The Anxious City

Structures of Feeling in Twenty-First-Century London Urban Fantasy

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Kurzfassung zur Dissertationsschrift

Anfang des 21. Jahrhunderts hat sich Urban Fantasy als eine besondere literarische Spielart herausgebildet, die wesentliche Merkmale der Fantasyliteratur, des Stadtromans, des *Urban Gothic* und der Kriminalliteratur miteinander verbindet und zu einem neuen Genre zusammenfügt. In Großbritannien weist dieses neue Genre bis heute eine auffällige Konzentration von Romanen auf, die die Stadt London aus unserer Realitätsebene mimetisch abbilden, aber mit übernatürlichen Erscheinungen ergänzen, und die damit in einem Gegensatz zu solchen fantastischen Werken stehen, die in der Tradition Tolkiens in ontologisch gänzlich anderen Welten angesiedelt sind. Diese Konzentration auf die britische Hauptstadt motiviert die Frage nach der Art und Weise, wie London in zeitgenössischer Urban Fantasy repräsentiert wird und welchen Zwecken diese Repräsentationsstrategien dienen. Die vorliegende Arbeit nimmt fünf London Urban Fantasy Reihen in den Blick und untersucht unter Rückgriff auf Raymond Williams' Konzept der *structures of feeling* die Artikulation einer distinktiven *Londonness*, d.h. eines qualitativen Lebensgefühls, das die britische Hauptstadt evoziert und das literarisch verhandelt wird.[1] Dieses konstituiert sich, so die zentrale These der Arbeit, vor allem in Form von *nostalgia*, *haunting* und *(in)security* als dominante *structures of feeling.*

Hintergrund und Ziele der Arbeit

Das Genre der Urban Fantasy hat bislang wenig akademische Aufmerksamkeit auf sich gezogen. Mit Ausnahme von Stefan Ekmans unlängst erschienener Monographie *Urban Fantasy: Exploring Modernity through Magic* (2024) haben sich bisherige Untersuchungen in Form kurzer Aufsätze zumeist mit der Frage befasst, wie sich Urban Fantasy beschreiben lässt und ob es überhaupt als eigenes Genre zu begreifen sei. Diese Diskussion bildet meine Arbeit durch eine ausführliche Rezeption des Forschungsstands ab. Ekman und andere Wissenschaftler*innen argumentieren hierbei zumeist, dass die Bezeichnung *urban* hauptsächlich als Synonym für Charakteristika der Spätmoderne zu verstehen sei, die inzwischen nicht mehr als ausschließlich urban gelten können. Diese Argumentationslinie folgt denjenigen Bereichen der stadtsoziologischen Forschung, die sich angesichts der Globalisierungsströme des späten 20. und frühen 21. Jahrhunderts dafür aussprechen, dass Formen regionaler Ungleichheit nicht mehr aus einem Stadt-Land-Gegensatz resultieren, wie ihn die Industrielle Revolution hervorgebracht hat.

Die vorliegende Arbeit bricht mit dieser Argumentationslinie und stellt stattdessen das Spezifische derjenigen Stadt, die den Schauplatz der literarischen Texte bildet, in das Zentrum des

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[1] Auch wenn die kursiv gesetzten Begriffe sicherlich mit *Gefühlsstrukturen* und *Londonartigkeit* näherungsweise übersetzt werden könnten, habe ich mich dazu entschieden, zentrale Begrifflichkeiten hier sowie im Weiteren im Englischen zu belassen. Die Terminologie wird an verschiedenen Stellen innerhalb der Arbeit selbst diskutiert und in dieser Kurzfassung eine weitere, translatorisch bedingte Bedeutungsebene hinzuzufügen erscheint mir nicht zielführend.

Untersuchungsinteresses. Eine Nivellierung des Städtischen als vermeintlich austauschbares Element einer globalisierten Moderne, so meine Argumentation, übersieht, dass diese Urban Fantasy Romane sich den Spezifika urbanen Lebens in einer konkreten Stadt widmen, sich also somit an Traditionen des realistischen Stadtromans im Sinne von Charles Dickens, Martin Amis oder Zadie Smith anschließen und die Fantastik in verschiedener Ausprägung nutzen, um lokale Eigenheiten zu repräsentieren und zu verhandeln.

Als anglistische Forschungsarbeit betrachtet diese Dissertationsschrift London Urban Fantasies. Ziel der vorliegenden Untersuchung ist, aufzuzeigen, wie die britische Hauptstadt im Genre der Urban Fantasy repräsentiert und somit wesentliche Erkenntnisse darüber zu erlangen, welche Rolle London für diesen Teil der britischen Populärkultur spielt. Gleichzeitig werden diese Repräsentationsstrategien in ihren kulturellen Verflechtungen adressiert, sodass argumentiert werden kann, dass diese Romanreihen einen Zugriff bieten auf Strukturen der Bedeutungskonstruktion und -zirkulation der kulturellen Imagination Großbritanniens, die über ein einzelnes literarisches Genre hinausgehen. Diese Dissertation bewegt sich somit im Bereich der *Literary Urban Studies*, einem interdisziplinären Forschungsfeld, das sich im Zuge des *spatial turn* gebildet hat und maßgeblich von literatur- und kulturwissenschaftlichen Zugängen geprägt ist. *Literary Urban Studies* zielt darauf ab, die literarischen Vermittlungen und Darstellungen städtischer Verhältnisse zu erforschen.

Zentrale Thesen und Erkenntnisse der Arbeit

(1) Urban Fantasy ist ein literarisches Genre, das Elemente der Fantasyliteratur und des Stadtromans mit Einflüssen des *Urban Gothic* und der Kriminalliteratur vermischt. Diese Romane sind komplexe Erzeugnisse der britischen Populärkultur, die sich trotz, oder gerade wegen, ihrer globalen Vermarktung auch als lokalspezifische Artikulationen begreifen lassen. London Urban Fantasy enthält demnach Elemente einer Besonderheit Londons und nutzt Techniken der Bedeutungskonstruktion, in die sich London-spezifische Diskurse einschreiben.

(2) London Urban Fantasy bedient sich tradierter literarischer Erzählmuster, die um Elemente aus der Fantasyliteratur ergänzt werden. Als maßgeblich habe ich die Verortung Londons innerhalb eines Stadt-Land-Gefälles, die Bedienung der Metaphorik von der Stadt als Körper sowie den Topos der überwachten Stadt identifiziert, die alle nicht originär der Urban Fantasy entstammen. Die Aufladung mit fantastischen Elementen birgt jedoch die erzählerische Möglichkeit, das Verfremdungspotenzial der Fantastik zu nutzen und die Tragweite der Geschichte vom individuellen auf das gesamtgesellschaftliche Level zu verlagern. Indem London existenziell bedroht wird, verhandeln die Romane beispielsweise die Frage, weshalb die Stadt eigentlich gerettet werden sollte.

(3) Londons Besonderheit manifestiert sich in Texten der Urban Fantasy in drei Formen der *anxiousness* als dominante Gefühlsdispositionen. In meiner Arbeit leite ich etymologisch und sprachpragmatisch her, dass sich dieser Begriff jenseits seiner pathologischen Konnotationen auch als eine wertfreie Antizipation begreifen lässt, deren unterschiedliche temporale Ausprägungen mithilfe der Leitkategorien der Nostalgie (*nostalgia*), des Spuks (*haunting*) und der (Un)Sicherheit (*(in)security*) für die Untersuchung fruchtbar gemacht werden.

(4) Wie die konkreten Analyseergebnisse reflektieren, lassen sich die verschiedenen Repräsentationsstrategien nicht simplifiziert mit einem bestimmten Diskurs in Verbindung bringen, sondern bergen das Potenzial für mehrdeutige, teils gar widersprüchliche Lesarten. Aus meiner Analyse der Texte ergibt jedoch, dass *anxiousness* vorwiegend in optimistischen und pessimistischen Gefühlsdispositionen hinsichtlich der Zukunft Londons resultiert und die Romane somit Antworten auf die Frage nach den Grundlagen des Zusammenlebens in der Stadt zu geben suchen.

Theoretische und methodische Zugänge

Eine zentrale Annahme der Arbeit ist, dass literarische Erzähltexte nicht isoliert zu betrachten sind, sondern in direkter Wechselwirkung mit gesellschaftlichen Diskursen stehen. Hierbei darf Literatur nicht als bloßer Spiegel einer übergeordneten Kultur gesehen werden, sondern gesellschaftliche Diskurse schreiben sich in literarische Texte ein und werden von diesen gleichermaßen (re)produziert, d.h. geformt und verhandelt. Eine kulturanalytische Literaturwissenschaft muss mit diesem (Re)Produktionsbegriff jedoch insofern vorsichtig umgehen, als Literatur auch als Schauplatz des Ringens um hegemoniale Deutungshoheit verstanden werden muss und somit oppositionelle und vorherrschende Elemente beinhalten kann. Literarische Texte werden somit zum Teil eines kulturellen Apparats, durch den Menschen Bedeutung schaffen und zirkulieren. Die *British Cultural Studies* in der Tradition des *Birmingham Centre of Cultural Studies* (CCCS), in die sich diese Arbeit stellt, wenden sich dabei gegen die mitunter kulturpessimistischen Ideologiekritiken der Frankfurter Schule und vertraut stattdessen auf einen erfahrungswissenschaftlichen Zugang zur gelebten Wirklichkeit. Gerade die Populärkultur, zu der Fantasyliteratur gewiss gerechnet werden darf, wurde hierbei in den 1970er und 1980er Jahren häufig zu einer Form des Widerstands und der Subversion gegen elitäre Kulturkonzeptionen verklärt; ein Verständnis, das mittlerweile überholt erscheint.

Diese Arbeit bedient sich Raymond Williams' Konzept der *structures of feeling* als Konzept einer kulturanalytisch gewendeten Literaturwissenschaft, das sich auf die Grundannahme der Kultur als ‚a whole way of life' zurückführen lässt und eine gegenseitige Nutzbarmachung der *Cultural Studies* und der Literaturwissenschaft ermöglicht. Das Konzept befasst sich sowohl mit den

Strukturelementen einer Gesellschaft zu einer bestimmten Zeit, d.h. den Konventionen und Regeln der Wissensorganisation, als auch den gelebten Erfahrungen, die häufig etwas simplifiziert als ‚Stimmung' einer Zeit umschrieben werden. Williams selbst hat diese affektive Qualität in *Marxism and Literature* als „die Besonderheit des Dabeiseins" („the specificity of being present", 128) bezeichnet. In meiner Arbeit kontextualisiere ich Williams' bisweilen nicht immer trennscharfes Konzept mithilfe von Impulsen aus der Ideengeschichte der Emotionen, wie sie unter dem Label der *Affect Studies* betrieben wird.

Um einen theoretischen Reduktionismus zu vermeiden, der nur das herausfindet, was ohnehin im Vorfeld erwartet worden ist, ist in den *Cultural Studies* in den vergangenen Jahren das Prinzip der *conjunctural analysis* aufgekommen, um die Ablehnung der Disziplin von vorherbestimmenden Theorien oder präskriptiven Methoden mit der Notwendigkeit einer systematischen Forschungsmethodik in Einklang zu bringen. Eine *conjuncture* bezeichnet dabei die spezifischen historischen und sozialen Bedingungen, unter denen kulturelle Praktiken stattfinden und unter deren Einfluss Repräsentationen artikuliert werden. In diesem Sinne unterstreicht das Konzept der Artikulation die Rolle von Repräsentationen und Ideologien bei der Bildung von bedeutungskonstitutiven Verbindungen. Die Analyse konvergierender und divergierender Tendenzen, die die Gesamtheit der Machtbeziehungen innerhalb eines bestimmten sozialen Feldes während eines bestimmten Zeitraums prägen, sind daher ein Mittel, um Kontingenzverknüpfungen zu finden, die in einer bestimmten *conjuncture* eine bestimmte Wirkung entfalten (vgl. Gilbert, Huck).

Da die *conjuncture* jedoch eine Makroebene darstellt, deren Ausprägung in ihrer Gesamtheit für einzelne Forschende auch im Umfang einer Dissertation nicht bearbeitbar ist, erhebt die vorliegende Arbeit keinen Anspruch auf eine Gesamtanalyse der 2000er und 2010er Jahre als zeitlichen Rahmen spezifischer historischer und sozialer Bedingungen. Vielmehr wird London Urban Fantasy als ein Ausschnitt einer *conjuncture* verstanden, der zwar Rückschlüsse auf ihre Konstitution insgesamt zulässt, jedoch mit weiteren Forschungsarbeiten, die v.a. über die Ebene der Repräsentation hinausgehen, ergänzt werden muss. Die vorliegende Dissertation beschränkt sich somit auf die Untersuchung eines bestimmten Textkorpus – zeitgenössische London Urban Fantasy – und aggregiert vorherrschende Repräsentationsstrategien innerhalb des Korpus, d.h. auf der Mikroebene, zu dominanten Gefühlsdispositionen auf einer für die *conjuncture* konstitutiven Mesoebene. Die Textuntersuchung selbst folgt dem Prinzip des *Close Readings*. Leitfragen für die Untersuchung sind daher, wie London in einzelnen Werken der Urban Fantasy repräsentiert wird, welches Verständnis von *Londonness* sich in diesen Repräsentationsstrategien manifestiert, und wie sich verschiedene *structures of feeling* in Bezug auf relevante Teile der sozialen Formation als Ganzes zu einem umfassenden Bild dessen zusammenfügen, was *Londonness* im Großbritannien des 21.

Jahrhunderts bedeutet, welche Rückschlüsse sich also über die Erfahrung der urbanen Existenz in der britischen Hauptstadt ziehen lassen.

Aufbau der Arbeit

Die **Einleitung** der Arbeit bettet London Urban Fantasy als Untersuchungsgegenstand in zeithistorische Ereignisse im Zeitraum 2001 bis 2020 ein. Diese Unterteilung resultiert einerseits aus der Publikationshistorie der Texte, andererseits markieren die Terrorangriffe vom 11. September 2001 in New York sowie der Ausbruch der COVID19-Pandemie 2020 entscheidende Wendepunkte in der Art und Weise, wie das Leben in London erfahren wurde.

Kapitel Zwei, **Approaching London Urban Fantasy**, nähert sich dem Begriff der Urban Fantasy zunächst über eine Diskussion des Stands der Forschung, da sich bisherige Arbeiten v.a. mit der Frage beschäftigt haben, was Urban Fantasy ist und welche literarischen Einflüsse sich in diesem Genre erkennen lassen. Vor diesem Hintergrund entfalte ich meine eigene Definition und Typologie durch die Betrachtung der beiden Bezeichnungskonstituenten, *Urban* und *Fantasy*. Ich verbinde hier literaturwissenschaftliche Ansätze aus der Fantastikforschung mit stadtsoziologischen und stadtkulturellen Ansätzen, um der verbreiteten Annahme zu widersprechen, es handle sich bei Urban Fantasy eigentlich eher um eine ‚Fantastik der Moderne‘, und die lokale Besonderheit der dargestellten Stadträume zu betonen. Diese Herleitung wird für London Urban Fantasy insofern konkretisiert, als sich in ihr auch eine Fortführung der Traditionslinien des realistischen Stadtromans, des *Urban Gothic* und der Kriminalliteratur erkennen lassen. Diese literaturgeschichtliche Herleitung des Genrebegriffs ergänze ich anschließend um eine kurze Beschreibung der fünf Reihen, die das Untersuchungskorpus bilden.

Kapitel Drei, **Structures of Anxious Feelings**, expliziert den theoretischen und methodischen Zugang der Untersuchung. Raymond Williams' Konzept der *structures of feeling* wird in seiner Entwicklung über Williams' Gesamtwerk hinweg beleuchtet und mit aktueller ideengeschichtlicher Forschung zu Emotionen verknüpft, um herauszustellen, dass literarische Texte als diskursive Formationen eben nicht bloße Spiegel gesellschaftlicher Entwicklungen sind, sondern sich in die affektive Erfahrung der Wirklichkeit einschreiben, indem sie die „Besonderheit des Dabeiseins" verhandeln. Dieses Kapitel führt zudem die analytischen Leitkategorien der Nostalgie (*nostalgia*), des Spuks (*haunting*) und der (Un)Sicherheit (*(in)security*) ein, die sich auf meine de-pathologisierte Definition des Konzepts der *anxiousness* stützen.

Die drei anschließenden Analysekapitel widmen sich jeweils einer dieser *structures of feeling*, mithilfe derer ich konkrete Strategien der Repräsentation Londons sowie deren Effekte untersuche. Diese Kapitel sind mit dem Begriff der Kartographie beschrieben, um herauszustellen, dass meine Studie natürlich an der Produktion von Wissen insofern beteiligt ist, als ich wichtige literarische

Tendenzen als Repräsentation einer solchen urbanen Landschaft analytisch beschreibe, die gleichzeitig in der außertextuellen Realität ontologisch konstituiert wird.

