

The Pied Piper as a Killer in London: China Miéville's Novel King Rat

Londra'da Bir Katil Olarak Fareli Köyün Kavalcısı: China Miéville'in Kral Fare Romanı

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Abstract

This study examines how the story of The Pied Piper of Hamelin is re-told in China Miéville's novel King Rat in London by combining elements of urban fantasy and arguing that the boundaries between the real and the fantasy world are blurred in the city of London. China Miéville is regarded as one of the most remarkable contemporary British Fantasy literature writers. In King Rat, blending the familiar cityscape with elements of myth, magic and horror creates a rich environment where ordinary lives intersect with extraordinary forces. By analysing the thematic and stylistic features of the novel, this study will reveal how King Rat exemplifies the basic elements of urban fantasy, focusing on the setting, characters, and fantastic elements and how it makes an important contribution to the genre. This analysis will provide readers with a detailed panorama of the interplay between urban settings, fantastic elements, and dark themes in contemporary literature.

Keywords: King Rat, Urban Fantasy, China Miéville, Fantasy Literature.

Öz

Bu çalışma, Fareli Köyün Kavalcısı hikâyesinin China Miéville'in Kral Fare adlı romanında Londra'da şehir fantezisi unsurlarıyla birleştirilerek nasıl yeniden anlatıldığını incelemekte ve Londra şehrinde gerçek dünya ile fantezi dünyası arasındaki sınırların ayırt edilemez hale geldiğini gözler önüne sermektedir. China Miéville, çağdaş İngiliz Fantastik edebiyatının en dikkat çekici yazarlarından biri olarak kabul edilmektedir. Yazar, Kral Fare'de tanıdık şehir manzarasını mit, büyü ve korku unsurlarıyla harmanlayarak sıradan hayatların olağanüstü güçlerle kesiştiği zengin bir ortam yaratır. Bu çalışma, romanın tematik ve üslup özelliklerini analiz ederek, romandaki mekan, karakter ve fantastik unsurlara odaklanarak bu özelliklerin şehir fantezisinin temel unsurlarını nasıl örneklemediğini ve türe nasıl önemli bir katkı sağladığını ortaya koyacaktır. Bu analiz, okuyuculara çağdaş edebiyatta kentsel ortamlar, fantastik öğeler ve karanlık temalar arasındaki etkileşimin ayrıntılı bir panoramasını sunmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Kral Fare, Şehir Fantezisi, China Miéville, Fantezi Edebiyatı.

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The Pied Piper as a Killer in London: China Miéville's Novel *King Rat*

Along with the remarkable increase in the number of works written in the field of fantasy literature in recent years, various subgenres of this genre have begun to emerge. Among these subgenres, urban fantasy [UF] has gained tremendous popularity as one of the prominent subgenres in contemporary literature with its perspectives that push the boundaries of traditional fantasy literature and explore new narrative realms. In this context, China Miéville's *King Rat* stands out as an essential representative of the UF genre. Published in 1998, *King Rat* presents readers with a skilfully orchestrated blend of the real setting of the city of London, supernatural elements, and a series of violent events, offering a remarkable and gripping reading experience. In this study, firstly, general information will be given about fantasy literature and its sub-genres of UF, then China Miéville's literary direction as a writer of fantasy literature will be discussed, and the characteristics of *King Rat* as a representative of UF will be analysed.

In the 21st century, fantasy literature has emerged as a vital and influential genre, significantly shaping contemporary literature. Its importance lies in its ability to transcend the boundaries of reality, offering imaginative and thought-provoking narratives that explore the complexities of the human experience. Fantasy literature provides a unique space for authors to delve into social, political, and philosophical themes through metaphor and allegory, allowing readers to engage with complex ideas in an engaging and accessible manner. Moreover, in an increasingly interconnected and technologically driven world, fantasy literature offers an essential escape from the mundane, providing readers with a much-needed respite from reality and a means to explore different cultures, mythologies, and fantastical realms. It fosters imagination, empathy, and creativity, encouraging readers to expand their horizons and challenge preconceptions.

There are various opinions regarding fantasy and the lack of consensus as to what it implies requires a brief outline of its diverse definitions to provide a general impression. In her study, Kathryn Hume (1984) suggests that all literature:

is the product of two impulses. These are mimesis, felt as the desire to imitate, to describe events, people, and objects with such verisimilitude that others can share your experience; and fantasy, the desire to change givens and alter reality—out of boredom, play, vision, longing for something lacking, or need for metaphoric images that will bypass the audience's verbal defences. (p. 20)

As can be understood from Hume's ideas the interplay between mimesis and fantasy in literature is a fundamental aspect of the creative process. It allows writers to navigate between the realms of reality and imagination, offering readers a diverse range of experiences and insights. This duality not only enriches literature but also mirrors the intricate interplay between our desires for representation and transformation in the broader human experience.

