (151). By rejecting its inessential father, the capitalist patriarch Weather Wrightby, the Council metamorphoses from a colonial instrument (and phallic extension of Wrightby's ego—getting ever longer, penetrating new territory, raping as it goes) into its antithesis. The strict hierarchical divisions previously separating those on the train—class, rank, race, whole or Remade—dissolve; boundaries blur and the workers become one with the train, transforming it from mere vehicle into a home, a community: "Their wealth and history is embedded in the train. They are a town moving. It is their moment in iron and grease. They control it" (*Iron Council* 261). Instead of leaving a rail, a conduit for New Crobuzon's power, the renegade train picks up its own tracks, abandoning the motives by which it was previously guided. It acquires a new innocence: "The roadbed they are building is only a sketch, a ghost in the land. The train creeps like a child" (262). Despite the sudden lack of centralized, brutal authority; despite the lack of "discipline" and control; despite the abolition of classed boundaries, "The pace is faster by orders of magnitude" (261). Within the Council, the previously shunned become accepted—rematerialized. Their abjection is forgotten: "Now the huge Remade woman who was freakish and kept from the tracks before is welcomed with her one-blow hammering" (262). The discursive boundary between whole and Remade exposes itself as a social phantasm, exorcised by the egalitarian spirit of socialist revolution.

During the resistance and the subsequent formation of the Iron Council, Remaking and sexuality are again intertwined, solidifying the parallels between non-normative sexuality and the Remade. Following Ann-Hari's transgressive kiss, prostitutes following the train "seek out Remade ostentatiously to touch" (247). The revolutionary aspect of these caresses and the sexual favors the prostitutes later perform for Remade clients lies not in the actions themselves but in their visibility, their openness. After all, Remade prostitutes have been a regular feature of New Crobuzon: "They doing it all over the city, like they doing cross-sex, khepri, humans, vods.… But you ain't supposed to admit it" (251). "Whole-and-Remade fucking" (251) only "matters" when it becomes visible, when it is no longer an abjected possibility, a source of shame; the sexual act only becomes significant when placed in the right discursive context. By embracing Remade clients the prostitutes open the door for what Butler would term "a coalition … that will transcend the simple categories of identity … that will counter and dissipate the violence imposed by restrictive bodily norms" (*Gender Trouble* xxvi). The Iron Council that the prostitutes, striking workers, indentured Remade, and other Councillors create establishes precisely this kind of coalition, a cyborg society fusing the machine (the train) and the

human into a new totality unafraid of its heterogeneous constituency, abolishing distinctions in a Remaking all its own.

The socio-political dynamics of Remaking are mirrored in New Crobuzon, the center of authoritarian power and the original site of dematerialization. In the city, the Remade (fReemade) folk hero Jack Half-a-Prayer, initially introduced in *Perdido Street Station*, becomes a symbol of resistance and revolution, a cyborg in the truest sense. He appears as a larger-than-life figure, a pulp-fiction character, a dashing renegade who saves the protagonists at the climax of *Perdido Street Station* and who subsequently becomes a fReemade martyr in *Iron Council*. He lives "a bastard liminal life," a paradoxical existence of "obscure crusades and anarchic vengeance" in an "interstitial city" (Miéville, *Perdido* 622); he has "a scorn for doors" and is said to have "wrested New Crobuzon into a new city … [striving] to save it from itself" (622). By the time of *Iron Council*, decades later, Jack has been executed by the New Crobuzon government and so ascended to become an immortal icon for anti-authoritarianism and progress. His story is told in subversive puppet theatres (*Iron Council* 66) and he has, through his extraordinary exploits, his daring raids, and political assassinations, escaped the usual disrespect reserved for Remade and become a champion of the downtrodden and the abject. Jack is significant in that he turns his Remaking—his arm was replaced with an enormous mantis claw—on those who gave it to him, viciously murdering corrupt capitalist overseers and government officials with his scissoring weapon. He rejects the role of victim and pariah into which the New Crobuzon authorities try to thrust him and refuses to see himself as "Remade." In doing so, he almost perfectly embodies Haraway's vision of the cyborg, collapsing the human, the animal, and the technological into a single totality, thoroughly breaching ideologically entrenched boundaries (151). Jack's vision of New Crobuzon as a "mongrel city" (*Perdido* 623) matches Haraway's cyborg utopia: "a world … in which people are not afraid of their joint kinship with animals and machines, not afraid of permanently partial identities and contradictory standpoints" (154). In his absolute commitment to his ideals and his total disregard for normative binaries, he "is resolutely committed to partiality, irony, intimacy, and perversity" (Haraway 151). Despite being an indisputable product of New Crobuzon's capitalist, authoritarian, hyper-normative agenda, he stands for revolution: like the Iron Council, he subverts his oppressive genesis.