Kapitel Vier, Cartographies of Nostalgia: London and the Countryside, argumentiert, dass sich eine nostalgische Gefühlsdisposition als Sehnsucht nach einer vermeintlichen Vergangenheit hauptsächlich im etablierten literarischen Topos des Stadt-Land-Gegensatzes manifestiert. Urban Fantasy bedient sich dabei Erzählkonventionen, die literaturgeschichtlich für den *Condition-of-England*-Roman prägend sind, der sich als gesellschaftliches Porträt mit zeitgenössischen sozialen und politischen Themen auseinandersetzt (z.B. Elizabeth Gaskell, *North and South* (1854)). Anti-urbanistische Strömungen thematisieren dabei eine moralischen und/oder politische Korruption Londons, der eine nostalgische Verklärung des Landlebens entgegengestellt wird. Die romantische Literatur des 19. Jahrhunderts ist dabei Ursprung dieser nostalgischen Vorstellungen vom Leben außerhalb Londons, deren Wirkmächtigkeit sich aus der Ablehnung der kulturellen, politischen und ökonomischen Vormachtstellung Londons speist. Gleichzeitig findet sich z.T. eine nostalgische Verklärung Londons selbst, die ein von Multikulturalismus geprägtes Selbstbild aufrechterhält, wie es zu Zeiten der ‚Cool Britannia' Strömung rund um die Jahrtausendwende unter anderem von Londons damaligem Bürgermeister Ken Livingstone medial verbreitet wurde. Dieses Selbstbild ist von Multikulturalismus, Diversität und Toleranz geprägt und hat auch die Inszenierung der Eröffnungsfeier der Olympischen Spiele 2012 in London maßgeblich beeinflusst. Beide Fremd- und Selbstbilder problematisiere ich vor dem Hintergrund des Brexit- und Austerität-Diskurses in Großbritannien.

Kapitel Fünf, Cartographies of Haunting: The Body-City Metaphor, untergliedert sich in zwei argumentative Abschnitte, die sich mit der Repräsentation der Stadt als organischer Körper und als Gedächtnis bzw. Psyche befassen. Beide Formen bedienen sich hauptsächlich Tropen des *Gothic* und befassen sich mit der Manifestation der Vergangenheit und/oder der Zukunft in der Gegenwart. Die Metaphorik des Stadtkörpers äußert sich in der rhetorischen Figur des Herzens der Stadt und bedient damit eine Bildsprache, die aus den Zeiten des Britischen Empire stammt, als London in einer übergeordneten Größenordnung als Herz des Kolonialreichs imaginiert wurde. London Urban Fantasy widmet sich damit dem kolonialen Erbe der Stadt als einstige imperiale Metropole, das in außerliterarischen Selbstbildern der Gegenwart häufig positiv im Sinne eines multikulturellen Erbes umgedeutet wird. Dem gegenüber stehen die untersuchten Werke, die sich, sofern sie diese kolonial-imperialistische Bildsprache nicht einfach unkritisch fortschreiben, in Geschichten über den fortschreitenden Verfall der Stadt ergehen. Der zweite Teil des Kapitels widmet sich Geistern in London Urban Fantasy als prominenter Denkfigur, die im Zuge des fantastischen Erzählmodus als buchstäbliche Manifestationen der Gedächtnismetapher gedeutet werden können. Die Gegenwart der Geister wird allerdings nicht als imperiales

Überbleibsel verstanden, sondern verweist auf die Lebensbedingungen, die der Spätkapitalismus hervorbringt. Unter Rückgriff auf Theorien der *Hauntology* argumentiert dieses Kapitel, dass sich London Urban Fantasy mit der Terminierung der Zukunft unter kapitalistischen Bedingungen auseinandersetzt und diese Spuren des Noch-Nichts mithilfe der Geister als Möglichkeit zur Interaktion fassbar gemacht werden.

Kapitel Sechs, **Cartographies of (In)Security: London as Surveillance City**, untersucht, wie die zunehmende Militarisierung des städtischen Raums und der Einfluss digitaler Technologien auf den städtischen Alltag in Urban Fantasy in Bezug auf erzeugte (Un)Sicherheiten verhandelt wird. In dieser Repräsentationsstrategie zeigt sich die Nähe zur Kriminalliteratur, da v.a. die Rolle der Polizei als städtischer Akteur in den Blick genommen und machtpolitische Herrschaftsstrukturen im urbanen Raum thematisiert werden. Auch für dieses Kapitel lassen sich zwei thematische Schwerpunkte identifizieren, die mit einer in den *Surveillance Studies* postulierten Transformation von der Überwachungsgesellschaft zur Überwachungskultur korreliert werden (vgl. Lyon). Die Militarisierung des urbanen Raums in London zu Beginn des 21. Jahrhunderts hängt eng mit den Terroranschlägen des 11. Septembers 2001 in New York und jenen vom 7. Juli 2005 in London selbst zusammen. Der flächendeckende Ausbau des ohnehin schon überproportional dichten Netzwerks an Überwachungskameras und die Einführung automatischer Kennzeichenregistrierung bei der Einfahrt in die City of London sind nur einige der technologischen Maßnahmen, die zu mehr Sicherheit im öffentlichen Raum führen sollen, gleichzeitig aber auch ein Gefühl der permanenten Unsicherheit erzeugen. Urban Fantasy nutzt den fantastischen Erzählmodus vor diesem Hintergrund hauptsächlich, um Technologie magisch zu überhöhen und derzeitige Limitationen zu kompensieren. Hier lässt sich eine eindeutige Neigung zu dystopischen Narrativen konstatieren, die wahlweise als warnender Weckruf angesichts realweltlicher Entwicklungen, aber auch als vermeintliche Legitimierung individuellen Widerstands gedeutet werden können. Weiterhin widmen sich die Texte des Untersuchungskorpus der veränderten Wahrnehmung der Polizeiarbeit vor dem Hintergrund extensiver Informationsbeschaffung. Verbrechensbekämpfung wird zunehmend nicht mehr als die Aufklärung bereits erfolgter Verstöße gegen Gesetz und Ordnung begriffen, sondern die Prävention dieser Verstöße *ex ante*. Auch hier nutzen Urban Fantasies die narrative Freiheit zur Überzeichnung realweltlicher Entwicklungen, um die oftmals dehumanisierende Logik eines solchen kategorischen und algorithmischen Denkens anzuprangern und die Frage nach den Grundlagen des Zusammenlebens im städtischen Raum zu stellen.

Übergreifend lässt sich feststellen, dass die Thematisierung dieser Grundlagen des städtischen Zusammenlebens ein textübergreifendes Element der London Urban Fantasy darstellt. Das **Fazit** der vorliegenden Arbeit ordnet die Erzählbögen der Romanreihen kurz entlang eines

utopisch-dystopischen Schemas ein, da positiven Vorstellungen eines von Konvivialität geprägten Londons auch der fortschreitende Zerfall oder gar die Zerstörung der Stadt entgegengestellt wird.

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1 Introduction

During the prologue of *The Neon Court*, the third instalment in Kate Griffin's *Matthew Swift* tetralogy, the protagonist Matthew Swift learns that a war between different supernatural political factions in London is about to break out and that he will be drawn into the conflict. To introduce the reader to the relevant parties within the novel and in order to create a sense of foreboding danger, Matthew Swift provides the following history of how the Neon Court came into existence:

> Once upon a time, in that old time when life was still magic and life was lived in the trees and the forests and the rivers and the hills, in the old time of wild, ivy-tangled, rain-dropped magic, before the lights burnt neon and the spells flickered with electric fury, there existed the Faerie Court. And it was beautiful, sensual, powerful, rich, decadent and dangerous. One touch from the lips of a faerie and he or she who was touched was enchanted; one whisper from the faerie queen and the course of nations would be changed for ever.
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> But alas, the Faerie Court did not move with the times, and did not predict how a steam train could carve through the landscape, or how a factory could discolour the sky and, as the times changed, so did the magic, migrating with the people to the cities and becoming rich with smoke and stone and the sound of metal. And so the Faerie Court declined, and those who sought its blessing dwindled, until there was nothing more than a dusty hollow in the carved-out heart of a wood, crumbling with the fall of autumn leaves.
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> Then one day, one fairly unremarkable day at the beginning of the twentieth century, an enterprising princess of the court, one of the very last, decided that rather than sit at home and watch her world dwindle and die, she was going to explore this new world. So she set out to travel, visiting all the cities of the globe and, as she travelled, she came to understand that new magic, urban magic, and bend it to her will. When finally she stopped, she summoned all her surviving subjects and friends and declared the founding of a new court: the Neon Court, whose heart was in the heart of the cities, and whose magic would be of the new magics, and whose ways would be of the new ways. (44–45)

The lengthy quotation aptly illustrates the issue with which this dissertation is concerned: the representation of Londonness in urban fantasy as a nexus of structures of anxious feeling.[1] Swift's brief history of the Neon Court exemplarily foregrounds that in contemporary urban fantasy London is imagined as a fantastical space in which the supernatural and the mundane co-exist. It also grounds this development historically and posits it as a continuity which follows the progressive narrative of industrialisation in our consensus reality.[2] In doing so, the excerpt introduces a spatial faultline between the city and the countryside on the basis of how the supernatural operates in these two domains. The choice of words alluding to decadence and decline, in conjunction with the phrase "the heart of the city" further indicate that London is

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[1]   As I will explain later in this dissertation, I understand Londonness to denote the meanings that London and being in London hold. Raymond Williams's term *structure of feeling* will be introduced in chapter 3, where I will also explain why I have expanded it by the adjective *anxious*.

[2]   The term *consensus reality* refers to the world in which we, the readers, are moving and living and which is distinct from the narrated storyworld. It will be introduced in more depth in chapter 2.2.1.

imagined metaphorically as a body and that this metaphor warrants a rhetoric grounded in Gothic tropes. Lastly, Swift's narration links the change in urban magic to advances in technology, thereby suggesting that the distinction between the two is blurred to a certain degree.

In this dissertation I am going to dissect these three concerns as central representational paradigms and signifying practices in contemporary London urban fantasy. I set out to investigate how the meaning of Londonness is managed and/or limited by representational practices, which are dependent on the use of established iconographic forms. As I have already suggested, these particular iconographic forms are the city in relation to the countryside, the metaphorical representation of the city as a body, and the ubiquity of technology, specifically for surveillance purposes, in the modern city. The central question explored in this dissertation is in what ways do London urban fantasies use these representational paradigms to transcode, interpret, and influence contemporary structures of feeling? In order to answer this question, I will examine the ways in which anxious emotions – more specifically nostalgia, haunting, and (in)security – are engrained into the fantastical urban imagination in order to reveal a body of works that function not as simple escapism, as we are often led to believe about fantasy novels, but serve as a collection of visceral responses to a conjuncture, whether consciously designed by the respective authors to be so or not. Because they depart from the paradigm of representing our lived realities with verisimilitude, fantasy narratives and fantastical storyworlds offer us a distinctive position from which to negotiate what kind of social framework or social conditions we want to create for our own lives. In this sense, my dissertation draws its importance from exploring what the representation of urbanity in fantastical terms reveals about people's behaviours in and attitudes towards cities, and specifically London, in the twenty-first century. In foregrounding the relationship between texts and our lived realities, one central tenet that informs this study is that literature has ontoformative power. We certainly do read for pleasure, but beyond gratifying this desire, literary texts also say something about how we engage with our environment and hold the power to transform these forms of engagement – albeit sometimes painfully slowly and not necessarily always to our awareness.

1.1 Terminology

Several terms I have used so far warrant a brief explanation at this point, as they will run through this dissertation without having immediate purchase on my analysis, which precludes their explanation elsewhere. Douglas Kellner uses the word *transcoding* as a portmanteau of *encoding* and *translating* to emphasise that texts do not simplistically 'reflect' or 'record' social and political phenomena (20). Rather, it draws attention to texts as processes of meaning-making, which are produced and simultaneously (re)produce cultural discourses and which construct positions of dominance and resistance within them, often simultaneously. Closely related to the process of

transcoding is the term *representation*. Following Stuart Hall, I understand representation as the very constitution of meaning ("Introduction" xvii–xxvi). In cultural studies' understanding, representation does not merely denote the reflection of the real world by semiotic systems via signs, but "endows material objects and social practices with meaning and intelligibility and in doing so constructs those maps of meaning that are constitutive of culture" (Barker 192). In this understanding, representation is inextricably entangled with questions of power through the arbitrariness of signification, as the maps, or codes, it creates select and organise knowledge while excluding other ways of seeing the world.

While these short explanations should make clear what I mean when I say that I am interested in the representation of Londonness in contemporary urban fantasy and how these novels transcode structures of feeling, my understanding of urban fantasy as a contemporary permutation of popular genre fiction equally warrants elucidation. I will begin with the latter term, *popular*, before clarifying what is meant by *contemporary*. As Andrew Edgar notes with regard to *popular*, "[t]he term is frequently used either to identify a form of culture that is opposed to another form, or as a synonym or complement to that other form" (245). This alludes to the complicated ideational history of the term, particularly in the compound *popular culture*. In its most descriptive sense, *popular* simply means 'widely favoured or well-liked by many people', that is, popular is what holds widespread popularity. However, as John Storey notes, such a wide definition "would include so much as to be virtually useless" (262). Moreover, Christine Berberich points to the fact that the term "contains a variety of different and, potentially, contradictory meanings, and is one weighed down with ideological meaning" (3). In particular, what constitutes 'the people' whose culture it is that is popular has been fraught with ideological tensions. On the one hand, popular culture has been theorised as constituting the mass-produced counterpart to seemingly 'authentic' folk culture.[3] On the other, popular culture has been taken to denote the culture of the working classes in distinction to the works contained in supposedly 'high' cultural canons. In this sense, the evaluation is equally one of value, where popular culture is equated with a form of lower, inferior value. Raymond Williams has outlined these pejorative connotations of the word in *Keywords* (180). Much of the work of cultural studies scholars of the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, not just by Williams but also Richard Hoggart, E. P. Thompson, and Stuart Hall, revolved around the elevation of working-class culture against the elitist rejection espoused by earlier critics such as Matthew Arnold, F. R. Leavis, and Q. D. Leavis.[4] However, this has led to a tendency of

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[3] The condemnation of mass-produced 'pop culture' as the product of the cultural industries with the goal to reduce consumers to passive, mindless cultural 'dopes' has been particularly acerbically voiced by Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer as a form of mass deception in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1947).

[4] The CCCS's emphasis on the (political) value of popular culture is condensed into Raymond Williams's famous claim that culture is ordinary. In "Notes on Deconstructing 'the Popular'", Stuart Hall claims that popular culture is one prominent arena of hegemonial struggle: "Popular culture is one of the sites where this struggle for and

either holding that popular culture denotes exclusively "the culture of working people, the laboring classes and the poor" (Hall, "Notes" 347) or of overemphasising the political value of popular (working-class) culture as being inherently subversive, as evident for example in many of the works by John Fiske. Particularly the distinction between 'high' culture on the one side and popular on the other has been transformed by debates on postmodernism. As Storey explains, "[p]ostmodern culture is supposedly a culture in which the distinction between high and popular has been in terminal decline since the 1960s", which is "[f]or some . . . a reason to celebrate an end to exclusion and to an elitism constructed on arbitrary distinctions of culture; for others it is a reason to despair at the final victory of commerce (presented as the very embodiment of the popular) over culture" (264). Wherever one may side on this ideological debate, it is undeniable that the conceptualisation of popular culture as a pure form of working-class resistance against the hegemonic dominance of 'high' culture becomes untenable particularly due to its production processes in the digital age and the "considerable cross-fertilisation" (Murphy 9) between several forms of popular culture. Rather, popular culture should be conceived of as a cultural formation which puts into place a structure of feeling to describe its effects on people's daily lives (Grossberg, *We Gotta* 69–72). Its effectivity lies in the fact that "people spend time with popular culture and that it matters to them" (78). Here, Grossberg links popular culture specifically with the emotional effects it is able to produce, since by "making certain things matter, people 'authorize' them to speak for them, not only as a spokesperson but also as a surrogate voice" (83). I thus agree with María del Pilar Blanco and Esther Pereen that "the popular, precisely by virtue of concerning that which is appreciated by many . . . is considered as a dynamic realm of contestation between various cultural forces in which hegemony and resistance, conformity and subversion, may be produced" (*Popular Ghosts* xii). However, this does not mean that popular culture should simplistically be taken to be "a barometer of contemporary imagination" but rather as "part and parcel of a sociological climate that includes an aesthetic dimension and in which the sociological and aesthetic are symbiotically joined, but where neither is reducible to the other" (Bloom 37).