Apart from Hume's definition, which underlines the difference between fantasy and other genres, in Andrew's study with Rennison (2009), the related definition seems to be an inclusive one that covers some of the most important characteristics of fantasy:

Fantasy is the literature of imaginary and inexplicable places, times, events, and beings. Fantasy stories take place either in our world or others, in our time or other times, their authors describing imaginary things that they do not attempt to explain rationally or scientifically, sometimes evoking magic and the supernatural to provide an excuse for the presence of these imaginary elements. (p. xi)

Fantasy indeed thrives on the power of imagination and allows authors and readers to explore worlds, events, and beings that exist solely in the realm of creativity. This imaginative aspect is one of the defining features of fantasy literature. Fantasy stories often transport readers to entirely fictional settings, eras, and situations. These elements can be as diverse as the author's imagination allows, from otherworldly realms to alternate histories, from mythical creatures to entirely new species. The above statement accurately indicates that fantasy can be set in various places and times. Some fantasy stories are set in our world but feature hidden magical elements (UF), while others create entirely new universes. This diversity in settings and timeframes is one of the genre's strengths, offering a rich tapestry for authors to explore. Unlike science fiction, which often strives to provide logical or scientific explanations for its speculative elements, fantasy tends to embrace the inexplicable. It does not always adhere to the laws of physics or logic. Instead, it often relies on the suspension of disbelief and encourages readers to accept the fantastic elements as part of the narrative's internal logic. Many fantasy stories incorporate magic and the supernatural as central elements. These mystical forces serve as a bridge between the ordinary and the extraordinary, allowing authors to introduce and justify fantastical elements within their narratives. Magic can also be a source of wonder and conflict in fantasy worlds.

Imagination might be considered a key term in defining fantasy as Richard Mathews (2002) remarks "fantasy unlocks imagination" (p. xi) and the boundaries of fantasy are circumscribed by the power of imagination. Similarly, Briab Attebery (1992) argues that "the fantastic mode, by contrast, is a vast subject, taking in all literary manifestations of the imagination's ability to soar above the merely possible" (p. 2). This phrase emphasizes that the fantastic mode in literature is a vast and diverse field that encompasses various literary forms and is defined by its exploration of imaginative elements that go beyond what is conventionally considered possible or real. It points to the rich creative potential and the boundless realms of storytelling that this mode allows authors to explore. From a different perspective, it could be claimed that all types of fiction derive from the writer's power of imagination, however, some works are surely regarded as more imaginary than others, and as Cynthia Duncan (2010) indicates "[...] if the work presents a world which varies so greatly from our own that it appears more invented than familiar and true, we are apt to talk about it as a product of the writer's imagination" (p. 1). How the readers perceive and discuss the literature is emphasized here. When a literary work introduces a world or elements that are significantly different from reality, readers are inclined to acknowledge it as a result of the author's creative imagination. It speaks to the power of literature to transport readers into new and imaginative realms and reflects the fundamental role of creativity in the art of storytelling.

In addition to imagination, the term impossibility is another important concept while defining the fantasy as Gary Wolfe (2004) defines fantasy "as a fictional narrative describing events that the reader believes to be impossible" (p. 271). Also, Mendlesohn and James (2009) emphasize the significance of the impossibility for fantasy in their definition and argue that "the most obvious construction of fantasy in literature and art is the presence of the impossible and the unexplainable" (p. 3). According to Mendlesohn and James's argument one of the main ways to identify fantasy in literature and art is by observing the inclusion of elements that are beyond the bounds of what is possible or rational. Fantasy invites readers and viewers to suspend their disbelief and immerse themselves in worlds where the extraordinary and the inexplicable take centre stage, offering an escape into the realms of imagination and wonder. As can be understood from the various scholars' opinions, the concept of impossibility is used by fantasy literature writers so that they can provide new perspectives to the readers and help them understand real-world issues using impossibility in secondary worlds. Clute and Grant (1996), while defining fantasy in *The Encyclopaedia of Fantasy*, also highlight the relationship between fantasy and impossibility:

A fantasy text is a self-coherent narrative. When set in this world, it tells a story which is impossible in the world as we perceive it [...] when set in an otherworld, that otherworld will be impossible, though stories set there may be possible in its terms. (p. 338)

Fantasy literature thrives on the tension between the impossible and the internally consistent. Authors create worlds and narratives that, while fantastical and beyond the scope of our everyday experiences, follow their own rules and invite readers to explore these imaginative realms. This capacity to present the impossible coherently and engagingly is a hallmark of the genre, making it a source of fascination and escape for readers seeking to venture beyond the boundaries of reality.

Urban Fantasy

After providing a brief overview of fantasy literature, it is essential to focus on various subgenres. Traditionally, fantasy subgenres are classified as high and low fantasy; if the story is set completely or partly in the real world, then it is regarded as low fantasy; however, if it is set in an alternate/secondary world, then it is called high fantasy. In addition to this classification, while Martin (2009) categorizes the subgenres of fantasy literature as “high fantasy, adventure fantasy, fairy tale fiction, magical realism, and dark fantasy” (p. 37), Manlove (1999) mentions six distinct subgenres; secondary world, metaphysical, emotive, comic, subversive, and children’s fantasy (p. 4). In this study, UF will be focused on analyzing *King Rat*.

UF, not surprisingly, means fantasy set in cities, either an existing one made fantastical, such as London or Hong Kong, or a fantastical one, such as Terry Pratchett’s Ankh-Morpork made real in accordance with the logic of the related story. Further, Alexander C. Irvine (2012) explains the characterization of these two kinds of cities as such: “One comes from an exploration of the folkloric tradition and places it in an urban environment; the other derives from the tradition of exploration of urban existence and uses the devices of the fantastic to continue this exploration (p. 201).