Judah Low similarly exhibits cyborg characteristics, although, unlike Jack, he is not himself Remade. While Cutter's homosexuality is seen as a fixed orientation and a sickness, Judah's cyborgian queerness annihilates discursive boundaries of sexual orientation:

> When Judah did it, sex was not sex any more than anger was anger or cooking was cooking. His actions were never what they were, but were mediated always through otherworldly righteousness. Cutter was an invert but Judah was Judah Low. (*Iron Council* 128)

Able to literally remake reality around him through acts of thaumaturgical intervention, creating golems out of inanimate matter, Judah, like Jack Half-a-Prayer, turns the technology of the oppressors against them: though he learns to make golems from indigenous peoples displaced or eradicated by the oncoming railroad, his brand of thaumaturgy, "somaturgy," is also taught in New Crobuzon's elite academic institutions (199). If Jack Half-a-Prayer subverts the state of being Remade, Judah Low subverts the very act of Remaking. Like the cyborg, Judah "is oppositional, utopian, and completely without innocence" (Haraway 151), Having seen the atrocities of which New Crobuzon is capable, Judah is totally committed to the Council, will "do anything for the Iron Council" (*Iron Council* 356). Judah's vision for Iron Council mirrors Jack Half-a-Prayer's vision for New Crobuzon; committed to a non-teleological, perpetually evolving revolution, a train without a final destination, Judah embodies the same spirit of flux and anti-authoritarian progress.

Toro offers a contrast with Half-a-Prayer and Judah Low. Wrapped in layers of duplicity and subterfuge, both her sex and her Remaking are hidden (literally made invisible, abject, dematerialized) by a quasi-magical, quasi-technological helm resembling the visage of a bull which also disguises her voice. Her true motivations, likewise concealed, are petty and personal rather than social. While at first she too seems to collapse the normally rigid boundaries between human, animal, and machine, much as Half-a-Prayer does, ultimately her cyborg identity is nothing more than a disguise, a mask that she removes, exposing her flawed, inner motivations. Throughout the novel, Toro is connected repeatedly to Jack. She also reflects Judah's political struggles: her willingness to use violence to achieve political ends distinguishes her and her band from the seemingly ineffectual dissenters of Runagate Rampant and the other leftist political factions of New Crobuzon. This links her to Jack's well-remembered and widely applauded extremism, his capacity for decisive and radical action, and Judah's uprising with the rest of the Iron Council. Ori notes the dedication of Toro's band early in the novel, as he casts around for a way into the gang: "You're like Toro.… You're the only ones *doing* anything, making changes *here*, now" (emphases in original). While Jack comes to represent the potential for revolution and transgressive metamorphosis contained in the Remade body, personifying the discursive reconstruction and rematerialization of that body as "fReemade," as a kind of Butlerian Übermensch and a Harawayan cyborg in the truest sense, Toro is his dark twin, a figure unable to escape the hell of abjection by rewriting her body as fReemade. She is a vengeful fury consumed only by individual desire who sees others merely as a means of bringing about her own selfish designs. In this sense she is a sham-cyborg: her apparently "liminal transformation" (Haraway 177) is a façade beneath which individual desire and power-lust have eclipsed any longing for real social change or true metamorphosis. Though her goals seem overtly political, they are covertly personal. As Ori thinks to himself after Toro murders the mayor and her lover, the magister who sentenced her:

"*it isn't the same. It was a sideshow, it wasn't what you were here for, and that's different, that makes it different*" (396; italics in original).

Despite Toro's inefficacy as a true cyborg, New Crobuzon achieves a kind of city-wide cyborgian revolution akin to the Iron Council's: a coalition of revolutionary groups bands together into a Collective that directly opposes New Crobuzon's government through force of arms, leading to a period of extended urban warfare culminating in the restoration of New Crobuzon's authorities. While at the end of the novel "Order reigns in New Crubuzon" (561) as the Collective is brutally disbanded, its revolutionary spirit remains beneath the skin of the city, impossible to expunge. The communal uprising, informed by the Iron Council's messianic return, is compared explicitly to a Remaking (459). As in the Council, the layers of old prejudice and deeply ingrained hatred begin to dissolve within the insurgency:

> At first, in the upsurge of resentment, violence, surprise and contingencies, revenges, motives altruist and base, necessities, chaos and history, in the first moments of the New Crobuzon Collective, there had been those who refused to work with the Remade. Necessity had changed most of their minds.… an old world began to change. In a speech to the strikers of the Turgisadi Foundry, an agitator from the Caucus waved at the Remade workers to join the main mass and shouted, "We're Remaking the damn city: who knows better about that than you?" (459)