What I have said so far about popular culture in general is also true for popular fiction in particular. Long regarded as the inferior other to supposedly high-value literary fiction, we are now living in a time when writers who have won the American National Book Award for Fiction have written zombie novels and Nobel Prize Laureates of literature also have published fantasy novels.[5]

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against a culture of the powerful is engaged: it is also the stake to be won or lost in that struggle. It is the arena of consent and resistance. It is partly where hegemony arises, and where it is secured. . . . Otherwise, to tell you the truth, I don't give a damn about it" (360–61).

[5] Colson Whitehead, who was awarded the National Book Award for Fiction in 2016 and won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 2017, has published *Zone One* in 2011, which takes place in a post-apocalyptic United States ravaged by zombies. Kazuo Ishiguro, winner of the Booker Prize in 1989 and 2017 Nobel Prize Laureate, published *The Buried Giant* in 2015, which centres around an elderly Briton couple living in a fictional post-Arthurian England in which no one is able to retain long-term memories.

Certainly, it is now the case that "scholars engaging with this kind of writing no longer need to justify its standing as an intellectually challenging and worthwhile field of academic enquiry: this may now be taken as a given" (Murphy and Matterson 2).[6] Nonetheless, there are identifiable characteristics of what is usually designated as popular fiction, which also involve talking about genre fiction as a term closely associated with it. These characteristics are tied to the audience a text is assumed to attract and the supposition that works of popular fiction can almost always be assigned to a particular generic category. In terms of the assumed audiences, as I have outlined previously the long-standing historical association has been between popular fiction and working-class readerships, which stems from the fact that "the development of genre fiction in the UK is inherently linked to the advent of mass literacy in the late nineteenth century" (Murphy 3) and thus also influenced the value judgement bestowed on popular fiction as inferior to literary fiction. However, as Bernice M. Murphy points out, today "readers of popular fiction can and do belong to every social class, income and education level" (3). In terms of generic classification, popular fiction is said to "produce[] predictable texts, knitted according to the same pattern, with few, if any, deviations" and "to employ those winning formulas to 'sell big' and do so in the shortest period of time" (Berberich 3).[7] As I will further explain in chapter 2, this means that readers have pre-existing expectations about characters, the setting, or plot elements a work of popular fiction will contain. At a time where the book market has gone online, the algorithmic logic of online marketplaces has exacerbated the logic of producing formulaic genre fiction, since who reads which type of book has becomes a key economic concern. Murphy notes in this respect that "[t]his generic visibility even extends to the presentation of the novel in question itself: when it comes to popular fiction, you really can usually judge a book by its cover" (5).[8]

These observations point to "[a]ccessibility, affordability and commercial availability" as "important associated aspects of the 'popular' text" (Murphy 4). Indeed, sales figures are often cited as evidence for a work's popularity – and thus its inclusion in the category of popular fiction.

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[6] If the acknowledgement that popular fiction can "shape the world and our reactions to it" (Murphy 11) makes one uneasy, this says probably more about how literary canons are formed and thus helps to question the processes that determine which texts receive critical attention and which are overlooked and to reflect on how the world around us – and equally, our own sense of identity – is shaped by the stories we engage with as readers and integrate into our imaginative and intellectual perspectives.

[7] It is on these grounds that popular fiction in general and fantasy in particular has often been accused of fostering escapism, which has lent earlier scholarship an apologetic notion to establish its pedigree. I am thankful for being able to build on their work and largely skip this demeaning exercise. As I will briefly explain momentarily, I take it to be self-evident that fantasy permeates contemporary popular culture as an extremely vigorous area of cultural production and has become something that many people care about, thus warranting academic exploration of its poetics and politics. If anything, I agree with Brian Attebery that "it seems that a more urgent defense is needed to justify studying stories at all" (*Fantasy* 7), as the humanities more generally are under attack from acolytes of neoliberalism, who raise doubts about their economic viability. This battle, however, must be fought elsewhere than in a dissertation's footnotes.

[8] Later in this introduction I will offer a brief survey over the covers of the texts included in my corpus which will show that there are indeed similarities in terms of how the novels are marketed visually by their cover as belonging to the genre of urban fantasy.

However, this is too short-sighted, as any work of literary fiction may sell well, or not, and probably says more about the quality of the work done by the publisher's marketing department than the work itself. Who would have thought, for instance, that a series which begun as an online fanfiction to a series of teenage vampire novels would become one of the greatest publishing successes of the twenty-first century, selling more than 165 million copies despite critics as notable as Salman Rushdie noting that the quality of its writing was extremely bad (Ellis-Petersen)?[9] Even though it *is* an example of popular fiction that has sold well, the publishing phenomenon of *Fifty Shades of Grey* (2011–2021) helps illustrate the globalisation of the Anglo-American publication market, which, I would argue, determines to a large degree what becomes popular. Prior to the 1990s, the book market was highly regionalised and rather consisted of several markets, which did intersect with each other but not in a general, strategic manner. During the 1990s, however, these regional book markets internationalised at tremendous speed, most notably in the United States and the United Kingdom, facilitated by the lack of a language barrier, and publishing houses began to merge across national boundaries. Additionally, in 1997 the UK abandoned the Net Book Agreement, which determined that books were sold at a fixed price. This decision is generally regarded as strengthening larger book chains, which were also more likely to operate internationally, at the expense of independent bookstores which struggled to compete on the open market. In addition to lower prices, the launch of online seller *Amazon* in 1995 altered the playing field in international book selling significantly and increased international availability. *Amazon*'s willingness to stock books from both sides of the Atlantic facilitated purchase for American readers of British books and vice versa. As the example of *Fifty Shades of Grey* demonstrates succinctly, the advent of the Internet also spurred the creation of international online fandoms around particular book series, which spread widely across regional and national borders, thus had a higher impact than the fanzine-driven fandoms of the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, and incentivised consumption through participation. These developments amplify the fact that "[a]lthough the general outlines of most of today's major genres were by and large established before the end of the Victorian era (although they would all undergo significant reconfigurations in the twentieth century), specific fads and fashions will always arise in response to particular historical and cultural moments" (Murphy 8).

These overall developments in the book market also contributed immensely to a commercial comeback of fantasy as an established genre of popular fiction in the second half of the 1990s. A similar trend towards internationalisation in audio-visual media, particularly film, as

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[9] The allusion here is to E. L. James's *Fifty Shades of Grey* series about which Salman Rushdie is quoted as saying that he had "never read anything so badly written that got published. It made *Twilight* look like *War and Peace*" (Ellis-Petersen) and which had sold over 165 million copies worldwide by 2023 (Bloom Books). Of course, Rushdie's attitude betrays the old high/low culture dichotomy and demonstrates that literary critics and readerships must not necessarily agree about what 'good' writing is.

well as tremendous technological advancements fuelled the rise of the fantasy genre around the turn of the century and led to its success across media. In *A Short History of Fantasy*, Farah Mendlesohn and Edward James argue that in the late 1980s, the 1990s, and early 2000s medievalist quest fantasy on the one hand continued to thrive with readers, either in the Tolkenian tradition or as a deliberate reaction to Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* (1954–1955). Well-known examples in this respect include George R. R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* (1996–present) series and Peter Jackson's cinematic adaptation of *The Lord of the Rings* (2001–2003). On the other hand, since the 1980s and throughout the 1990s some hitherto popular forms, such as sword-and-sorcery fantasy, were increasingly subject to ridicule and parody – most notably by Dianna Wynne Jones and Terry Pratchett, who was *the* best-selling British author in the early 1990s – and thus pressured fantasy writers to innovate (Mendlesohn and James 143–67). Especially in Great Britain, innovation has resulted in a "British Boom" (A. Butler 374) which was carried by, firstly, the revival of fantasy targeted primarily at children and young adults and, secondly, the emergence of generic hybrids and crossover forms. Children and young adult fantasy have produced many successful series such as Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* (1995–2000), but its boom was spearheaded by the best-selling book series in history, Joanne K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* heptalogy (1997–2007), which sold more than 5000 million copies worldwide and won critically acclaimed awards such as the Whitbread Book Award. As chapter 2 will illuminate in more detail, one of the crossover forms to emerge is "the post-2000 rise to commercial prominence of Urban Fantasy" (Murphy 8), with which this dissertation is concerned. Overall, the surge in fantasy narratives clearly "illustrates the extent to which the fantastic has become a default cultural vernacular" (Miéville, "Editorial" 40).

This brings me to finally fulfilling my promise to explain what I mean by *contemporary*. The term has obvious chronological limitations. I employ the label as a designation for urban fantasy texts that have been published in the twenty-first century. This has two reasons. The first is that I see the genre to be constituted as such only after the turn of the millennium, as chapter 2 will explain more fully. The second is that I deem urban fantasy to be invested in the construction of structures of anxious feelings, a concept which will be introduced in chapter 3.2. Suffice it to say here, therefore, that the heightened attention given to anxiety in the twenty-first century arguably results from the crises that have shaped the past two-and-a-half decades. From international and domestic terrorism since 9/11 to the global financial crisis in 2007 and 2008, to the so-called refugee crisis, or European migrant crisis, in 2015, to the corona crisis in 2020, and the overall looming environmental crisis – there was hardly a year in the past two decades that went by without being labelled as a crisis year.[10] The crises that so seem to characterise the twenty-first century have

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[10] The consequent designation of the twenty-first century as an 'Age of Anxiety' harks back to the eponymous poem by W. H. Auden written in 1947 and has been used with varying frequency as a buzzword in both academia and the media. As I will expound in chapter 3.2, the concept of anxiety has developed from a term that originated in

also been registered in popular fiction, which serves so often "as vivid dramatisation of the anxieties and preoccupations of the society from which it emerges" (Murphy and Matterson 7).[11] The question whether urban fantasies, which position cities at the nexus of 'real-world' political order and the manifestation of the supernatural in that world, engage with our lived experiences in way that are critical of power structures or seek to maintain them is particularly relevant in the context of the high circulation, and thus prevalence, of these texts in the twenty-first century.

The commercial prevalence of urban fantasy as a genre whose setting depicts contemporary cities points to the relevance of our lived realities as increasingly urban experiences. The 2022 United Nations Habitat's *World Cities Report* notes that in 2021, 56% of the global population were living in cities and expects this number to rise to 68% in 2050.[12] "Unequivocally," then, "this tells us that cities are here to stay, and that the future of humanity is undoubtedly urban" (6). It is now a commonplace to state that within this global network of urban settlements, several global or world cities exert significant influence on the economic, cultural, political, and social systems of the world. These cities play a pivotal role in the functioning of the global economy by hosting major financial institutions, multinational corporations, and world-class infrastructure. They serve as centres for international finance, housing major stock exchanges, banks, and attracting foreign direct investment. Additionally, they are focal points for international diplomacy and governance, often home to embassies and global institutions. Beyond economics and politics, global cities shape cultural trends through their contributions to art, media, and fashion, while also maintaining diverse, cosmopolitan populations and advanced transportation networks that enhance their global connectivity.

London exemplifies a global city due to its central role in international finance, politics, and culture. It is one of the world's leading financial centres, holds significant political weight as the capital of the United Kingdom, both domestically and internationally, and is a prominent cultural hub. Both Saskia Sassen and Doreen Massey, who are among the most prolific scholars on global or world cities, treat London as exceptional example in their works.[13] Oliver von Knebel Doeberitz and Ralph Schneider go so far as to suggest that

> [e]ven New York, the most iconic, emblematic city of modern times, has become
> increasingly sidelined as the symbolic metropolitan centre of the Western world by the

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individual psychology to denote, not unproblematically so, the state of mind of an entire population, most notably that of the global West in the twenty-first century (Howie and Campbell 25–46).

[11] The argument that the terrorist attacks of 9/11 have had such a profound impact on Western societies that they, rather than the turning of the calendar, mark the beginning of the twenty-first century is also brought forth by Catherine Spooner (*Post-Millennial* 4–5) and Frances Pheasant-Kelly (1–2), among other, particularly with regard to the field of cultural production.

[12] The next report is due to be published in November 2024, but unfortunately was not yet available prior to the submission of this thesis.

[13] See, for instance, Saskia Sassen's *The Global City: New York, London, Tokyo* (Princeton UP, 1991) or Doreen Massey's *World City* (Polity, 2007).

burgeoning city on the Thames, while Paris, the European contender to the position of a 'global capital' in terms of international appeal, has likewise failed to embody the spirit of the here and now in the way London does.[14] (1)

One the one hand, attention has thus focused on London as a global "seat of power", whose political, institutional, economic, and cultural influences and effects "spread nationally and globally" (Massey, *World City* 8). On the other, considerable effort has been vested into teasing out how local actions shape global processes. Paradigmatic for this trend stands the term *glocalisation*, which blends the two terms of scale (Swyngedouw 137). As my cursory survey of academic literature about London in chapter 2.3.1 will reflect, both perspectives have captured the attention of many writers and artists in recent years, and which has, in turn, sparked scholarly interest in the resulting literary and cultural manifestations.

This dissertation sets out to explore the place of contemporary urban fantasies within the literary imagination of London, which has hitherto been overlooked. Since I argue that the representation of Londonness is indicative of nostalgia, haunting, and (in)security as contemporary structures of anxious feeling, I will provide a brief overview of the cultural and socio-political history of London in the twenty-first century before I go on to specify why the study of urban fantasy constitutes a lacuna in literary urban studies and then outline the construction of my literary corpus.

1.2 London in the Twenty-First Century

What follows in this section sketches out the history of London in the twenty-first century as one marked by what Lauren Berlant has termed "crisis ordinariness" (7) and the particular type of positive perceptions the city tries to construct about itself as it is enmeshed in these multiple, overlapping crises.[15] In particular, I will focus on the 'Cool Britannia' campaign in the early 2000s and London's bid for and hosting of the 2012 Olympic Games as the two most notable focal points for a branded sense of Londonness, which cast the city in overwhelmingly positive terms to an international audience. At the same time, Britain grappled with international and domestic terrorism, the global financial crisis (2007–2008), the austerity programme adopted by the respective Conservative governments from 2010 to 2019 to cut back public expenditure in order to reduce public debt, the so-called refugee crisis in 2015, and the withdrawal of the United

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[14] Their argument is constructed around the success of London's self-branding as a global city. Indeed, London routinely tops the Anholt-Ipsos *City Brands Index* reports, published since 2008, which seek to measure the image and reputation of the world's cities. I will return to the issue of city branding in chapter 2.2.2.

[15] As the historian Jeremy Black notes, referring to "London as a whole is only partially correct for, although the city as a unit has an impact on the outside world, it is experienced by Londoners (and indeed by many visitors) as a complex assemblage of districts and communities" (*London* 243). While for the presentation of a history of London in the past twenty-five years, some degree of generalisation is unavoidable, I attempt to do justice to the multiplicity of perspectives in the following textual analysis.

Kingdom from the European Union following the EU membership referendum held in 2016. As the nation's capital, political decisions and developments at state level have unavoidably affected London as well.[16]

The term *crisis ordinariness* is deployed by Lauren Berlant in *Cruel Optimism* (2011) as a way of describing the phenomenon that "the present moment increasingly imposes itself on consciousness as a moment in extended crisis, with one happening piling on another" (7). As crises become a normalised part of everyday life, they argue that people adapt to and cope with ongoing crises, such as economic instability, political upheaval or social injustice, in ways that are different from configuring crises as exceptional and disruptive. This idea challenges the notion of a crisis as a singular, isolated event and highlights how the persistent nature of crises affects emotional landscapes, social relationships, and cultural narratives by becoming "a process embedded in the ordinary that unfolds in stories about navigating what's overwhelming" (10). In this context, the ordinary is understood as a continuous state of survival and adaptation to ongoing uncertainties and challenges (53). Life is perceived as a constant navigation through uncertainties and threats, with adaptation to these conditions becoming routine. While Berlant takes a different route from these observations in *Cruel Optimism*, I think that their description of "the contemporary moment" (4) as characterised by an ongoing sense of crises aptly captures what it feels like to live in the twenty-first century and how this sense of ongoing crisis generates structures of anxious feeling. In what follows I will sketch in chronological manner the sociohistorical contours of the crises I argue to have impacted the construction of Londonness between 2001 and 2020 and its artistic representation in urban fantasy.

London entered the twenty-first century with a new political structure. The Greater London Authority referendum of 1998 returned a majority in favour, albeit on low voter turnout, and the British government accordingly passed the Greater London Authority Act in 1999, creating the Greater London Authority composed of a directly elected Mayor of London and a London Assembly. The first elections for the Mayor of London and the London Assembly were held in May 2000. Ken Livingstone was elected as London's first Mayor as an independent candidate, but joined the Labour Party prior to the 2004 election, which he also won. In 2008, the candidate of the Conservative Party, Boris Johnson, succeeded Livingstone, and remained in office until Sadiq

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[16] I have chosen not to extend my cultural and socio-political survey beyond 2020, as the onset of the coronavirus pandemic in 2020 serves as an incisive event which has initiated a new conjuncture with which the novels I discuss cannot or do not engage. As indicated by the brief plot summaries in chapter 2.4, most of the novels roughly follow in their timeline the dates of publication. With the exception of Benedict Jacka's *Alex Verus* series (finished in 2021) and Ben Aaronovitch's *Rivers of London* series (ongoing), all other series included in my corpus were finished well before 2020. Neither the *Alex Verus* nor the *Rivers of London* novels published after 2020 engage with the pandemic and the ensuing cultural, economic, and political consequences, which leads me to claim that all urban fantasies discussed are novels which are representative of the first two decades of the twenty-first century as a specific historical conjuncture.