Clute and Grant (1996) define UF as “normally texts where fantasy and mundane worlds intersect and interweave throughout a tale which is significantly about a real city” (p. 975). Stefan Ekman (2016), who is well-known for his studies on UF, refers to UF as a genre on its own rather than see it as a subgenre to fantasy and states that: “its [UF’s] root genres are not only fantasy but Gothic, horror and romance, and it can also draw on mystery, science fiction, and crime fiction” (p. 452). Similarly, Hobson and Anyivo (2019) point out the difficulty of categorizing UF: “The ambiguity of urban fantasy as a genre grows from the blending of many genres into one. Urban fantasy complicates the idea that genres are stable with fixed borders and consistent iconography (p.19). From a different perspective, in her description, Helen Young (2016) emphasizes the role of UF solving problems of modernity such as loneliness, isolation, fragmentation, and alienation, she characterizes all these problems as identity trouble and remarks:

Tolkien and his followers turned to the medieval in search of authentic identity, while Urban Fantasy also looks to the past in search of identity, but brings that past forward into the present, populating the streets of small towns and cities with the beings of folklore and mythology. (p. 141)

Since urban space is essential in UF, the setting plays an active role in the narrative. Hobson and Anyivo (2019) underline this fact, adding that the location itself is a character in the plot of UF and expresses: “The city is alive, not simply as a location but creating both obstacles and aids for the protagonists” (p. 1). In light of this basic information about what UF is, the novel *King Rat* can be regarded and evaluated as a representative of UF. However, before starting the analysis, some information about China Miéville is to be given.

The English fantasy writer China Miéville has written a distinguished body of work; he has eight novels and stories published in various anthologies, and *King Rat* is his debut novel. *King Rat* stands as an exemplar, skilfully weaving the enchantment of fantastical elements into the fabric of a modern urban milieu. Through the creative synthesis of the supernatural with the familiar contours of city life, Miéville crafts a narrative that not only challenges conventional distinctions but also offers a profound exploration of the urban experience, making *King Rat* a pivotal work deserving of meticulous scholarly inquiry.

Sherryl Vint (2009) indicates China Miéville's significance for British speculative fiction: "China Miéville is an important figure in a number of literary contexts. His work is at the centre of the renaissance of British science fiction and fantasy literature, often referred to as the British Boom" (p.197). Further, Thomas Scholz (2018) emphasizes that modern fantasy was ignored until the middle of the twentieth century and states Miéville's role in its development as such: "But in the end, it took academia only a few decades to overturn this false estimation. Now, authors such as J.R.R. Tolkien, Ursula Le Guin, China Miéville and Terry Pratchett are on their way to being canonized (p.227). In addition, Rayment (2014) also explains the literary style of China Miéville together with Pratchett and Pullman:

They displace elements of the 'real world' of our everyday 'social reality', decontextualize them, give them a non-real appearance (an appearance that is transformed and disrupted) and then throw it back at us 'real being'. A fantasy reality that is more than 'reality' itself. This is how they make us question over and over again what is postulated as self-evident, how they disturb our mental habits, the way that we do and think things, how they dissipate what is familiar and accepted, how they make us re-examine rules and institutions. In short, this is how they radically make us see again. (p. 18)

The power of fantasy literature lies in its capacity to reframe and reinterpret reality, prompting readers to see the world with fresh eyes and question the familiar. It invites us to explore the boundaries of our imagination and consider the limitless possibilities of the human experience. Doing so, it plays a vital role in the ongoing process of personal and societal growth and transformation.

With his works, China Miéville has become an influential voice in speculative fiction, renowned for his sweeping imaginative scope, erudite political perspective, and richly evocative prose style. His debut novel *King Rat* is London phantasmagoria and kin to Neil Gaiman's *Neverwhere*. However, it was with the publication of *Perdido Street Station* in 2000 that Miéville became a literary sensation. *Perdido Street Station* is the Bas-Lag series' first novel, followed by *The Scar* and *Iron Council*. Although *King Rat* received great acclaim when it was first published in 1998, it was later overshadowed by these three novels, known as the Bas-Lag trilogy, written between 2000 and 2004, and academic studies on the author have generally centred around the Bas-Lag trilogy.

***King Rat* as a Representative of Urban Fantasy**

King Rat is a modernized version of The Pied Piper of Hamelin tale. However, China Miéville has not adapted the fairy tale to his novel but has re-constructed a story based on a murder. The novel progresses both fast and intriguingly. The novel tells the story of Saul Garamond whose father turns out to be a rat, while his mother is a human. Saul finds himself in a bloody war against the Pied Piper of Hamelin who wants to kill Saul.