Here, individual motives are subsumed in the collective will. Though the creation of the Time Golem at the end of *Iron Council* does depend on Judah Low's messianic individuality, the Golem—with its immanentization of revolution, its crystallization of an ideological moment—derives its power from the perpetual train and its Councillors. A symbol of the collective desire for change and progress immortalized through thaumaturgy but fueled by ideological remembrance, by discourse, the Time Golem transforms the Iron Council into a monument of equality. Having, in a sense, abjected space and time, the material world of Bas-Lag, the Time Golem containing the Council becomes forever imminent, always on the verge of arriving and thus ultimately unobtainable, unrealizable—an image of utopia. Within the frozen tableau of the Council, all boundaries have been erased: "*Here in the environs of the train those Remade who make the dangerous pilgrimage are given something, are for these yards around this moment equals*" (562; emphasis in original). The Council thus stands as the ultimate symbol of rematerialization, undeniable and everlasting. While the Time Golem and its inhabitants are unable to overturn the authoritarian social order of New Crobuzon, the Golem does not symbolize defeat. As Nicholas Birns comments, "The novel's ending admits a realistic inadequacy while keeping faith with the fantastic hope for transformation" (210). The Time Golem thus testifies to the possibility of social progress and the dissipation of unjust biopolitical boundaries; by perpetuating the memory of the Iron Council it ineradicably enshrines their revolutionary spirit, their utopian fReemaking.

Iron Council, like the rest of the BAS-LAG sequence, concerns itself with liminality and thresholds, with moments of becoming, but *Iron Council* in

particular examines the social construction of those categories which are later essentialized and entrenched: gender, sexual orientation, class, race. The Remade make the processes of abjection which underlie such stratified classification monstrously visible. Fractured subjects, their bodies and their very personae are rendered grotesque, expelled violently from the social order in order to perpetuate it under the auspices of an authoritarian elite, pushed to the margins so that the center can exist at all. *Iron Council* not only explores the mechanisms of oppression, it also charts their breakdown as well. Through a defamiliarizing, cognitively estranging mode of "radical fantasy" (see Burling), Miéville confronts us with a vision of our own monstrosity. The Remade, while superficially outlandish and fantastic creatures, metaphorize the development of social phenomena we experience every day, usually unconsciously, including the formation of sexual identity, gender, orientation, and other aspects of subjectivity, categories which hegemonic authorities tend to sediment for their own biopolitical purposes. Rather than fulfilling the escapist or conciliatory functions of fantasy, the Remade demonstrate its potential not only to comment on social reality but also to subvert some of its most ossified tenets in the name of revolution. *Iron Council*'s Remade are less about magic or science-fictional technology as usually conceived than they are about social construction: the erection, maintenance, and policing of boundaries, boundaries which are not fundamental derivations from human nature but artificial constructs with material consequences. Of course, if the boundaries that structure our social reality are artificial, then they are also mutable; they can be trespassed and breached, rewritten and remade.

WORKS CITED

Anders, Lou. Interview with China Miéville. *The Believer* Apr. 2005. Online. 13 Oct. 2011.

Baur, Wolfgang. "*Perdido Street Station*: An Interview with China Miéville." *Dragon*. 21.9 (2001). 20-22.

Birns, Nicholas. "From Catacopias to Railroads: Rebellion and the Shaping of the Normal in the Bas-Lag Universe." *Extrapolation* 50.2 (2009): 200-211. Online. 11 Jan. 2012.

Burling, William J. "Periodizing the Postmodern: China Miéville's *Perdido Street Station* and the Dynamics of Radical Fantasy." *Extrapolation* 50.2 (2009): 326-44. Online. 12 Oct. 2011.

Butler, Judith. *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex."* New York: Routledge, 1993.

———. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge, 1990.

Csicsery-Ronay, Jr., Istvan. *The Seven Beauties of Science Fiction*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan UP, 2008.

Foucault, Michel. *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France 1977-78*. Trans. Graham Burchell. New York: Macmillan, 2007.

Gordon, Joan. "Hybridity, Heterotopia, and Mateship in China Miéville's *Perdido Street Station*." *SFS* 30.3 (Nov. 2003): 456-75. Online. 23 Oct. 2011.

Haraway, Donna. "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century." *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. New York: Routledge, 1991. 149-81.
Kristeva, Julia. *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. Trans. Leon S. Roudiez. New York: Columbia UP, 1982.
Miéville, China. *Iron Council*. New York: Ballantine, 2004.
———. "Jack." *Looking for Jake*. New York: Ballantine, 2005. 199-212.
———. *Perdido Street Station*. New York: Ballantine, 2000.
Rosenberg, Joanna. "The Future Historical Perspective: Miéville's Queer Durée." *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*. 16.1-2 (2010): 326-29. Online. 23 Oct. 2011.

ABSTRACT
China Miéville's *Iron Council* (2004), as one of the major texts of the New Weird, is a prime example of weird fiction; as a novel concerned with the establishment and extension of territorial and economic boundaries, however, it is also a western in its thematic ethos, its aesthetic sensibilities, and its preoccupation with notions of the frontier. This article explores the social boundaries of the titular train, the Iron Council. Using Judith Butler's notion of the social abject and the materialized/dematerialized body, the article first looks at the abjected bodies of the Remade and how they are discursively and socially constructed, finding parallels with the queer figures in the novel. It then uses cyborg theory to theorize the ways these abjected bodies can be rewritten and recuperated (made to matter, in Butler's terms) and examines the ways in which the novel troubles notions of stable ontological and social boundaries, blurring distinctions among human, animal, and machine and locating, in this dissolution, the opportunity for transgression and revolution.