Khan's victory in the 2016 election. Khan, who is a member of the Labour Party, has subsequently been re-elected in 2021 and 2024.

The re-introduction of a London governing body fit well with the government's agenda for change and renewal. Ending eighteen years of Conservative governments, the Labour Party won the general election in 1997 in a landslide and Tony Blair became Britain's new Prime Minister on a 'New Labour' agenda. The change of government spurred a more optimistic evaluation of Britain's future after a period of decline following Margaret Thatcher's economic policies, which her successor, John Mayor, largely continued. Politically, Blair moved "away from collectivist solutions based on state planning" in contrast to previous Labour policies, relying instead on "the role of the marketplace and modest rates of taxation" (Black, *Britain* 172–73) and thereby continuing aspects of Thatcherism. Consequently, inflation, interest rates, and unemployment were low in Britain around the turn of the millennium. The historian Jeremy Black observes in this regard that

> "New Labour" appeared to offer a more appealing vision of life in post-Thatcher Britain, by championing a society in which the dominance of the marketplace was not to be allowed to undermine social cohesion. . . . Indeed, it was a new, modern corporatism that was on offer, one open to global capitalism but seeing this as a means to community, idealism, and even equality. (*Britain* 173)

Rather than constituting a radical break with previous policies, Blair was thus able to reap the fruits of the economic recovery that followed the recession of the early 1990s. The economic growth spurred a euphoric mood and provided a central element for pursuing an image of 'Cool Britannia', which benefitted London enormously. The decline of old industrial areas was therefore juxtaposed to "the rise of London" (Black, *Britain* xi) under Blair's New Labour government, which lent the city "renewed self-confidence, energy and resolve" (Pleßke 16). Consequently, branding London as a 'cool' city became a central effort in public relations in order to market the British capital internationally as the flagship of the 'Cool Britannia' movement.

Stryker McGuire's 1996 article "Why London Rules", published in *Newsweek*, is widely credited with initiating the media hype surrounding the British capital, though it notably did not employ the term 'Cool Britannia'. Nevertheless, the phrase, a play on the well-known hymn *Rule, Britannia!*, gained traction and came to symbolise the optimistic attitude of many as a result of relative economic prosperity, with London at the epicentre of this cultural transformation. These changes in feeling also impacted cultural production and were epitomised by the areas of film, fashion, music, and literature, as 'BritArt' and 'BritPop' "became increasingly influential, passing rapidly from [their] anti-establishment origins . . . to become an affluent new establishment" (Black, *Britain* 114). The so-called 'British Boom' in the literary genres of speculative fiction – fantasy, science fiction, and horror – also coincided with the same era and was in part produced by a

politically engaged cultural scene, with many writers using fantastical modes to express their political views, often from a left-wing perspective (A. Butler 381). The 'Cool Britannia' image was not universally embraced, however, and criticised as being the product of a "metropolitan liberal elite" (Black, *Britain* ix) that was removed from life elsewhere in Britain.[17]

After the 2001 election, which Blair had won easily, support of Blairite politics crumbled. The reasons for the erosion of the Prime Minister's support by the general populace were multifactorial, but key issues were the Labour Party's increasing appearance as corporatist, the absence of fundamental reform to improve public service, and Blair's unequivocal support of the United States' invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003 following the 9/11 terrorist attacks (Black, *Britain* 176). Britain's involvement in the Middle East was followed by deadly bombing attacks on London's Tube and bus system on 7 July, 2005; following the example of 9/11, the event is generally referred to as 7/7. On the one hand, the Islamist attacks evoked the sentiment of shared solidarity in the city in the immediate aftermath which was widely compared to the myth of the Blitz (Closs Stephens), but in the long run also exacerbated xenophobia and Islamophobia on the other and called into question the extent of Britishness as being built around tolerance and openness to immigrants in general, and London's pride on its proclaimed spirit of multiculturalism in particular. Moreover, the spread of global and domestic terrorism in the first half of the 2000s engendered widespread public anxiety and was met in London by an increase in public security measures and widespread surveillance technologies which became known as the 'Ring of Steel' and consisted of an extensive network of close-circuit television cameras (CCTV) and automatic number-plate recognition systems (ANPR).[18]

In the aftermath of the 7/7 attacks, public defences of multiculturalism abounded. London's Mayor, Ken Livingstone, authorised the '7 Million Londoners, 1 London' campaign, which received widespread attention (e.g. Closs Stephens). The campaign consisted mainly of posters erected all over London and was built around the unificatory character of the city with regard to its diverse population. Livingstone also wrote an essay in *The Independent* in 2006 with the title "To Defend Multiculturalism Is to Defend Liberty" in which he defines multiculturalism as "the right to pursue different cultural values subject only to the restriction that they should not interfere with the similar right for others".[19] Towards the end of the essay, he specifically links multiculturalism to London by arguing that it has made the British capital not only "economically

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[17] The spatial split between London and 'the rest' of the country will be examined through the lens of nostalgia as a structure of anxious feeling in chapter 4.

[18] The representation of urban surveillance and (in)security as a structure of anxious feeling in the novels under analysis will be the focus of chapter 6.

[19] For an academic evaluation of multiculturalism as a political philosophy, see Michael Murphy's *Multiculturalism: A Critical Introduction* (Routledge, 2012). For a study of the literary representation of multicultural perspectives in the London novel, see Michael Perfect's *Contemporary Fictions of Multiculturalism: Diversity and the Millennial London Novel* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

successful", but also "by far the most international city in the world".[20] Generally, linking multiculturalism to the 'Cool Britannia' image of the late 1990s and early 2000s has resulted in positioning the time "as an inclusive and embracive period that was tolerant of communal and societal difference" and as one "in which there was an increased sense of pride in the culture of the United Kingdom, which subsequently sparked a renewed sense of optimism" (Arday xii). However, Jason Arday cautions that such a celebration "must also acknowledge the plight of the marginalised and the racialised tensions of the time that created a hostile environment which resulted in ethnic minorities residing on the periphery of an institutionally racist society" (xii).

By the mid-2000s, the atmosphere of euphoria and optimism that had so characterised the beginning of the new millennium had given way to more variegated expressions of public sentiment. After winning the 2005 election, pressure mounted on Blair to resign following the military debacle in Iraq, rising import expenditures as the domestic demand for products outgrew the British economy, the failure of the government to sustainably secure the economic growth of the previous years, and internal divisions over foreign affairs. In 2007, Blair was followed in office by Gordon Brown. As a result of Brown's poor management of the national budget, Britain was poorly prepared for the worldwide fiscal crisis and economic recession that began in 2007, extended throughout 2008, and which also hit London, as a global financial centre, extraordinarily hard (Black, *Britain* 178). Inadequate regulation of the financial sector incentivised high-risk financial operations which eventually "produced a banking crisis, a drying-up of credit, and the triggering of a recession" (178). The British economy shrank and unemployment rose, which put severe strains on public expenditure. Thus, "Britain ended up with a large budget deficit, a large public debt that was growing at a fast rate, and a large private debt, as well as a weak economy and inflation that was overtarget" (179). Labour's heavy losses in the 2010 general election appeared consequential in this context and ushered in a period of Conservative governments which lasted until 2024.

The change of party at national government level was preceded by a change at London City Hall when the Conservative candidate, Ben Johnson, defeated the incumbent Mayor, Ken Livingstone, in the 2008 election. In 2011, economic and social tensions culminated in the London riots, a series of violent disturbances that began on 6 August 2011 in Tottenham, north London, after police shot dead a 29-year-old Black man, Mark Duggan, two days earlier. The riots lasted approximately five days and quickly spread to other parts of London and cities in England, characterised by widespread looting, arson, and clashes between rioters and police. The riots were

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[20] In a speech delivered at the 2011 Security Conference in Munich, David Cameron then declared multiculturalism to have failed and accusing the concept to have contributed to the rise of international terrorism and radicalisation in Europe. Cameron claimed, "state multiculturalism" had encouraged different cultures to live separate lives whereas he saw "the key to achieving true cohesion by allowing people to say 'I am a Muslim, I am a Hindu, I am a Christian, but I am a Londoner…too'" (BBC, "State"), which he somehow made sound like a contradiction in terms.

increasingly no longer focused on racial inequality but were an expression of frustration with cuts to public services following the 2008 financial crisis, concomitant austerity measures, and growing wealth disparities. Unemployment was high in many of the affected areas, especially among young people who felt neglected by the government. Media commentators felt reminded of the 1981 Brixton riots and frequently invoked them in comparison. The police were initially slow to react, but became more assertive as the violence spread, eventually resorting to a combination of increased force and arrests to restore public order (Black, *Britain* 181). Two months later, in October 2011, a series of protests took place in London, emulating the Occupy Wall Street protests in New York in September 2011. The protesters denounced the British government's response to the 2008 financial crisis, in particular the bailouts for banks and austerity measures, and argued that the public should not pay for the mistakes of the bankers and the financial elite. An encampment was erected at St. Paul's Cathedral as a symbol of the occupation of the nearby financial district but was finally dismantled by the police and bailiffs in February 2012. The riots and the Occupy movement started a national debate in the UK about the causes of social unrest and economic inequality, and the consequences of neoliberal capitalism.

The eviction of the Occupy camp was also read as a reminder that the city was preparing for "the single most outstanding event in London's recent history" (Knebel Doeberitz and Schneider): the hosting of the 2012 Olympic Games. The city's bid for the games was launched under the 'Cool Britannia' spirit of the early 2000s and consequently focused on London's multiculturalism and diversity as potential reasons for selecting it as the host city. Consequently, the candidate file included a letter by Ken Livingstone to Count Jacques Rogue, then president of the International Olympic Committee, which stressed that "[n]owhere can offer a better location for the Games than London: the city that people of all faiths, cultures and languages can call 'home'. We are proud of our diversity . . . and every year celebrate it with visitors from every continent" ("London Candidate File" 7). The announcement that London had won the bid for the 2012 Olympics came on 6 July 2005, one day before the 7/7 attacks. As indicated above, the attacks were discussed in the context of having shattered the image of London as a peacefully and harmoniously multicultural city, but both Livingstone and Blair focused in subsequent public speeches on the resilience, strength, and courage of Londoners, which they often put into context by referring to the myth of the Blitz (see e.g. Closs Stephens; cf. also Werther 9–10).

Diversity and multiculturalism were also the focus of Danny Boyle's staging of the Opening Ceremony, titled 'Isles of Wonder', which was both an extravagant spectacle showcasing Britain's self-perception and a deliberate attempt at constructing a particular kind of national identity.[21]

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[21] The ceremony's title was allegedly inspired by Caliban's speech in act III, scene II in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, which starts with the observation that "this isle is full of noises" (136). In the context of the speech, the replacement of noises with wonders does not make any sense, however, and rather emphasises the impression that Boyle took

Appearing as a continuation of the 'Cool Britannia' spirit, the ceremony combined "a strong sense of inclusiveness with an open-minded cosmopolitanism in which the British capital attempted nothing less than to 'welcome the world this summer' with a bravura display of Britain's rich cultural heritage" (Karschay 59). By equating London with Britain, the celebration of the capital's past, present, and future, as Boris Johnson declared in his opening remarks, was extended to the nation at large. The ceremony has been met with public acclaim by the media and attracted attention in academia, having been read from the perspective of, for instance public history (Baker), city and nation branding (Werther), and cultural studies (Karschay). Especially in light of the surge of white ethnic nationalism in the lead-up to and the period following the 2016 EU referendum, the unabashedly positive staging of an inclusive and tolerant British national identity, of which London was celebrated as the epitome, was called into question.[22] Moreover, the bid for the Olympics also focused on urban regeneration as a sustainable development strategy for the areas of the city which were to become redeveloped for the Games, particularly London's East End boroughs of Tower Hamlets, Newham, and Hackney. As Francesca Weber-Newth has observed, "[t]he term 'urban regeneration' reflects the idea of the city as an organism, with local areas (body parts) requiring intervention to be healed, repaired or re-*generated*" (19; original emphasis).[23] In the context of the Olympics, public statements indicated that the redevelopment measures undertaken for the games were believed to benefit the respective areas long after the event has ended. However, Weber-Newth's study indicates that "the reordering of urban space – commonly referred to as 'urban regeneration' – is . . . a complex interaction of everyday, mundane and discursive practices that contribute to creating new forms of exclusion" (206), particularly if undertaken within a neoliberal framework which tends to benefit the rich development corporations and not necessarily the people actually living in these areas (205).[24]

In hindsight, the celebratory tone of the Olympics in general and the Opening Ceremony in particular appears as an isolated period of optimism amidst a time of economic hardship and political polarisation. The austerity measures begun by Cameron's coalition government in 2010 and continued by all subsequent Conservative governments drastically reduced public expenditure in areas of the welfare state. By 2015 "more than eight million people in Britain lived in households that cannot always afford enough to eat" (Black, *Britain* 182), as the costs of living and of rent

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various aspects of British culture and amalgamated them into a "near-mythical representation of Britain's national identity" (Karschay 59).

[22] The idiosyncrasies of the ceremony and its relation to the portrayal of nationalism in the wake of Brexit in Ben Aaronovitch's *Rivers of London* series in particular will be discussed in the chapters 4.1.2 and 4.2.2.

[23] The metaphorical conception of the city as a body will be examined of chapter 5, albeit with the focus on the Gothic imagery that such a discourse calls up and on haunting as a structure of anxious feeling rather than looking at urban regeneration.

[24] Weber-Newth also demonstrates that "the policies and practices known as 'neoliberalism' are contested and reworked" and therefore "presents a nuanced picture of urban regeneration that not only interprets the dynamics of the (unjust) social world" (205).

rose, and health inequalities widened as a result of reorganising funding for the NHS (Hiam, Dorling, and McKee 10–13). As David Berry explains, these developments provoked the sentiment that "ordinary working people were not responsible for the crisis, but ordinary working people, as opposed to elites who caused the crisis, suffered the most as governments sought to reduce public spending" (2). Moreover,

> [i]n the case of the United Kingdom, austerity policies were not simply based on 'calculated rationality'; in fact, austerity economics became an opportunistic-ideological excuse to shrink the size of the state, reduce public spending in the longer term and rely on the market and private sector to increase investment. (Berry 2)

As political and economic priority, the coalition government sought to cast its austerity programme as a necessary self-sacrifice of the nation, as Cameron's now (in)famous statement that 'we're all in this together' indicated.[25] Indubitably, the strict austerity politics and their ideological justification by Conservative governments incentivised the "affective polarisation" (Stedman and Gohrisch 2) of Britons, that is, the creation of new salient identities beyond traditional partisan divisions which reflect public discontent with social, political, and economic inequalities.[26]

Arguably the most incisive political event in Britain of the past twenty-five years was Brexit, the 2016 referendum on the country's EU membership and the ensuing process of withdrawal. The referendum was one of two within two years which addressed the internal cohesion of the United Kingdom. Whereas the 2014 referendum for Scottish independence was rejected by the electorate, the results of the 2016 EU referendum exposed the deep faultlines running through the country and prompted the rhetorical figure of the 'Divided United Kingdom' or the 'DisUnited Kingdom'.[27] The Conservative Party promised a referendum on the UK's EU membership in their

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[25] The exact origin of the phrase is unclear, but it appears to have been displayed on posters during the Second World War. Cameron had been using it since as early as 2005, but its most famous usage in the context of austerity politics stems from his Big Society speech in 2010 to invoke a sense of shared solidarity and coming together.

[26] For additional work on British austerity politics in the twenty-first century, see e.g. David Etherington's *Austerity, Welfare and Work: Exploring Politics, Geographies and Inequalities* (Policy, 2020), Lisa McKenzie's *Getting By: estates, Class and Culture in Austerity Britain* (Policy 2015), Julian Dobson and Rowland Atkinson's *Urban Crisis, Urban Hope: A Policy Agenda for UK Cities* (Anthem, 2020), or Christopher Hood and Rozana Himaz's *A Century of Fiscal Squeeze: 100 Years of Austerity, Politics, and Bureaucracy in Britain* (Oxford UP, 2017) for a historical perspective.