The main argument of this study is that *King Rat* can be regarded as a representative of UF. In order to discuss this claim, Stefan Ekman's ideas in his study entitled *Urban Fantasy: A Literature of the Unseen* is to be used. In his study, Ekman (2016) collects eleven accounts written about UF to determine the

basic features of the genre. After his evaluations, he underlines three distinctive points: the setting, characters, and fantastic elements peculiar to UF. Ekman (2016) starts with the distinctive characterization of the setting in UF; he explains that:

Urban Fantasy can be set in a secondary world metropolis which is itself a central figure of the story, a setting integral to the goings-on that can be considered a main character; or in a modern primary world which may or may not have become aware of the supernatural or mythological beings and events that dwell in it. (p. 463)

Miéville is known for his vivid and imaginative world-building, and *King Rat* is no exception. The story is set primarily in London, specifically in the urban landscape of the city. Its crowded streets, dark neighbourhoods, iconic buildings, and rivers function as a backdrop for the events of the story. The setting comes alive and contributes to the unique atmosphere and tone of the story. For example, after King Rat breaks Saul out of the prison in the police station, Saul finds himself in a supernatural and mystic world, although the setting is still London. Following these fantastic events, i.e., meeting King Rat and escaping from prison with him, Saul's thoughts and descriptions of London begin to change. His new perspective regarding the city is depicted in the novel as such: "The city had been made unsafe. Saul felt it yawn before him, infinitely vaster than he had imagined unknowable and furtive" (Miéville, 1998, p.53). For Saul, the fact that the city in which he has lived for years suddenly becomes a great unknown brings questions about the city. As Saul learns that London is much bigger than he had imagined, he questions the city:

"So, so ... " said Saul slowly. *So, What is London?* he thought. *If you can be what you are, what's London? What's the world? I've had it all wrong. Do werewolves and trolls lurk under bridges in the parks? What are the boundaries of the world?* (Miéville, 1998, p. 54)

Saul's continuous questions include a kind of curiosity and contemplation, and they seem to be asked to explore the nature of reality. Especially, the question 'What is London' is a rhetorical one. If there are supernatural creatures like King Rat living in London, then what he has known about London needs to be re-evaluated in the context of the fantastic events and creatures he encountered. The following questions further Saul's inquiries into the nature of truth. As Saul himself sees it, if King Rat exists in this world, what is the limit, and what else could be possible in this world? These questions imply a kind of realization that the world could be far more complex and supernatural than Saul previously believed. Further, when Saul questions the nature of reality, he realizes that he has lived in a false reality so far, as is seen in his remark, '*I've had it all wrong*'. Also, his words about supernatural beings like werewolves and trolls signify fantasy. After meeting King Rat, Saul sees it possible to encounter other fantastical creatures within the boundaries of the world. The last question, '*What are the boundaries of the world?*' could be seen as the most comprehensive and challenging one. The writer encourages the readers to think about the unknown. Also, within the framework of UF, it could also be claimed that the writer indicates that the boundaries between the real world and the world of fantasy are blurred and not clear; in other words, it is not known where the boundaries of the real-world end and the fantasy world begins. The two worlds are intertwined.

When King Rat takes Saul to the underground, he sees a manhole and, to Saul's surprise, he defines it as his home and enters it. Then, it is Saul's turn to enter from the manhole. His first impression of the sewer is as follows:

Saul stared into the pit. The swirling winds of the courtyard yanked at the rich-smelling wisps of vapor emerging from the hole. The sewer was gorged with darkness; it seemed to overflow, seeping out of the open concrete and obscuring the ground. The organic scent of compost billowed out. Just visible, a ladder driven into the subterranean brick plunged out of sight.

Where it was riveted to the wall, metal had oxidized and leached out profusely, making the sewer bleed rust. The sound of a thin flow of water was amplified by the yawning tunnels, making for a bizarre booming trickle. (Miéville, 1998, p. 84)

The city seen below unsettles the readers and as Pike (1981) indicated “see the city from below is to demonise it” (p.36). Further, this paragraph describes a different setting- underground London and sensory details are employed. In his vivid and atmospheric depiction, Miéville skilfully uses descriptive language to evoke a sense of foreboding and otherworldliness. The fact that the sewer is likened to a ‘pit’ which is ‘gorged with darkness’ creates a dark tone and again the setting functions as a character in the story. The use of the word ‘gorged’ to describe the darkness is particularly effective, as it suggests that the sewer is overflowing with something dark and sinister. This dark atmosphere is further intensified using the expressions ‘swirling winds’ and ‘rich-smelling wisps of vapor’. Moreover, the expression ‘ladder driven into the subterranean’ could be regarded as one of the elements of UF since the ladder seems to be a gateway or a portal to another world. The auditory imagery is equally compelling. The sound of a thin flow of water is amplified by the yawning tunnels, creating a disorienting effect, and emphasizing the strangeness of the scene. The sound of the water is also a powerful image, as it suggests that the protagonist is being swallowed up by the darkness. The ‘bizarre booming trickle’ adds an eerie quality, enhancing the sense of the uncanny that often defines the UF genre. Miéville uses his mastery of language to create a vivid and atmospheric scene that is both chilling and exciting. He masterfully combines the familiar elements of an urban landscape with the fantastical, blurring the boundaries between the mundane and the magical. By means of his evocatively crafted narrative, he immerses the readers into a concealed realm beneath the Earth’s surface, where enigmas and perils lie in wait. The passage undeniably prompts readers to contemplate the forthcoming developments, exemplifying the seamless integration of the tangible world with the supernatural, characteristic of the UF genre.

After gaining the power to control the rats, Saul emerges from the sewers and wanders through the alleyways of London, where he meets a homeless young woman and sees that she is afraid of the rats in the street. With his extraordinary power, Saul controls the rats in front of her eyes. While the woman is very surprised by this situation, Saul sits next to her and his ideas about London are exactly descriptive of UF: “He looked to his right and saw the lights of Edgware Road, only ten feet away. Again, he thought: these things take place so close to the real city, and no one can see them. They take place ten feet away, somewhere in another world” (Miéville, 1998, p. 166).