[27] Examinations of Brexit are legion. To suggest but a few resources covering a wide array of approaches, interested readers may turn to Tim Oliver's *Understanding Brexit: A Concise Introduction* (Policy, 2018) or Kevin O'Rourke's *A Short History of Brexit: From Brentry to Backstop* (Penguin, 2019). Notable contributions from German academia are Ina Habermann's *The Road to Brexit: A Cultural Perspective on British Attitudes to Europe* (Manchster UP, 2020), Daniela Keller and Ina Habermann's *Brexit and Beyond: Nation and Identity* (Narr Francke Attempto, 2021), and the special editions of the *Journal for the Study of British Cultures* (edited by Joanna Rostek and Anne-Julia Zwierlein, vol. 26, no. 1, 2019) as well as *Hard Times* (edited by Georgia Christinidis, Jessica Fischer, and Frauke Hofmeister, vol. 104, 2020). Stuart Ward and Astrid Rasch's *Embers of Empire in Brexit Britain* (Bloomsbury, 2019) and Danny Dorling and Sarah Tomlinson's *Rule Britannia: Brexit and the End of Empire* (Durnell Marston, 2020) focus on the interplay between Brexit and Empire. Kristian Shaw's *BrexLit: British Literature and the European Project* (Bloomsbury, 2021) and Robert Eaglestone's *Brexit and Literature: Critical and Cultural Responses* (Routledge, 2018) focus explicitly on literary responses to Brexit. Anthony Barnett's *The Lure of Greatness: England's Brexit and America's Trump* (Unbound, 2017) and Fintan O'Toole's *Heroic Failure: Brexit and the Politics of Pain* (Apollo, 2018) are examples for political commentaries which are aimed at the general public rather than academic audiences.

campaign manifesto for the 2015 general elections, which they won. The question over continued membership was widely regarded as diving the Conservative Party and started to adumbrate other political issued (Black, *Britain* 183). Cameron supported EU membership and resigned immediately on 23 June 2016 after the results indicated a narrow majority of 51.9% for leaving. Cameron was succeeded by Theresa May, who remained in office until 7 June 2019 and oversaw the initial stages of withdrawal negotiations. Although simplistic explanations for the referendum results must be rejected, the success of the Leave campaign has been widely attributed to a combination of complacency among younger voters, a demographic group for which polls indicated to support EU membership but which had a low turnout; to the Leave campaign's success in capitalising on widespread anxieties regarding the influx of immigration, the UK's contribution to EU spending, and the alleged regulatory imposition of the EU on free market and free trade; to scepticism about national sovereignty within the supranational union resulting from notions of British exceptionalism due to its imperial heritage; and to anti-establishment protest fuelled by populism. The result plunged Britain into a period of political chaos characterised by internal disputes about the withdrawal negotiations, continued austerity politics, and an economic fallout due to the insecurity and instability of the political situation following the referendum. After several postponements of the withdrawal date, the UK eventually left the EU on 31 January 2020, after May's successor, Boris Johnson, managed to negotiate an agreement, although final trade agreements were negotiated during a transition period exceeding January 2020.

Amidst the political turmoil in the post-Olympic years, London continued to grow. Boris Johnson's *2020 Vision*, published in 2013, proclaimed on its cover that London was "the greatest city on Earth", attracting "billions of pounds of international investment" to boost "the brand of London and the UK" (Mayor, *2020 Vision* 4). Indeed, the document claims that "investment in London can help drive the rest of the UK economy" (6). By 2016, the relationship between London and the rest of the UK, as Johnson put it, appears to be that the British capital sees itself more "in direct competition with other global cities" and thus "seems somewhat aloof of any ties to the nation" (Knebel Doeberitz and Schneider 5). This development indicates a split in the evaluation of London's central economic and cultural role in comparison to other parts of the UK. Whereas many, particularly wealthy Londoners feel that "the city would be far better off without its burdensome, income-poor 'hinterland'" (Knebel Doeberitz and Schneider 5; cf. also Chakrabortty), London also receives the bulk of government spending in the UK, almost four times as much as the North East in 2023 (HM Treasury, "Country").[28]

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[28] The discrepancy between government spending in London and other UK regions was even higher in the past (Arnett). Urban fantasy's representation of this split between city and country will be at the focus of the analysis in chapter 4.

Contrary to political developments on the national level, Labour won the mayoralty back from the Conservatives in May 2016, and Sadiq Khan succeeded Boris Johnson. In the referendum, the Greater London Area had the second highest share of votes for Remain with 59.9%, after Scotland's 62%, although five of the thirty-three London voting areas voted for Leave. Overall, however, "[t]he contrast between the national result produced a degree of anger in London" (Black, *London* 231) and the strong majority for Remain in London reinforced the impression that the relationship between the capital and other regions of the UK is one fraught with tension.

Sadiq Khan addresses these tensions in the introduction to the 2021 *London Plan*, which replaced Johnson's *2020 Vision*, by naming "Brexit and the continued uncertainty this is causing; air pollution; climate change; and entrenched inequality" (Mayor, *London Plan* xii) as the central challenges for London in the third decade of the twenty-first century. This brings me back to the claim made at the beginning of this section, namely that the first two decades of the century have been marked by a sense of crisis ordinariness in which several overlapping economic, political, cultural, and social crises have been punctuated by the 'Cool Britannia' era and the 2012 Olympics as two brief periods of positive public sentiment, marked as they were by deliberate attempts at brand building. As Black points out, "[i]n some respect, the diversity of the city is part of its global identity" (*London* 238), but whether or not London "can remain in its current position relative to other global cities" (239) following Brexit and the COVID19 pandemic remains unclear, as "[r]ecurrent issues within London include pressures and anxieties arising from development, migration, poverty, crime and taxation" (244).

It is against this socio-political backdrop that London urban fantasy has emerged as a genre in the twenty-first century, thus continuing what Merlin Coverley has described as "the London Revival" (134) in literary fiction. Responding to the lack of scholarship on London's fantastical urban imaginary, this dissertation is devoted to mapping how urban fantasy engages with the extradiegetic systems in which the novels find themselves entangled, how they relate to the political fractures that became evident in the upheavals of the 2010s especially, how they articulate what London means in the fantastical urban imagination, and how they posit nostalgia, haunting, and (in)security as specific structures of anxious feeling in twenty-first-century Britain.

1.3   The Present State of Research

A number of publications inform my own research. In particular, one of the starting points of my research was the ubiquity of London in British fictions in the twenty-first century, which academics registered meticulously (see e.g. Coverley; McLeod; Wolfreys). However, London urban fantasies managed to escape the scrutinising glance of literary studies scholars so far. With the in-depth analysis of the literary and cultural dimensions of structures of anxious feelings in this body of

works, this dissertation therefore extends the growing corpus of critical work on the literature of London to its fantastical imaginary beyond the well-researched genre of the Gothic.

John McLeod, one of the most prolific scholars on London literature, notes that

[i]n an age when the city's local fortunes are ever more subject to the travails of global happenings – armed conflicts, poverty and refugeeism, the 'war on terror' – writers' contemporary visions of the city (of its past as well as its present) cannot remain immune from the changed atmosphere and conditions of a new, already embattled century. ("Writing" 242)

Taking this observation as a starting point, he identifies three major strands of London's literary representations which, in the globalised world, can be regarded as equally true for other urban centres in the Western hemisphere. He juxtaposes, firstly, "a polycultural and multiracial vision of [the City's] problems and possibilities" as "an alternative to older diasporic models of urban and individual identity" and, secondly, the focus of many writers on "the difficult lives of those . . . often pushed to the side in official views of [the City] as a vibrant centre of world capital and global culture" (244). Thirdly, McLeod traces the influences of the 9/11 and 7/7 terrorist attacks, which have "led writers to explore the psychological and moral consequences as well as the social impact of contemporary change" (244).[29]

Overall, McLeod's observations with regard to developments in post-9/11 urban literature echo the claims to the end of the age of irony and the return of the 'real' that have been voiced since Roger Rosenblatt's famous essay "The Age of Irony Comes to An End" appeared in the *TIME* magazine shortly after 9/11 (cf. Gheorghiu 2), and which literary scholars also proclaim for London novels (Groes 259). The proclaimed 'return of the real', however, neglects non-realist forms of writing, most notably fantasy and science fiction, even though it is precisely the fantastical mode of narration which has experienced not just in literature but a transmedia surge in popularity, starting already in the 1990s but continuing well over the turn of the century. While a monocausal connection between heightened anxieties in the twenty-first century and the boom of non-realist literary and audio-visual narratives is certainly an undue oversimplification, the proliferation of non-realist modes of narration can be explained at least partly by their ability "to translate some of the social and cultural complexities . . . in a popular, globally recognised format for mass-audience consumption" (Howie and Campbell 29). As Luke Howie and Perri Campbell propose, "the nature of anxiety in the social world" arises from the uncertainty generated by the fact that "we don't know what we don't know, but we imagine that we have some idea" (26). The non-realist fantastical mode offers a powerful tool of imagining what we do not know to make it more tangible; in other

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[29] Coverley identifies two types of early twenty-first-century London writing: one strand which is character-driven and in which the "characters are symbolic of the city they inhabit", and a second strand which "extend[s] interpersonal and family relationships to comment on the state of the city as a whole" (135).

words, "we need fantasy to think the world, and to change it" ("Editorial" 48), as China Miéville put it. I therefore contend that urban fantasy constitutes a major and prolific trend within London's urban imaginary in the twenty-first century.

It thus seems surprising that edited academic collections devoted to charting contemporary British fiction in general and literary London in particular largely ignore the fantastical urban imaginary. The capital's ubiquity in the British urban imaginary may exemplarily be illustrated by pointing out that even in a recent edited collection on *Twenty-First-Century British Fiction and the City*, edited by Magali Cornier Michael (Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), six out of the ten chapters deal with London texts. This phenomenon is also visible in collections which focus on the British novel more generally, albeit less strikingly so. Examples include Nick Bentley, Nick Hubble and Leigh Wilson's *The 2000s: A Decade of Contemporary British Fiction* (Bloomsbury, 2015) or Vera and Ansgar Nünning's *The British Novel in the Twenty-First Century: Cultural Concerns – Literary Developments – Model Interpretations* (WVT, 2018), where the prominence of London might be explained by a heightened concern for postcolonial British fiction, which often centres on the British capital. As my survey of the recent scholarship on literary London in chapter 2.3.1 will demonstrate, aside from occasional discussions of nineteenth-century London Gothic or the theme of the returning past academic attention is skewed towards realist representations. Likewise, my survey of existing scholarship on urban fantasy in chapter 2.1 will reveal the need for close readings of individual city texts, as much of the existing scholarship is devoted to sketching the contours of the genre rather than inquiring about the specific imaginaries of individual cities. Therefore, by offering an account of London urban fantasy this present study understands itself as contributing to closing this gap in the existing research on both literary London and urban fantasy.

1.4   The Literary Corpus

As the previous section has demonstrated, this study looks at a number of texts that have not yet received widespread critical attention. As I will elaborate in chapter 2.2, my definition of urban fantasy is closely tied to the history of the genre, which I argue bifurcates around 2000 into a strand informed by crime fiction and one informed by romance. Under the considerable literary influence exerted by Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* novels (2005–2008), the latter has morphed into what is now termed paranormal romance and will thus be excluded from my analysis. Urban fantasy can be further delineated into a strand whose setting emulates our consensus reality with the exception of the supernatural, in particular with regard to its depiction of urban environments, and one strand which is set entirely in fantastical otherworlds. Since I am interested in the representation of London in urban fantasy specifically, I have excluded texts which are not set explicitly in London,

regardless of how closely the urban environment in the text is modelled on the British capital.[30] Similarly, I have exempted individual novels set in a fantastical version of London within a series of urban fantasy whose overall setting is not exclusively London or individual novels which include fantastical London within a whole range of urban settings.[31] Likewise, novels whose narrated time does indicate a departure from the period defined above as *contemporary*, that is, the first two decades of the twenty-first century, have also been excluded.[32] All of these exclusions result from my contention that these kinds of novels tell fundamentally different kinds of stories.

As a result, the defining criteria for including a novel in my corpus are (a) its setting in a fantastical version of contemporary London, which is designated as London on the level of the story, and (b) the incorporation of elements from crime fiction, as this is a fundamental characteristic of urban fantasy in contrast to paranormal romance. Since both fantasy and crime fiction have a predilection for serialised formats, these novels tend to come in series. Moreover, they tend to be narrated from one character's perspective in first-person voice.[33] My corpus therefore consists of 31 novels contained in five series. Listed chronologically by the publication of their first instalment, these series are:

- the *Bartimaeus* trilogy (Jonathan Stroud, 2003–2005): three novels
- the *Matthew Swift* series (Kate Griffin, 2009–2012): four novels
- the *Rivers of London* series (Ben Aaronovitch, 2011–): nine novels
- the *Alex Verus* series (Benedict Jacka, 2012–2021): twelve novels
- the *Shadow Police* series (Paul Cornell, 2012–2016): three novels

I will provide a short plot summary as well as an evaluation of the respective series' importance with regard to the construction of the corpus in chapter 2.4. Overall, the corpus is put together in such a way as to ensure that my readings will be able to trace commonalities in terms of content and form across a variety of urban fantasy series but also tease out heterogeneous approaches to their representation of Londonness as a nexus of structures of anxious feelings. Moreover, since the novels are published over the entire span of the period under consideration, I will punctuate my synchronic analysis with remarks on diachronic developments where they are evident. However, I must acknowledge that my selection, as indeed any corpus selection, remains subjective and arbitrary to a certain extent. I have attempted to make my selection criteria as transparent as possible and explain here in how far they are motivated by the interests of my study.

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[30] Examples of this type are China Miéville's *Un Lun Dun* (2007) or V. E. Schwab's *A Darker Shade of Magic* (2013).
[31] An example of this type of novels is Genevieve Cogman's *The Invisible Library* (2015).
[32] This includes Neil Gaiman's *Neverwhere* (1996), Samantha Shannon's *Bone Season* series (2013–), as well as the whole body of works which falls under the category of neo-Victorian fiction, such as e.g. Erin Morgenstern's *The Night Circus* (2011) or Natasha Pulley's *The Watchmaker of Filigree Street* (2015). I will briefly comment on neo-Victorian fiction's relation to urban fantasy in chapter 2.3.2.
[33] I will elaborate on these characteristics and their implications for the analysis in the chapters 2.2 and 2.3.

By looking at the cover art of all five series, it becomes evident that the series under consideration in this thesis are marketed as belonging to a coherent and identifiable genre – urban fantasy – with a particular interest in the qualities of its setting – London. To not overdo this exercise and because the pattern becomes quickly apparent as is it replicated consistently, I limit myself to briefly comparing the cover jackets of the first instalment in each series.
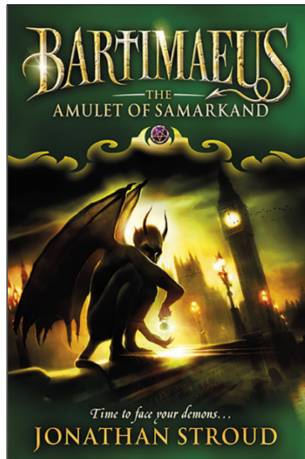
Fig. 1: Cover of *The Amulet of Samarkand* (Corgi, 2010)
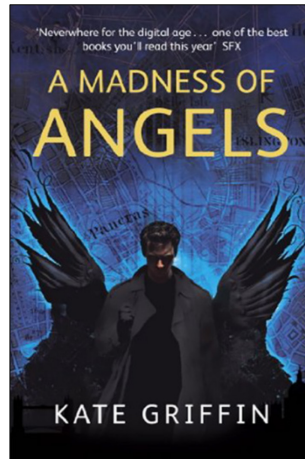
Fig. 2: Cover of *A Madness of Angels* (Orbit, 2009)
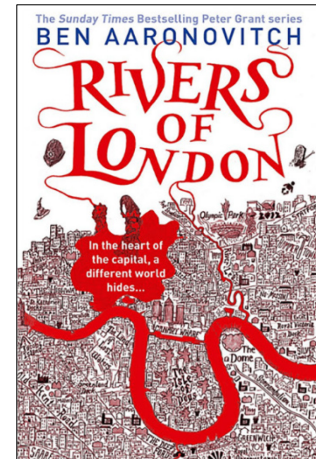
Fig. 3: Cover of *Rivers of London* (Gollancz, 2011)
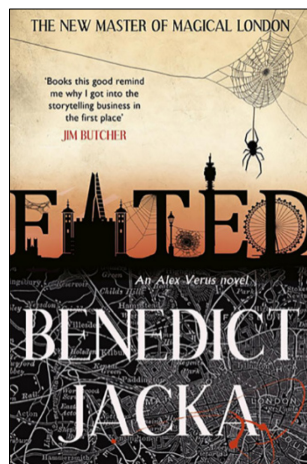
Fig. 4: Cover of *Fated* (Orbit, 2012)

Fig. 5: Cover of *London Falling* (Pan Macmillan, 2012)

As can be seen at first glance, all cover jackets represent London visually. Big Ben and the Houses of Parliament feature on the cover of both *The Amulet of Samarkand* and *London Falling*, and *Fated* sports the Tower of London, the Shard, the BT Tower, and the London Eye as instantly recognisable iconic landmarks to make up part of its lettering.[34] What unites all cover jackets except the ones for the *Bartimaeus* trilogy, however, is the street grid of a part of London, either with the city's name on it or the name of city districts.[35] These novels, therefore, do not only advertise

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[34] Big Ben is depicted on the cover jacket for *Cursed*, the second instalment in the Alex Verus series.

[35] The *Rivers of London* series retain this cover art, which was done by Stephen Walter and based on his artwork "The Island", even for two of its three companion novellas which are not set in London but depict their urban setting in the same street grid style: *The October Man* (Trier, Germany) and *The Masquerades of Spring* (New York, USA).

themselves as urban fantasies, or as parts of a series – the series name is included on almost all of the covers – but as *London* urban fantasies in particular. How much this has become a recognisable genre in its own right with purchase on the publishing market becomes clear with the example of Stroud's *Bartimaeus* trilogy. As I explain in more detail in chapter 2.4.1, Stroud's novels were published half a decade before all the others in my corpus, at a time when the genre of urban fantasy was still in formation and when London urban fantasy was not yet an established and widely recognised publishing category. The cover I have depicted above is the one of the re-print series from 2010 by Corgi, whereas the original edition was published in 2003 by the American publisher Doubleday and featured a different cover. The first-edition cover jacket showed an image of the djinni Bartimaeus in the form of a gargoyle, clutching the eponymous Amulet of Samarkand, and was not altered for the international translations of the novel.
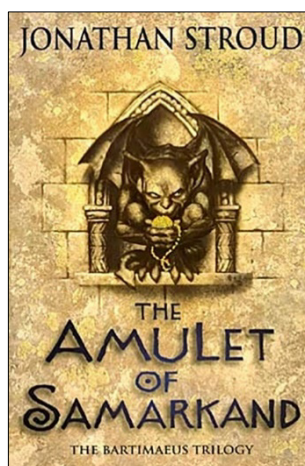
Fig. 6: Cover of *The Amulet of Samarkand* (Doubleday, 2003)

Fig. 7: Cover of *Das Amulett von Samarkand* (cbj, 2004)

Arguably, however, by 2010 publishers felt the need to visually align Stroud's *Bartimaeus* novels closer with the setting in London and altered the cover jackets of all three novels in the trilogy accordingly to emphasise their Londonness. Looking at the ways in which London is represented in urban fantasy is thus a selection criterion that distinguishes this dissertation from previous work done on urban fantasy more generally.

1.5 Methodological Approach

The present study understands itself to be contributing to literary urban studies as an intersection of different disciplines, chief among them cultural and literary studies.[36] Since the theoretical basis

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Winter's Gifts, which is set in Eliose in Northern Wisconsin, USA, depicts the area at the shore of Lake Superior in the same artistic style.

[36] What is meant here by *cultural studies* is the British variant that has developed primarily at the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS), formed 1964 under the directorship of Richard Hoggart. For a concise disciplinary history, see Nick Stevenson's chapter "British Cultural Theory" in the *Routledge Handbook of Social and Cultural Theory* (2nd ed., edited by Anthony Elliott, Routledge, 2021, pp. 226–46). For a history of British cultural studies in Germany, see Christian Huck's meticulous and extensive account "How Cultural Studies Came

of the following analyses is explained in more detail in chapters 2 and 3, some general remarks regarding methodology must therefore suffice here. Cultural studies is often criticised for its lack of a distinctive methodology, and critics frequently accuse the discipline of theoretical and methodological eclecticism (see e.g. Bal, "Cultural" 33–34; cf. Marchart 36–37, Baßler 152, and Huck, "How" 90–91 for a summary of such criticism). Oliver Marchart responds to such criticism that it risks confusing methodological diversity for methodological arbitrariness. A "variety of methods", he contends, "has the advantage of great flexibility in dealing with the different manifestations of the cultural" (37). Echoing Stuart Hall and Lawrence Grossberg, Paula Saukko posits that "[t]he trademark of the cultural studies approach . . . has been an interest in the interplay between lived experience, texts or discourses, and the social context" (11). Famously, Hall has pointed to cultural studies' interest in the textual, noting "that culture will always work through its textualities – and at the same time that textuality is never enough" ("Cultural Studies" 82). Hall's observation, in turn, points to Clifford Geertz's description of culture as "webs of significance he [man] himself has spun" (5), thus allowing to conceive of culture as a text that can be read with the methodological tools of literary criticism.[37] At the same time, the observation opens up literary texts as a formation in which culture manifests itself symbolically as a whole. The "never enough" of culture's textuality points to the logic of mutual influence that is at work here. Culture constitutes itself in textual forms, which in turn influence culture. The text simultaneously both is produced by culture and (re)produces culture. In addition, Lawrence Grossberg has drawn attention to the practice of cultural studies as "radically contextualist" (*Bringing* 254). He rightly points out that "[a]n event or practice (even a text) does not exist apart from the forces of the context that constitute it as what it is" (255). By context he means "not merely background but the very condition of possibility of something" (255). This context, Lawrence argues, is not "empirically given beforehand; it has to be defined by the project, by the political question that is at stake" (255). This interdependency of meaning production and politicised contexts constitutes the research object of cultural studies. Meaning, in other words, is produced differently in different cultures at different historical contexts for different purposes, and this demands cultural studies' "adaptation to the respective time and place of each particular investigation" (Huck, "How" 91).[38] In this

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to Germany, or, Rather, The Events and Circumstances that Led to the Foundation of the German Association for the Study of British Cultures".

[37] It would be remiss not to note here that while Hall and others of the CCCS acknowledged the role of the representational and the value of semiotics, they also strove to move beyond it. The aim was to make the study of culture a materialist endeavour. Literature is understood in this sense as an aesthetic cultural practice among many others. As Christian Huck points out, the questions asked by cultural studies scholars do not posit literature as a reflection of culture, do not see culture as acted out between art and society, but see the struggle for hegemony in all aspects of life, art included, as constitutive of culture itself ("How" 34, 43). This conception liberates cultural studies from merely becoming a new way of dealing with literature beyond structuralist and formalist research designs.

[38] See Marchart 38–42 for a condensation of Lawrence's argument into six "guidelines" for cultural studies research.

dissertation, I argue accordingly that urban fantasy texts produce Londonness as a nexus of structures of anxious feelings in the twenty-first century and subject the texts under analysis to a close reading in order to tease out the particularities for substantiating this claim.

In recent years, cultural studies scholars have advocated for conjunctural analysis as a research framework to reconcile the discipline's rejection of predetermining theories or prescriptive methods with the need for a more systematised way of doing research in order to avoid theoretical reductionism by finding out what was expected anyway. As I will explain in chapter 3.3, a conjuncture denotes the specific historical and social conditions in which cultural practices take place and under whose influence representations are articulated. In this sense, the concept of articulation "highlights the role of representations and ideologies in the forming of connections" (Huck, "How" 93) which determine meaning. A conjunctural analysis can therefore be defined as "the analysis of convergent and divergent tendencies shaping the totality of power relations within a given social field during a particular period of time" (J. Gilbert 6). It is a means to "find chains of contingencies that within *this* conjuncture, have *that* effect" (Huck, "How" 94; original emphasis).

This framework suggests an organisation of the analysis on three levels, the largest of which is the conjuncture as the systematic macro-level of a social formation as a whole. The smallest level of analysis is that of the individual texts which constitute the examples. Here, a specific problem attracts attention: how is London represented in the specific works of contemporary urban fantasy? The answers to this question are provided throughout chapters 4 to 6 and are aggregated across the texts from the exemplary micro- to the configurative meso-level, which is informed by the economic, political, and cultural context in which these texts emerged. The guiding question for my research at this level is how specific and individual representations of London are aggregated to a configurative structure of feeling? In moving from the meso- to the macro-level, I then ask how partial configurations – different structures of feeling – can "be positioned in relation to the social formation as a whole (or, at least, to relevant parts of it)" to form what Jürgen Kramer has termed "a soft version of totality" (168)? How, in other words, can different structures of feeling be drawn together to a comprehensive picture of what Londonness means in twenty-first-century Britain?

Such a framework prompts two further observations with regard to the methodological underpinning of my research. Firstly, Kramer's three-stage model as well as the idea of cultural studies as doing conjunctural analysis make clear that some theoretical grounding is needed in order to substantiate the endeavour, in my case to read literary works of fantastical fiction as articulations of a specific conjuncture. For this dissertation, the theoretical framework is provided by Raymond Williams's concept of structures of feeling. Structures of feeling remained a central touchstone for

Williams throughout his working life and, as I explain in some detail in chapter 3.1, was altered and developed across his opus. Suffice it thus to say here that the concept draws attention to the idea that the ways in which a society talks about itself, for example in literary texts, are indicative of shifts in language, feeling, and thinking which suggests the pre-emergence of a collective disposition towards the world. As I argue in chapter 3.2, I see the disposition towards London in contemporary urban fantasy characterised by nostalgia, haunting, and (in)security. Moreover, I position anxiousness as a particular quality of anticipation beyond the pathological meaning of the word as the commonality between these three structures of feeling.

As any approach, such a framework bears its own risks and limitations. Firstly, my contention that contemporary London urban fantasy speaks to and is part of a conjuncture is contingent on my periodisation of both socio-political events (as I have sketched them in this introduction) and my understanding of the evolution of the genre (as I will sketch it in chapter 2). Different understandings of the periodisation of the present conjuncture will be able to tease out other continuities and ruptures than I have. Similarly, different genealogies of urban fantasy have been written, and they may come, and have come, to different conclusions about the subject matters of the texts at which they look. Secondly, a conjuncture is "formed out of multiple, heterogeneous and contradictory forces, tendencies and trajectories" (Clarke 81). This draws attention to the fact that sets of questions about a particular conjuncture run side-by-side, "rather than presuming that there is a singular 'here' (in parallel with a singular 'now')" (Clarke 83). In addition, Clarke's observation also makes clear that no lone scholar, let alone a single dissertation, can hope to exhaustively analyse a conjuncture. Consequently, rather than self-aggrandising my study as a conjunctural analysis of the present moment in and of itself, I think it prudent to recognise that the findings provided by my case studies may constitute a stepping stone towards understanding the interconnections between economic, political, social, and cultural factors that shape the contemporary understanding of Londonness. Lastly, cultural studies prides itself in not erasing but making apparent the position of the researcher. For all that science strives to provide objectivity, constructivism has taught us that striving for any 'pure' sense of objectively looking at the world is futile. As I elaborate in chapter 3.3, I am therefore aware that the decisions I have made in designing this research project ineluctably exert influence over its findings. However, I believe that the way forward in light of such an insurmountable exigency to any scientific endeavour is to make transparent the assumptions and predispositions that underline one's research design; a claim to which I hope to have done justice.

1.6   Chapter Overview

This present study is divided into two parts. Following this introduction, I provide the theoretical and methodological framework for my subsequent analysis. Chapter 2 offers a detailed survey of the existing research on urban fantasy, which I close with the observation that particularly the element of urbanity has been unduly overlooked so far. I go on by offering my own definition of urban fantasy out of a synthesis of the genre's two denominators: *fantasy* and *urbanity*. This definition is then integrated into a multigeneric framework which also encompasses elements of the realist London novel, Urban Gothic, and crime fiction. Chapter 2 closes with a brief summary of each of the series under analysis, their central protagonists, and their specific London setting, as chapters 4 to 6 will frequently draw on such information. In chapter 3, I extend Raymond Williams's concept of structures of feeling by anxiousness as a central characteristic of Londonness in the twenty-first century to argue that London urban fantasies are indicative of nostalgia, haunting, and (in)security. Against this background knowledge, chapters 4 to 6 reflect the systematic approach and focus on one of these structures of anxious feelings respectively and analyse the five urban fantasy series for their representation of London and Londonness. Although there are conceptual overlaps and synergies to be made between the individual chapters, I contend that each of the three literary traditions I theorised in chapter 2.3 as exerting an influence on urban fantasy offers a particular representational paradigm that can be tied to one structure of anxious feeling. Each of these chapters therefore opens with a brief theoretical outline introducing the specific structure of feeling that frames the respective chapter.

Chapter 4 discusses urban fantasy's engagement with the city-country dichotomy, which can be found in many urban novels of the state-of-the-nation variety, through the lens of nostalgia. In particular, I argue that the texts uncritically employ either a nostalgic imagery of the pastoral countryside in order to construct London as a morally and/or politically depraved space or the equally distorted paradigm of the progressive city in contrast to a parochial rusticity that allegedly characterises the countryside. I read such a construction in the context of London's economic dominance within the UK as well as Brexit.

Chapter 5 performs a hauntological examination of the metaphorical construction of the city as a body. More precisely, I categorise urban fantasy's representation of London along the somatic imagery of the heart of the city and the mnemonic imagery of the city as a mind. Since both metaphoric variants are frequently organised around an additional representational paradigm of either sickness or health, urban fantasy's genealogic vicinity to the Urban Gothic is foregrounded in this chapter. I argue that the somatic imagery engages with London's history as an erstwhile imperial capital, whereas the mnemonic metaphorics foregrounds economic networks within the city.

Chapter 6 emphasises the elements urban fantasy borrows from crime fiction and investigates the novels' representation of surveillance technologies. I argue that in the fantastical surveillance city the relationship between magic and technology becomes central to negotiating surveillance as a cultural practice with which all urban citizens engage, voluntarily or not. The series reflect on the pervasiveness of surveillance practices in contemporary urban life to varying degree, ranging from imagining their protagonists engaged in a battle of resistance against a panoptic state to acknowledging the ubiquity of surveillance as a constitutive element of urbanity.

In addition to summarising the analytical results, the conclusion identifies patterns and common threads that connect the three analytical chapters. Moreover, it briefly addresses the environmental crisis as a point of concern conspicuously absent from twenty-first-century urban fantasy.

I have framed the analytical chapters 4 to 6 as *cartographies* of the respective structure of feeling which is the focus point of the analysis. The term is meant to reflect what I have already acknowledged in the previous section on methodology, namely that my study engages in the production of knowledge by mapping key literary trends as representing an urban landscape which simultaneously continues to be ontologically constituted in the extradiegetic reality. This dissertation charts the representational strategies of a literary genre over a period of some fifteen years which engage with a present as it is taking place. In this observation, I return to one of the starting points of this introduction: I am offering a cartography of the contemporary which, in the words of Giorgi Agamben, "is, then, a singular relationship with one's own time, which adheres to it and, at the same time, keeps a distance from it" (41), and thus suggests a relationship of simultaneous closeness and critical distance.

2 Approaching London Urban Fantasy

This chapter is concerned with sketching the contours of what I mean when I speak of urban fantasy. The concept is too elusive to hope for a sharp definition, but by the end of the chapter, it will have become clear what I regard as the characteristic features of the texts that I group under this label. Although this study is not one that focuses on genre in particular, any discussion of urban fantasy cannot manage without a few prefacing remarks on the matter, because urban fantasy is, in essence, genre fiction. To date, urban fantasy has been varyingly conceived of as either a genre in its own right (e.g. all publications by Ekman; Elber-Aviram, "Past"; Holmes; McLennon, Ramos-García) or a subgenre (e.g. Bergue; Clute, "Urban Fantasy"; Duarte and Coelho; Tiffin; Young). With regard to urban fantasy as a subgenre, Stefan Ekman and Leigh McLennon in particular have argued convincingly that this automatically raises the question to which parent genre urban fantasy would be subordinated; a notion that both reject on the grounds of urban fantasy's capability to amalgamate influences from many literary genres, thus warranting the status "as a genre in its own right" (Ekman, "Urban Fantasy" 452; cf. also Ekman, *Urban Fantasy* 3–5). McLennon argues that this hybridity essentially characterises urban fantasy to such an extent that she refers to it as "a hybrid genre", thus placing hybridity at its centre.[1] It must be noted, however, that hybridity is an essential feature of *any* genre in the postmodern understanding and thus not distinctive for urban fantasy alone. To account for these porous boundaries, Jacques Derrida has introduced the useful notion of genre participation instead of claiming that texts 'belong' to just one genre: "Every text participates in one or several genres, there is no genreless text; there is always a genre and genres, yet such participation never amounts to belonging" ("Law" 65). Derrida's terminology of participation points to the fact that texts do not possess any inherent characteristic that make them part of any genre by default, but that genres are human categories of classification that are discursively constructed in order to make sense of texts. Consequently, the idea is untenable that any one text can only belong to one genre that somehow captures the essence of that text.[2]

To date, some of the most prolific writing of genres and its conventions comes from scholars who discuss audiovisual texts, predominantly film and television. However, their arguments are also relevant for literary genres and help illuminate 'the genre question' with regard to urban fantasy. Writing about television genres, Jason Mittell argues that "[a] category primarily

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[1] This sentiment is echoed in an encyclopedia entry by Robin Anne Reid, which claims that urban fantasy could be usefully conceived of as a mode, thereby making it "flexible enough to operate across a range of themes" and media. While Reid refers to John Clute in the vicinity of this statement, it remains unclear whether the argument is her own or Clute's.