Through the protagonist Saul’s observation of the lights of Edgware Road, a familiar and tangible urban setting, the author effectively conveys the hidden nature of fantastical events that occur in the shadows. Edgware Road has often been described as a diverse and vibrant urban setting, making it a compelling backdrop for writers exploring themes of multiculturalism, urban life, and the convergence of different cultures. Writers have used Edgware Road as a symbol of London’s cosmopolitan character and its ability to absorb and adapt to diverse influences. The paragraph begins with Saul looking to his right and seeing the lights of Edgware Road, only ten feet away. This juxtaposition of the real and supernatural worlds is a key element of UF, and Miéville successfully captures this duality. As indicated by Mark Bould “*King Rat* is, consequently, a novel of multiple cities—or, rather, of a city’s multiplicities” (p. 318). The fact that the supernatural world is so close to the real world, yet invisible to most people, creates a sense of mystery and suspense. The phrase ‘somewhere in another world’ is particularly effective, as it suggests that the supernatural world is not just a different dimension, but a different reality altogether. This sense of otherworldliness is further enhanced by the mention of the ‘lights of Edgware Road’, which represent the everyday world that Saul knows and understands. The paragraph ends with Saul’s realization that ‘these things take place ten feet away.’ This realization is a

powerful reminder that the supernatural world is always present, even in the midst of the everyday world. It is a reminder that there is more to the world than what we can see, and that there are forces at work that we do not fully understand. By highlighting the proximity of the extraordinary to the ordinary, he invites readers to question what lies beneath the surface of their own urban environments.

After Saul sends rats all over the city in search of the Piper, he observes the city from an area surrounded by rubble and scaffolding that overlooks the rear facade of the buildings in London:

This point of view was dangerous for the observer, as well as for the city. It was only when it was seen from these angles that he could believe London had been built brick by brick, not born out of its own mind. But the city did not like to be found out. Even as he saw it clearly for the product it was, Saul felt it square up against him. The city and he faced each other. He saw London from an angle against which it had not front, at a time when its guard was down. (Miéville, 1998, p. 257)

This paragraph could be regarded as one of the best examples supporting Ekman's idea that the setting itself is a character in UF. Also, in UF the city is not described as a safe place and "images which depict the city as an unruly, unsettling and disorderly place are increasingly dominant" (Bannister & Fyfe, 2001, p. 807). Further, the paragraph delves deep into the essence of UF by exploring the complex relationship between the city and its observer. Through Saul's dangerous point of view, the author unveils the concealed nature of London, emphasizing its constructed existence rather than a spontaneous creation. Similarly, Bould underlines that "Miéville's London is profoundly dialectical. The opposition *King Rat* asserts between the reality of the rat city and the falsity of the human city is nothing more than chauvinism. The city multiplies across fractal scales and fresh perspectives" (p. 319). Further, Miéville's choice of words, such as 'dangerous' and 'found out,' imbues the observer's perspective with a sense of risk and vulnerability. This speaks to the inherent dangers associated with unravelling the hidden truths of the city's origins and nature. The suggestion that the city 'did not like to be found out' implies a consciousness, an entity that guards its secrets fiercely. It reinforces the notion that the city itself is a character in the narrative, with its own desires and defences. Also, Saul's perception of London as a product constructed 'brick by brick' challenges the notion of a city birthed from its own mind, suggesting a more deliberate, human-made origin. This perspective aligns with the core of UF, which often subverts our perceptions of reality by exposing the constructed nature of our urban environments. The paragraph ends with Saul feeling as though the city is 'square up against him'. This suggests that the city is aware of being observed and that it does not like being found out. This is a powerful image, as it suggests that the city is not just a passive object, but a force that can actively resist human understanding. The personification of London heightens the sense of confrontation and establishes a dynamic relationship between Saul and the city. This paragraph captures the essence of UF by highlighting the symbiotic relationship between the city and its observer. It emphasizes the city as a living entity with secrets to protect, while the observer's perspective is a dangerous act of defiance and discovery. Miéville challenges our perceptions of urban landscapes, encouraging us to question the hidden narratives and concealed histories that lie beneath the surface.

The second distinctive point that Ekman (2016) makes about the features of UF is about the characterization, he states:

The protagonist can be a social outsider; or can belong to a group that in some way creates order out of chaos and makes the unknown (artists, musicians, scholars, investigators); or has the physical, mental, or magical skills to take on supernatural threats. [...] The protagonist and their allies can belong to the fantastic domain or not, be born into it or recently have discovered their powers. (p. 463)

Saul, the novel's protagonist, lost his mother at an early age and has conflicts with the person he thinks is his father. Saul's group of friends are people who like to make music, so Saul has a close connection with music. Especially, Natasha is portrayed as a real musical genius. There is also a police inspector in the novel, which also fits the description above. Moreover, the novel's antagonist is the Piper from the fairy tale *The Pied Piper of Hamelin*. It tells the story of a town called Hamelin that is infested with rats. The townspeople, desperate to rid themselves of the rats, promise a reward to a mysterious piper who claims he can solve their problem. The piper plays a magical tune on his pipe that lures the rats out of Hamelin and into the Weser River, where they drown. However, when the townspeople refuse to pay the piper the promised reward, he becomes angry and vows to take revenge. The piper returns to Hamelin and plays a new tune that lures away all the town's children, except for one lame boy who cannot keep up. The children are led into a cave in a nearby mountain, and the entrance closes behind them. The townspeople are left in sorrow and regret for breaking their promise. Accordingly, the Piper has come to the real world from a fantastic and folkloric realm. Moreover, King Rat, the former king of rats; Anansi, the king of spiders; and Loplop, the king of birds, are also characters from the fantastic world.