[2] The refusal of essentialist ideas about genre also extends to discarding the much-evoked distinction between literary and genre fiction as 'good' and 'bad' writing respectively. A particularly acerbic dismissal of this value judgement can be found in China Miéville's essay "The Autonovelator", in which he observes a "détente between litfic and its others" (42), that is, the increasing amalgamation of traditional realist elements with formal characteristics typically relegated to genre fiction.

links discrete elements together under a label for cultural convenience" (5). He also rejects the notion of genre as an intrinsic quality of any text and claims that genres are constituted by intertextuality instead, since "the category itself emerges from the relationship between the elements it groups together and the cultural context in which it operates" (6). Therefore, he conceives of genres as "*discursive practices*" (8; original emphasis) in the Foucauldian sense, and his discursive conceptualisation of genre decentres the individual text in order to focus on the cultural contexts that surround genres. Mittell's prioritisation of cultural context over the text simultaneously builds on and goes beyond Rick Altman's semantic/syntactic approach of textual analysis. Altman argues about film that there are two aspects to any notion of genre which either focus on characteristic elements – such as characters, locations, or attitudes – or constitutive relationships among different elements – most notably plot structures. Borrowing his terminology from linguistics, Altman claims that "[t]he semantic approach thus stresses the genre's building blocks, while the syntactic view privileges the structures into which they are arranged" (10).

Whereas Altman's concept of genre emphasises synchronic characteristics of genres, Mittell's argument adds a diachronic perspective. He claims that "we need to look at genre history as a fluid and active process, not as a teleological tale of textual rise and fall", thus concluding that "instead of typical questions of definition or interpretation, we should foreground *questions of cultural process*" (Mittell 10; original emphasis). He locates such cultural process primarily in industry and audience participation in the construction of genres which, in addition to intertextual relationships between the texts, give rise to the texts' individual usages of semantic and syntactic tropes that many audiences come to associate with genre labels. As Lisa Fletcher points out, "[r]eaders select and evaluate genre novels in relation to the horizon of expectations, which is charted and recharted by personal reading histories and in relation to genre boundaries" (3).[3] In this sense, genre is a category which profoundly impacts text choices, regardless of whether the text in question is an audiovisual or a literary one, and makes genre not only "a salient aspect of contemporary literary production" but also "a powerful tool for literary and cultural diagnosis" (Lanzendörfer 3).[4] This impact becomes immediately clear when looking at reviews on platforms such as *Goodreads*, for instance, which often include references to and recommendations of similar works that display the

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[3]   Ultimately, I believe that the underlying issue is one that is directed at the purpose of genre. If genres, as Altman notes tongue-in-cheek, are "treated as if they spring full-blown from the head of Zeus" (8), one risks subjecting genres to theoretical regimentation for the purpose of *excluding* texts. However, if the result of this narrowing down is that one ends up excluding what most people pre-theoretically would include in the genre's scope, this suggests to me not that the people are ignorant but that the theory must be improved to better describe existing practices. This belief will also shine through my discussion of fantasy later in this chapter and led me to preferring a broad definition of fantasy over a narrow one.

[4]   Lanzendörfer is referring here to the process which Joshua Rothman has termed "genrefication" in an article in *The New Yorker*. Genrefication describes the process to which I have already alluded in the introduction, namely that the traditional boundaries between literary and (popular) genre fiction are eroding.

same genre elements or rank a novel as fitting, or not, for readers who love a particular genre.[5] This is even more true for genres that advertise themselves explicitly as genre fiction, such as fantasy, Gothic, crime fiction, or urban literature, all of which contribute semantic and syntactic elements to urban fantasy texts.[6] I have therefore incorporated not only scholarly discussions of urban fantasy in my survey of the state of research below, but also contributions from librarians and urban fantasy authors.

Urban fantasy is, in my opinion, best conceived of as a dynamic genre, which this study locates at a particular point in time, namely the first two decades of the twenty-first century. As my analysis will show, the contemporary socio-cultural context has influenced urban fantasy texts to develop distinctive semantic elements into an idiosyncratic structure – usually by borrowing from, and thereby participating in, other genres. Such discursive intertextuality exemplifies Emily McAvan's argument about the postmodern character of popular culture in the twenty-first century in general as the "suturing together of texts from other texts" (25).[7] In addition to a fantastical mode and a notion of urbanity in the case of urban fantasy, much of the intertextual fabric for suturing is provided by Urban Gothic and crime fiction due to the two genre's proclivity for urban settings from the middle of the eighteenth century onwards.

One caveat cannot be simply ignored in discussing a slippery concept such as genre, however. Both Altman and Mittell have stressed the necessity for many different approaches to exist simultaneously and equitably in order to form as complete a picture as possible. My approach towards urban fantasy, hence, is not meant to be monolithic but constitutes one among many. Moreover, it is naturally informed, and therefore limited, by my selection of texts; a limitation which cannot be avoided entirely. Stefan Ekman, the most prolific urban fantasy scholar, has used the vivid metaphor of a bug's eye, which reconciles its fractured views into a complete image, to describe how "the many perspectives on urban fantasy can be aggregated to discover some of the genre's underlying characteristics" (455). In a more recent publication, he also uses a sartorial metaphor and observes that urban fantasy has come into being as the result of "braiding" (*Urban Fantasy* 37) different generic strands together. Hence, what one means when one speaks of urban fantasy depends significantly on the selection of the braiding material. Accordingly, I understand

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[5] This algorithmic logic underlying audience preferences has of course also been exacerbated by these online platforms, who rely heavily on review recommendations as incentives for future purchases. James English pursues this issue further in "Five Star Stories: Readers and Ratings" (*Literary Judgment and the Fora of Criticism*, edited by Mats Jansson, Sandra Richter, and Gisele Sapiro, Wallstein, forthcoming)

[6] Urban fantasy's heritage from different lines of literary tradition as well as the established tropes that have originated in them will be further examined later in this chapter.

[7] For an argument about the existence of a postmodern fantastic in British fiction in particular, see Martin Horstkotte's *The Postmodern Fantastic in Contemporary British Fiction* (WVT, 2004). Horstkotte brings together a Todorovian understanding of fantasy with postmodern critical theory by Brian McHale, Linda Hutcheon, Jean-François Lyotard, and Jaques Derrida in order to argue that postmodern aesthetics and the sustained hesitancy of the pure fantastic mutually reinforce each other.

this study as contributing an inevitably fragmented perspective to the complete image to advance the understanding of urban fantasy as a meaningful genre in the twenty-first century. Any discussion on and about genre, however, is an approximation of its object that ultimately and ineluctably remains subjective and artificial. Brian Attebery has observed that by believing too strongly in one's own categories, one risks participating in what he has termed, bluntly but aptly, "boundary disputes and definition wars" (*Strategies* 11). The more interesting question, after all, is not what a certain text is or is not, but what it *does*. Therefore, I intend to uncover in this study what the selected texts do when they are read as urban fantasies.

Despite considerable divergences in the definitions of the label *urban fantasy* between and within both the publication market and scholarship, some common ground can be teased out from existing definitions of the genre. Specifically, urban fantasies are generally understood as stories about magical or supernatural elements in a noticeably urban environment. However, after having proposed this truism, most of the definitions that I will discuss in the next part of this chapter plunge right into examining influences from other genres with giving little indication as to what they understand as 'magical or supernatural elements' and what exactly constitutes the 'urban environment' is often barely discussed.[8] It seems therefore sensible to first examine the existent definition attempts, before offering my own by exploring the two denominators of the label, *fantasy* and *urban,* which are both constitutive of the genre and provide touchstones for the interplay of other generic influences.

2.1   Urban Fantasy in Criticism

Existing scholarship on urban fantasy is hitherto almost exclusively concerned with defining the form, discussing its relationship to other publishing genres, or it focuses on the exploration of single texts, most notably by the British authors Neil Gaiman and China Miéville (e.g. Meteling; Raţă; Tiffin, Vogrinc Javoršek; M. P. Williams; Vanderbeke), or by the American writer Laura K. Hamilton (e.g. Fusco; Heiß; Holland-Toll). Concise studies on the urban fantasy genre are, with one exception, contained in larger anthologies or journals and therefore discuss only very specific and limited aspects of their primary texts. Their concern with genre also entails that these texts focus on ascertaining the parameters of urban fantasy which reflect the disciplinary backgrounds and interests of their respective authors. In addition, there are a handful of articles which explore urban fantasy's thematic concerns on an abstract level (e.g. all publications by Ekman; Elber-Aviram, "Past") and diachronic studies of the urban fantastic in the nineteenth and twentieth

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[8]   In his most recent publication, the book-length study *Urban Fantasy* (2024), Stefan Ekman argues that "the *urban* in *urban fantasy* is like the *science* in *science fiction*, not a required feature for a given story" (12; original emphasis), but "an acknowledgement of how frequent stories about cities and science are in the respective genres" (12). As will become clear over the course of this chapter, I disagree with this assessment at least where my choice of texts is concerned.

centuries (Elber-Aviram, *Fairy Tales*; García). The only book-length study on urban fantasy was published by Stefan Ekman in August 2024 and continues most of the arguments he has made in previously published articles while also arguing that the gerne is concerned with modernity at its core.[9]

All of these studies of the urban fantasy tradition, however, are built on a slightly different definition of the genre than the one I am proposing, which makes for a different corpus that often stretches all the way back to the nineteenth century. Though Hadas Elber-Aviram's *Fairy Tales of London: British Urban Fantasy, 1840 to the Present* continues into the present, just as her title promises, the exploration of twenty-first-century urban fantasy is necessarily limited to one chapter which "suggests that this new permutation encodes an escapism that runs counter to the political and social engagement at the heart of the genre" (24). As I hope to demonstrate throughout, I beg to differ with this assertion and seek to demonstrate otherwise by offering the first book-length study to date that examines extensively twenty-first-century urban fantasies about London with regards to the socio-political context that has produced these stories.

John Clute was the first to offer a definition of urban fantasy in *The Encyopedia of Fantasy* (1997). He saw it as a group of texts in which "fantasy and the mundane world intersect and interweave throughout a tale which is significantly *about* a real city" ("Urban Fantasy"; original emphasis). In addition, he identified as central characteristics the Crosshatching of the mundane and a supernatural otherworld, the emphasis on "the consanguinity of . . . peoples, times and stories", the concern with urban conflicts, the struggle for "a sense of Healing" at the end of the story, and the tendency to choose as central protagonist "a kind of hunter-gatherer figure, one better able than suburbanites or farmers to cope with the crack-up of the immensely rigid world system created over the previous few thousand years" ("Urban Fantasy").[10] These characteristics have persisted to varying degree in twenty-first-century urban fantasies, with the exception of Healing as the central achievement at the end of the story. Apart from the general development in fantasy fiction towards more diversified story patterns, I contend that this department from Clute's four-stage pattern of Wrongness, Thinning, Recognition, and Healing is largely due to the preference of urban fantasy for potentially ever-ongoing or at least extensive book series rather

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[9] The temporal proximity of Ekman's publication to the submission of this thesis entails that we arrive at similar conclusions by pursuing different approaches. The genealogical history of the genre offered in the book, for instance, is congruous with the one I offer in this chapter. The point about which we find ourselves disagreeing most profoundly is the importance of the denominator *urban* for urban fantasy, though this may result from Ekman's claims being about the genre more generally, while I am concerned specifically with London urban fantasy.

[10] Crosshatching describes the instance when "two or more worlds may simultaneously inhabit the same territory" (Clute, "Crosshatch") without being sharply demarcated. Moreover, John Clute conceives of fantasy as being structured by stages of Wrongness, Thinning, Recognition, and Healing in the storyworld ("Fantasy"). Healing denotes the final stage of the narrative when the evil in the fantastical storyworld has been defeated and the world can return to normalcy. Accordingly, Clute has re-named the final stage 'Return' in post-1997 versions of the model. The idea is similar to Tolkien's concept of eucatastrophe but describes the state of the storyworld rather than the reader's state of mind.

than standalones or concluded trilogies, because serial instalments depend on open ends for the next one to follow.

In *Rhetorics of Fantasy* (2008), Farah Mendlesohn offers a taxonomy of fantasy that draws on Clute's four-stage-pattern but reconceptualises it into four categories, which are organised by the way the fantastic enters the text: portal-quest fantasy, immersive fantasy, intrusion fantasy, and liminal fantasy.[11] Although Mendlesohn does not discuss urban fantasy by name, she identifies "the tendency of immersive fantasies to be set in cities" (89). This observation stems from the contention that cities are "places that imagine themselves the center of the world" (89), which allows cities to function as universes in and of themselves: "the belief that there is *so much there* that there is no reason to search outward, and the constant belief that there is more and more to discover within the environs of the city, helps to create an emotional trajectory that spirals inward, towards a core" (89; original emphasis). Her discussion touches upon a few points to which I will return throughout this chapter, in particular the notion of these places being characterised by an "urban mind-set" (89). However, while the categorisation of urban fantasies as immersive is certainly accurate with regard to the examples given by Mendlesohn – China Mieville's *Bas-Lag* trilogy (2000–2004) and Terry Pratchett's *Guards! Guards!* (1989) – it entirely neglects contemporary texts set in cities which we recognise from our consensus reality,[12] but which include supernatural elements. These texts – of which there have been countless examples already in 2008 such as Neil Gaiman's *Neverwhere* (1996), China Mieville's *King Rat* (1998), Jim Butcher's *Dresden Files* novels (2000–present) or Jonathan Stroud's *Bartimaeus* trilogy (2003–2005) – seem to follow the trajectory that Mendlesohn classifies as intrusion fantasy to a certain extent, where the mundane, real world is ruptured by a supernatural intrusion. However, intrusion fantasy in her sense shapes the plot into a particular direction, as the real world strives to dispel the supernatural intrusion. This specific structure is not entirely accurate with regard to the texts I discuss as urban fantasy which rather move towards a reconciliation of the two domains. Overall, Mendlesohn's structural taxonomy is one focussed on the poetics of text which appears at times a little arbitrary in its choice of examples and, therefore, comes with its own 'health warning' in the front that "[t]his book is not intended to create rules. Its categories are not intended to fix anything in stone". For

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[11] In portal fantasy, supernatural elements are on the other side of a portal, through which the protagonist enters the supernatural realm. As this form is usually presented as a quest narrative, with the protagonist returning to their side of the portal at the end of the story, Mendlesohn sees this as one category. Immersion fantasy is set entirely in a fantastical otherworld in which "the point of view characters . . . must take for granted the fantastic elements with which they are surrounded" (xxi). In intrusion fantasy, supernatural elements intrude upon a world which is perceived as normal and ordered. Usually, this is the real world, although intrusion narratives can also be set in an immersive otherworld. Liminal fantasy is the most obscure and least elaborate of her categories in which supernatural elements are "represented as unnerving, and it is this sense of the unnerving that is at the heart of the category" (xxiii).

[12] The term *consensus reality* is Kathrine Hume's, who proposed it in order to make clear that whatever we conceive of as 'reality' is not absolute but contingent. I will return to her argument in more detail below when I discuss what exactly I understand by fantasy.

all its shortcomings, however, her taxonomy is useful for debunking the myth that, somehow, all fantasy is the same – a claim usually accompanied by the accusation that fantasy is purely escapist literature – and for providing the analytical insight that structure and content, poetics and politics, of fantasy stories are closely linked with each other, though her focus lies with the former.