Saul's mother is a human, but his father who raped his mother, is a rat- King Rat. Therefore, Saul is a character with half-rat and half-human characteristics. However, he is unaware of his rat characteristics until he meets King Rat. Shortly after they meet, King Rat begins to inform Saul about the powers he possesses but does not know about. When King Rat and Saul get hungry, King Rat goes through the rubbish, looking for something to eat, but Saul says he cannot eat from the rubbish. King Rat asks Saul "When was the last time you puked?" (p. 51) and continues:

You can't recall because you've never done it. Never spewed nothing. You've been ill, I'll bet, but not like other Godfers. No colds or sneezing; only some queer sickness making you shiver for days, once or twice. But even then, not a sign of puke [...] You've got rat blood in your veins. There's nothing you can't stomach. (Miéville, 1998, p. 51)

In this paragraph, the concept of UF is portrayed by exploring Saul's unique nature and blending human and rat elements within him. Miéville employs evocative language to convey the transformative nature of UF and its ability to challenge our conventional understanding of identity. The mention of Saul's inability to recall or experience vomiting suggests a departure from typical human experiences and bodily functions. This sets the stage for the revelation that Saul possesses rat blood in his veins, blurring the boundaries between species and hinting at a hidden, fantastical realm that intertwines with the urban environment. The line 'You've got rat blood in your veins' also exemplifies the essence of UF, where ordinary individuals discover extraordinary elements within themselves and their surroundings. The fusion of human and animal characteristics creates a sense of duality and adds depth to the narrative. Saul's rat blood implies a connection to the underground London, aligning him with the hidden world of the rats and granting him a unique perspective on the city. The idea that there is 'nothing [Saul] can't stomach' reinforces the notion of his transformative nature and highlights his resilience. It suggests an adaptability that allows him to navigate the dark and fantastical aspects of the urban landscape. This concept of embracing the extraordinary and accepting the uncanny is a common theme in UF, where characters often confront with and integrate fantastical elements into their identities.

This paragraph is a good example of how UF can blend the real world with the supernatural. The fact that Saul has rat blood in his veins is a supernatural element, but it is also grounded. Saul's physical advantages are not just magical, and they are also physiological. Miéville's paragraph showcases the blending of human and supernatural elements, exemplifying the essence of UF. It challenges the preconceived notions of identity, inviting us to question the boundaries between species and the hidden potentials within ourselves. By intertwining the fantastical and the urban, Miéville demonstrates the

power of UF to disrupt the ordinary.

As the story progresses, Saul's fantastical powers begin to become more apparent. This change in Saul is illustrated with the following expression: "He was shedding his humanity like an old snakeskin, scratching it off in great swatches. It was so fast, this assumption of a new form inside" (p. 83). These sentences describe a metamorphosis since Saul sheds his humanity and assumes a new form. These sentences also raise questions about the nature of identity. Saul is a half-human, half-rat hybrid, and this means that he is not fully human. He has some of the same physical characteristics as rats such as climbing buildings easily, being able to eat anything without feeling nauseous and communicating with mice. This raises the question of whether Saul is genuinely human or whether he is something entirely different. The comparison of Saul shedding his humanity to an old snakeskin highlights the profound and rapid nature of his transformation. The image evokes a sense of renewal and rebirth, as Saul discards his previous identity and embraces a new form. This theme of metamorphosis is a recurring motif in UF, where characters often undergo profound changes, both physically and psychologically. Further, the speed and intensity of Saul's transformation are implied with the phrase 'scratching it off in great swatches'. This heightened pace is characteristic of UF narratives, where events unfold rapidly, propelling characters into unknown territories and revealing hidden aspects of their identities. The phrase 'assumption of a new form inside' shows the core of UF—the blurring of boundaries between the ordinary and the extraordinary. Saul's internal transformation reflects the transformative power of the urban environment itself, where characters discover hidden potentials and embrace their newfound identities. This internal metamorphosis mirrors the external changes that occur within the urban landscape, as fantastical elements intertwine with the mundane.

After King Rat introduces Saul to his friends Anansi and Loplop, the three of them tell Saul that the one who is after him and wants to kill him is the Piper who slaughtered rats in Hamelin 700 years ago. In addition to rats, the piper also committed genocide on spiders and birds, which is the reason for Anansi and Loplop's hostility towards him. The reason why Piper wants to kill Saul is that Saul, who is half man and half rat, is not affected by Piper's music. Unlike all other creatures, the Piper cannot control Saul with his melodies and therefore wants to eliminate him as is stated in the novel:

"He [Piper] can choose, see?" said King Rat. 'Will I call the rats? The birds? The spiders? Dogs? Cats? Fish? Reynards? Minks? Kinder? He can ring anyone's bell, charm anything he fancies. Just choose and he plays the right tune. Owt he chooses, Saul, except for one thing. "He can't charm you, Saul. You're rat and human, more and less than each. Call the rats and the person in you is deaf to it. Call to the man and the rat'll twitch its tail and run. He can't charm you, Saul. You're double trouble'. (Miéville, 1998, p.133)

The use of the Piper adds a significant layer of intrigue and mythology to the story. The character of the Piper draws upon folkloric and mythical associations, enriching the UF narrative with a sense of ancient power and mystery. By incorporating this legendary character into the narrative, Miéville taps into our collective cultural consciousness, invoking a sense of familiarity and curiosity. The Piper assumes a prominent role as a powerful and dangerous figure. His presence introduces a supernatural and ethereal quality to the story, heightening the sense of urban enchantment. The Piper's abilities and influence over the rat population contribute to the overall thematic exploration of the hidden and magical elements that exist within the urban landscape. Furthermore, the Piper serves as a catalyst for the conflict and tension that drives the plot forward. His actions and motivations create a sense of mystery and suspense, as characters navigate the complex dynamics and power struggles associated with his presence. The Piper's presence underscores the idea that UF often involves ancient and timeless forces intertwining with modern urban settings. By incorporating the Piper into the novel, Miéville expands the mythological and folkloric dimensions of the narrative, weaving together elements of the

past and present. The character not only adds depth to the UF world but also reflects the underlying themes of transformation, hidden power, and the interplay between the human and supernatural realms. If we reconsider Ekman's ideas on UF characters, the fact that the Piper is both a musician and a folkloric character from the fantasy universe shows how important this character is for the novel.

The last distinctive point suggested by Ekman (2016) for explaining the features of UF is the use of fantastic elements, he proposes:

The fantastic can derive from existing myths and folklore, as well as from beings well-established in Gothic horror stories, or it can arise from the urban environment itself. The existence of the fantastic can be known to the entire world or to the protagonist or can be a shocking discovery that becomes familiar over the course of the story or series. (p. 463)

The use of fantastic elements in *King Rat* enhances the urban setting, creates allegorical layers, drives character development and conflict, builds an immersive world, and provides readers with an engaging and imaginative story. These elements are key to the success of the novel as a work of UF. As mentioned above, the story of the Pied Piper of Hamelin strengthens and advances the plot of this novel. Moreover, retelling this folkloric story in a modern London setting with a combination of fantastic and ordinary characters attracts and intrigues the reader. What makes the plot more interesting is that the Piper, traditionally mentioned as a good character, appears as an antagonist in this story. In other words, while the original story is told from the point of view of humans, in this novel, the same story is told from the point of view of animals, especially rats. So much so that *King Rat* expresses that genocide was committed against his race. In the novel, the fact that the piper tortures and kills people as well as animals brings to the forefront the feature of UF containing both gothic and crime stories. Throughout the story, the fantastic elements are usually linked with the actions of the Piper. The dead bodies of two police officers killed by the Piper are described as follows:

The skin folded up under the chin and became a tightly wound coil, a skein of flesh wrung out to dry. The body was chest-down, limbs uncomfortable, and the head was facing the ceiling, twisted around nearly 180 degrees. [...] Crowley looked at the seated man and made a small disgusted noise, as if at rotten food. He stared into the ruinous mess of the other's face. Blood was smeared across the wall. The dead man's uniform was saturated with it, stiff like an oilskin coat. (Miéville, 1998, p. 77)

Here, the reader is confronted with a disturbing description. In the realm of UF, fantastical elements blend with urban settings to create a unique atmosphere. This paragraph captures the dark and gritty nature often associated with the genre. The way that Miéville describes the scene is both realistic and spooky. The details are so vivid that the reader can almost see the body for themselves, but the way that the body is contorted, and the blood is smeared across the wall is also distinctly unnatural. This creates a sense of unease and suspense, as the reader is left wondering what could have caused such a gruesome death. In Piper's next murder, he kidnaps an innocent friend of Saul in order to learn his whereabouts, and after torturing him, Piper hangs him on the railway track after which he is hit by a train. Again, in this murder, as in the above quotation, the gory scenes are depicted quite clearly. By depicting violence and gore, Miéville sets an unsettling and visceral tone, immersing readers in a world where danger lurks in the shadows. This contributes to the overall aesthetic and mood of the UF setting, creating an environment where supernatural elements can coexist with urban realities.

UF often involves the integration of fantastical elements into the familiar urban landscape as stated by Jim Butcher: "It's [UF] expanded in almost every sense, including nearly any type of modern setting and a broader variety of characters" (p. 25). Accordingly, the presence of blood and gruesome imagery can serve as a bridge between the mundane and the supernatural. It highlights the collision of the

ordinary and the extraordinary, showcasing how the fantastical intrudes upon and disrupts the everyday world. The use of blood can symbolize the breaking of boundaries, the manifestation of hidden powers or creatures, and the revealing of a hidden layer of reality. Blood could be regarded as a potent symbol associated with life, death, and transformation. In the context of *King Rat*, the blood and its presence on the wall and the saturated uniform can symbolize violence, sacrifice, and the consequences of supernatural encounters. It can represent the hidden struggles and conflicts that exist within the urban landscape, both literal and metaphorical.

Saul's fight with the Piper could be another example of the use of fantastical elements within the story. Loplop, the king of birds, helps Saul escape from the Piper, grabs his body, and flies Saul away with him. However, the Piper uses his pipe to control the birds and chases after them. This event is described in the work as follows: "They [Birds] converged on the Piper, imploding from all sectors of the sky toward his hunched shoulders, and then en masse they rose again, suddenly clumsy, trying to fly in concert, dragging the Piper's body through the air with them" (Miéville, 1998, p. 191). Miéville uses imagery to create a powerful mental picture. This vivid description engages the reader's senses and immerses them in the scene. The sentence builds tension and suspense as the birds attempt to fly in concert with the Piper's body. The word "clumsy" implies a struggle or lack of coordination, adding to the sense of urgency in the scene. These statements engage the reader's imagination and set the stage for further developments in the story; they also effectively convey a sense of urgency, chaos, and mystery.

As an example of 'a shocking discovery' underlined by Ekman in his definition, Saul learns that he has rat powers and starts to develop these powers one by one throughout the novel. However, Saul, who cannot be a complete human or a complete rat, is always in a state of conflict throughout the novel. Especially, after he learns that King Rat is actually his real father and that he raped his mother, his conflict within himself increases even more. In the last part of the novel, the Piper's melodies that control both humans and animals do not work on Saul. Saul attacks the Piper heroically and shouts:

I'm not rat plus man, get it? I'm bigger than either one, and I'm bigger than the two. I'm a new thing. You can't make me dance. [...] I'm the new blood, motherfucker. I'm more than the sum of my parts. You can't play my fucking tune, and your flute means nothing to me. (Miéville, 1998, p. 301)

This paragraph is a powerful expression of the protagonist Saul Garamond's identity crisis and indicates the fantastic elements he has. Saul is half-human, half-rat, and he struggles to find his place in the world. He is constantly being told that he is not a "real" person, and he is forced to conform to the expectations of both human and rat societies. In UF, the characters are expected to learn "to extend their view of life beyond solely personal problems to much larger issues" (Weiss, 2006, p. 110). Saul's declaration of being "bigger than either one" and "bigger than the two" speaks to the concept of individual agency and power. In UF, characters often discover hidden strengths or tap into supernatural abilities, surpassing the limitations of their ordinary selves. Saul's assertion of being more significant than the sum of his parts aligns with this motif, highlighting his unique and potent nature within the UF framework. In the context of UF, the paragraph can be seen as a commentary on the nature of identity in a world where the supernatural exists alongside the mundane.

Conclusion

China Miéville's *King Rat* emerges as a compelling representative of the UF genre, blending the supernatural with the urban landscape to craft a narrative that re-imagines the city of London and the boundaries of reality itself. Through the use of fantastic elements, Miéville intricately weaves a story that not only captivates with its imaginative world-building but also serves as a commentary on the

hidden facets of urban life. The protagonist's transformation from an ordinary denizen of the city to a pivotal figure within the realm of the supernatural highlights the genre's propensity for character development and the exploration of the magical within the mundane. In other words, Saul Garamond's journey from an ordinary young man to a figure of newfound power underscores the transformative potential of UF, wherein fantastical elements catalyse personal growth. Furthermore, *King Rat* exemplifies the genre of UF through its masterful depiction of the setting, compelling characters, and the integration of fantastic elements into an urban landscape. Through a careful analysis of these key elements, it becomes evident that *King Rat* embodies the essence of UF and demonstrates the unique qualities that make the genre so captivating.

Miéville's *King Rat* serves as a prime example of UF, effectively utilizing its setting, characters, and fantastic elements to create a rich and immersive narrative. By embracing the duality of the urban landscape, exploring the complexities of characters caught between worlds, and properly blending the extraordinary with the ordinary, Miéville crafts a compelling UF experience. The novel proves the genre's ability to evoke a sense of wonder, challenge societal norms, and illuminate the hidden depths that exist within our familiar urban environments. *King Rat* stands as a testament to the enduring allure of UF and solidifies China Miéville's position as a master of the genre. Also, many aspects of *King Rat* remind of Neil Gaiman's *Neverwhere* in terms of their exploration of UF and the hidden, fantastical aspects of urban settings. Both novels are set in urban environments, with *King Rat* taking place in London and *Neverwhere* specifically set in the dark, magical, and hidden corners of London's underground. They both explore the idea that beneath the surface of a city lies a hidden world filled with extraordinary beings and events. Moreover, the protagonists of both novels, Saul in *King Rat*, and Richard in *Neverwhere* find themselves thrust into these unfamiliar and surreal worlds, and they must navigate these new environments and face various challenges. Also, these novels explore themes of transformation, as the characters undergo personal changes and growth as they adapt to their new surroundings and face the challenges presented by the fantastical elements of the story. Both novels blur the lines between reality and fantasy, challenging the reader's perceptions of what is possible within the urban environment. They depict a hidden layer of existence that exists alongside the mundane world.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

Ethical Approval

Ethical approval for this study is not applicable.

Author Contributions

The author confirms sole responsibility for the following: study conception and design, data collection, analysis and interpretation of results, and manuscript preparation.

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