Viviane Bergue and Adam Zolkover have pointed out the relationship between the mundane urban reality depicted in urban fantasy and their supernatural elements as one relating to the Gothic. Bergue sets out to unravel the different lineages of urban fantasy elements as originating in the fantasy and the Gothic tradition respectively, but their close entanglement leads her to the rather trivial conclusion that probably "there will be no end to the discussion of what makes Urban Fantasy different from Gothic fiction" (58). Zolkover in particular engages with the presence of the uncanny in the Freudian sense in urban fantasy and argues that "[i]n order for the uncanny to function effectively, . . . signs must point not only to the mundane, but *our* mundane" (70; original emphasis). In addition to the trope of the uncanny, Zolkover addresses the reconfiguration of legends and fairy tales which "suggest a kind of drawing-together of the elements of different universes of discourse" (76) and results in the texts being "ensnared in an intertextual web, deploying a combination of history, literature, prior fantasy, and legends in order to populate a landscape at the border between fantastic and uncanny" (78). This intertextual versatility of urban fantasy has been noted as "a kind of generic syncretism" (77), but others tend to dismiss it as "shorthand to pull the reader through familiar territory quickly without wasting precious time" (Beagle 11). I see intertextuality as a characteristic feature of London urban fantasy that, firstly, helps characterise the protagonist as an apt decoder of contemporary London and, secondly, is used to construe a sense of realism within the fantastic text, since references to other fictional works are usually used in order to suggest that the characters within the urban fantasy narrative do in fact perceive their reality *as real* despite the supernatural occurrences they encounter.[13]

Alexander C. Irvine offers a conceptualisation of urban fantasy that allows to integrate the different texts which Mendlesohn and Zolkover consider respectively. Irvine suggests conceiving of urban fantasy as "a literary axis, with *urban* as one terminus and *fantasy* as the other" (201; original emphasis). This model builds on Kathryn Hume's argument that fantasy as a mode can only be outlined in relation to mimesis, which seeks to represent consensus reality with verisimilitude, because Irvine's axis requires the equation of *urban* with *reality*, or, more precisely, *consensus reality* to make sense; a step that he conveniently skips. Consequently, the more urban a text is, that is, the more it represents the urban environment mimetically, the more it tends towards narrating a

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[13] In Ben Aaronovitch's *Rivers of London* series, for instance, police officers working outside the designated department tasked with investigating the supernatural regularly dismiss events which involve the fantastic as "*X-Files* shit". The reference to the well-known American TV show seeks to establish the narrative's universe as reality akin to ours despite supernatural occurrence, which are relegated to a fictionality of the second order.

Mendlesohnian intrusion fantasy with supernatural elements in a real-world city, whereas texts that lean more towards the fantasy pole of the axis depict an urban environment in an immersive fantastical otherworld.[14] Irvine's axis allows to connect the stories' content to their form. With recourse to Mendlesohn's taxonomy, moreover, it makes clear that these two kinds of urban fantasy tell different stories and thus warrant different narratological approaches. This concept is fundamental to my choice of texts, since I have thus decided to disregard urban fantasies set in a fantastical city that is supposed to be London for all intents and purposes but is not identified as London in the text.[15]

Irvine regards this loose distinction into "two fundamental strains of urban fantasy" as "a characterization if not a rigorous definition", which he sees complicated by the label's extension "to include virtually every work of the fantastic that takes place in a city or has a contemporary setting that occasionally incorporates a city, with the result that any particularity the term once had is now diffused in a fog of contradiction (and, it must be added, marketing noise)" (200). The fog of contradiction he deplores refers primarily to the alleged conflation of urban fantasy and paranormal romance as well as the tendency to identify every fantasy story which is set in our contemporary world automatically as urban fantasy, regardless of the prominence of urban environments in the story itself. While Irvine is certainly right in pointing out the difficulty to define urban fantasy conclusively, urban fantasy and paranormal romance have largely been seen as overlapping but distinctive genres by readers, the publication market, and academia. Irvine's own essay on urban fantasy in *The Cambridge Companion to Fantasy*, for instance, is immediately followed by Roz Kaveney's essay on dark fantasy and paranormal romance. Already in 2008, Nanette Wargo Donohue has advised librarians to be wary of "genre confusion" (64), identifying as distinctive characteristics the prominence of romance in the plot and the tendency of paranormal romance to focus on different characters in each instalment whereas urban fantasy series retain the same protagonists throughout. These characteristics have been taken up in subsequent discussions of the differences and similarities between urban fantasy and paranormal romance and have been

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[14] In a chapter on urban fantasy in *Race and Popular Fantasy Literature*, Helen Young has proposed to term the kind of urban fantasy which is set in the real world "suburban fantasy" (141). She clarifies that she means to emphasise by this term both the (occasionally) suburban setting (as opposed to metropolitan settings) and the often literally sub-urban location of the supernatural (142). Prompted by the success of Netflix's *Stranger Things* (2016–), this idea is continued with respect to audiovisual texts by Angus McFadzean's *Suburban Fantastic Cinema: Growing Up in the Late Twentieth Century* (Columbia UP, 2019). However, I find Young's terminology more misleading than illuminating, because neither the suburban setting nor the location of the supernatural underground is necessarily featured in all urban fantasy of this kind. Moreover, if *the urban* is conceptualised qualitatively as a certain way of life instead of quantitatively as the distinction between metropolis and suburb, the terminological distinction becomes redundant.

[15] Examples for versions of London that are not 'real' London include China Miéville's *Un Lun Dun* (2007) and Simon R. Green's *Nightside* series (2003−2012). There is an argument to be made that it is this strand of urban fantasy in particular which is influenced by the writers of the New Weird since the 2000s (cf. Ekman, *Urban Fantasy* 62).

largely affirmed as the most distinctive idiosyncrasies of the two genres by authors and critics alike (Harrison; Holmes; Mandelo; McLennon). As these distinctions also inform my choice of texts, I take the liberty to briefly rehearse the argument here.

Leigh McLennon's discussion of the two genres is one of only three I identified which holds the view that urban fantasy and paranormal romance are for all intents and purposes the same genre. The second is by writer N. K. Jemisin, who starts a blog post published on Jeff VanderMeer's blog in 2009 by asking readers to assume that "there are two kinds of urban fantasy". She proceeds to distinguish them as 'stylistic' and 'contextual' urban fantasy and lists as authors belonging to the first kind Gaiman and Miéville as well as VanderMeer and as writers exemplifying the second kind Laurell K. Hamilton, Patricia Briggs, and Marjorie Liu. The usual argument, Jemisin writes, is that these two kinds of urban fantasy bear "as much resemblance to [each other] as apples do to . . . bean pies", which she then spends the rest of the post to debunk. Jemisin links the compartmentalisation as being down to race and gender – Gaiman, Miéville and VanderMeer are all "white guys" – and while she does concede that the stylistic kind offers "better writing", she eventually finds that "there is not as much difference between these two forms of U[rban] F[antasy] as everybody keeps saying there is". This indicates that the formation of paranormal romance as a meaningful genre label – under which Hamilton, Briggs, and Liu are nowadays grouped on the book market and by readers online discussing their works – originates somewhere around the beginning of the 2010s. However, the distinction between urban fantasy and paranormal romance remains a fuzzy one. U. Melissa Anyiwo and Amanda Jo Hobson's edited collection *Gender Warriors: Reading Contemporary Urban Fantasy* (2019) comprises essays which are focussed on texts foregrounding romantic relationships, some of which are usually regarded as prototypical paranormal romance, such as Joss Whedon's television show *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997–2003) or Laura K. Hamilton's *Anita Blake* series (1993–present). In their introduction to the collection, Anyiwo and Hobson conceive of paranormal romance as a sub-genre to urban fantasy and argue that "the difference between these two categorizations is really an issue of nuance and emphasis" (3).

The claim that urban fantasy and paranormal romance are essentially the same kind of texts is explicitly refuted by María T. Ramos-García, who points out that "the basic differences between paranormal romance and urban fantasy – as the genres are understood by most – create very distinctive kinds of narrative and reader expectations" (143–44). She continues to argue that the formulaic 'happily ever after' (HEA) ending is important to paranormal romance readers, who would "feel cheated when a book marketed as paranormal romance doesn't end with an HEA" (144). Ramos-García traces the predominance of the HEA-ending to the romance genre proper

and concludes that, while both forms share the influences from fantasy and the Gothic, the romance line of tradition is not adopted by urban fantasy (Ramos-García 147).

While I tend to side with Ramos-García on this issue, McLennon's discussion of what she refers to as "UF/PR" in particular offers one of the most extensive studies on urban fantasy to date and raises two points in particular that are also relevant for this dissertation. Firstly, McLennon was one of the first critics who saw urban fantasy as characterised by the amalgamation of different generic influences, among which she cites "fantasy, the Gothic, horror, romance, chick lit, crime fiction, and science fiction". While this study also emphasises the indebtedness to Gothic and crime fiction, I deem it necessary to add influences from realist representations of the city in literature to this list. Secondly, McLennon usefully charts the history of urban fantasy and paranormal romance from the 1980s to the early 2000s and identifies three waves of urban fantasy.[16] The first wave began the genre and was coined by writers such as Charles de Lint, Emma Bulls, and Terri Windling. Their stories centred around a character who was "forced to question his or her own identity and social role" by the presence of the supernatural. This thematic concern reflected the increasing dissolution of identity as an essential, unified human characteristic at that time. In the 1990s, urban fantasy's concern shifted towards strong female protagonists who "refuse the traditional position of victim" and "instead embrace the agentive role of the heroine". The eponymous characters of the *Anita Blake* series, Tanya Huff's *Vicky Nelson* (1991–1997) series, and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* thus showcased "the contemporary cultural significance of girl-power, and post- and third-wave feminism that emerged the 1990s". Lastly, McLennon notes a shift at the beginning of the twenty-first century, which she describes as one towards posthumanism, and points to the remarkable popularity of vampire characters for evidence. She thus concludes that urban fantasy has been able to register social and cultural anxieties from its beginnings and suggests that anxieties of identity and sexuality have shifted towards anxieties of boundaries of the human since 2000.

I suggest that the third shift in the development of urban fantasy which McLennon locates at the beginning of the twenty-first century and which she sees characterised by an incorporation of posthuman ideas and third-wave feminism, entailing a particular focus on romantic relationships with werewolves, vampires, and other supernatural beings, actually constitutes precisely the moment when urban fantasy and paranormal romance started to split into distinctive genres of their own rights. As the thematic concern with female sexuality is particularly susceptible to influences from the romance tradition, the texts McLennon discusses under the label of urban fantasy after the turn of the century are now predominantly considered paranormal romance by

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[16] Much of her genealogy also informs Stefan Ekman's much more extensive "Short History of Urban Fantasy" (*Urban Fantasy* 37–69), the only other existing attempt to chart the genre's historical evolution.

almost all other sources I have consulted as well as by the publication market and readers. The same holds true for the three female writers N. K. Jemisin refers to in her blog as writing contextual urban fantasy (in her terminology). As Gina Wisker concludes in her examination of contemporary vampire fiction, the vampire in particular has "become a figure that continues to invite *romantic* fantasies and so reinforces heterosexual relationships based on undying love, however quite chastely portrayed" (236; my emphasis). Similarly, Kristina Deffenbacher's essay on urban fantasy surveys texts that center on female protagonists' "fulfilling *romantic* relations with supernatural men who respect their strength" (31; my emphasis), suggesting that these texts might in fact be more aptly considered as paranormal romances by dint of the stories they tell. The prevalence of vampire characters further indicates sexuality as the dominant issue in these texts, which makes them noticeably different from the strand of urban fantasy which I examine in this study. Helpfully, Joseph Crawford's *The Twilight of the Gothic? Vampire Fiction and the Rise of Paranormal Romance* chronicles meticulously the generic history of paranormal romance and traces its influences from the Gothic and romance traditions. Crawford argues that although this trend had not actually begun with Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* series (2005–2008), the seismic cultural impact of Meyer's four novels and the consequent film adaptations has certainly established paranormal romance as a recognizable genre that differs from urban fantasy both in its generic elements and the stories it tells.[17]

From my point of view, these scholarly examinations of the relationship between urban fantasy and paranormal romance can be amalgamated into the following argument: After writers, predominantly but not exclusively female, had introduced elements from romance into the emerging genre of urban fantasy in the 1990s, the genre differentiated and effectively split into the two strands of paranormal romance and urban fantasy around the turn of the millennium. The former continued the generic interplay with romance, Gothic, and horror fiction, but is characterized primarily by the prominence of romantic relations for the plot, if not the stereotypical HEA-ending, and tends to focus on different protagonists' romantic relationships in each instalment. Other writers, again predominantly but not exclusively male, reacted to the prominence of romance and moved their texts closer to plot patterns and protagonists stemming from the crime fiction genre, the earliest example of which is probably Jim Butcher's *Dresden Files* series (2000–present).[18] In my point of view, the beginnings of what I mean by contemporary urban

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[17] In *Twilight of the Gothic*, Crawford tends to contradict himself regarding the relationship between urban fantasy and paranormal romance. At one point he sees urban fantasy as the parent genre to paranormal romance (121), at other times it forms the subgenre (110); sometimes urban fantasy detective fictions are "numerous enough to form a subgenre of their own" (110), but then again, they form "a distinct minority" (121).

[18] Crime fiction is a genre which "developed mainly in white, Western, patriarchal societies in which agency was granted to men rather than women" (Worthington 41). Its inclusion in urban fantasy thus marks a noticeably gendered departure from the more femininely coded romance tradition. I do not endorse the binary and rather

fantasy lie this gendered split. Consequently, it has informed my choice of texts for this study. While the novels I discuss occasionally draw upon sexual anxieties in their subtext, this is not their focal point and the romantic relationships that are displayed are marginal to the plot development.

So far, I have claimed that many of the academic texts supposedly discussing urban fantasy are often concerned with paranormal romance texts, and that those who do focus on urban fantasy as I understand it are more concerned with generic elements than with offering interpretations of the actual stories. Those that do focus on particular texts, do so with respect to a few authors only, the most prolific of which are Neil Gaiman and China Miéville in a British context. Of the texts I discuss in this dissertation, only Ben Aaronovitch's *Rivers of London* novels (Borowska-Szerszun; Elber-Aviram, *Fairy Tales*; Ekman, "London Urban Fantasy", *Urban Fantasy*; Hopkins; Kędzierska; Korte; Lethbridge) and Jonathan Stroud's *Bartimaeus* trilogy (Bhattacharya; Campbell; Do Rozario; Köhler; Oziewicz) have been discussed at all, and none with respect to the concerns I propose to be at the centre of the texts.

Before turning to Stefan Ekman as the most prolific urban fantasy scholar, two other texts deserve mention. Stefan Rabitsch, Michael Fuchs, and Stefan L. Brandt's edited collection *Fantastic Cities: American Urban Spaces in Science Fiction, Fantasy, and Horror* provides an impressive span of texts from the three modes of writing named in the subtitle and focuses on "the pervasiveness and ubiquity of the American city (or, more precisely, *representations* of the American city) in the media" (4; original emphasis). The contributors look at literature, film, television, and video games in order to tease out "a procedural and multifaceted indeterminacy that undergirds the American city and thus the fantastic urban imaginary" (11). Although conceptualising the term *fantastic* more widely than I do – by extending it to science fiction and horror – the authors acknowledge that "there is a complex interplay at work between actual urban and social realities, their representations, and how these representations feed back into our experiences and imaginations of urban spaces" (15). Moreover, in their introduction to the collection, Rabitsch, Fuchs, and Brandt conceptualise the fantastic city according to nine criteria: its representational character, the reliance on particular scripts, the modularity of constitutive components, its transnational character, its horizontal and vertical expanse, the erosion of the separation between the city and its surroundings, the interlinking of urban experience with mobility, and its palimpsestic character. Such an impressive array of characteristics might benefit an expansive collection but is far too wide-ranging for the purposes of this study. Nonetheless, a collection such as theirs, but which focuses on British fantastic cities, even beyond London, still constitutes a lacuna in the discipline.

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stereotypical construction of gender that underlies this argument, but to deny its validity for the genre evolution discussed here seems contrafactual to me.

Aleksandra Łozińska's chapter on urban fantasy cities as communities of citizens in *The Palgrave Handbook of Global Fantasy* is the one text which sustains a prolonged interest in the urban environment in which urban fantasy stories are set.[19] Łozińska engages extensively with existing urban fantasy research and surveys a variety of primary texts, among which are also Ben Aaronovitch's *Rivers of London* series, the first two instalments of Kate Griffin's *Matthew Swift* series, the first instalment of Benedict Jacka's *Alex Verus* series as well as the ubiquitous Jim Butcher, Neil Gaiman, Charles de Lint, and China Miéville. While she argues convincingly for the organisation of fantastic societies and the fight for the fate of the city as overarching narrative structures in urban fantasy, the nature of the publication precludes an in-depth study of the material from which these claims are elicited. Moreover, Łozińska proclaims a transnational character of the cities depicted in urban fantasy, which further prevents a more localised analysis for the sake of broader comparison despite her observation that "the protagonists themselves are very often localized" (111).

Stefan Ekman's prolonged occupation with urban fantasy seems like the right choice for concluding this survey of the current state of research. His professional output on the subject matter comprises three highly relevant journal articles and the only existing monograph on urban fantasy and follows a clear trajectory. In "Urban Fantasy", published in 2016 in the *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts*, he starts theorising the genre as "focusing on that which in some sense or other is not seen: the Unseen" (463), which he clarifies as "the less savoury aspects of modern/urban life" (466), and which he sees as evidence for the genre's function to offer social commentary. Although he identifies these aspects to mean "criminality, homelessness, addiction, prostitution, and physical and sexual abuse" (463) more specifically, the discovery that literary texts comment somehow on the societies which have produced them is not particularly surprising. Given that it is his first publication on the subject, it is understandable that Ekman focuses on the examination of academic texts on the issue at this point and does not yet perform actual textual analysis.

The subsequent publication in 2017 contains the first examination of urban fantasy's borrowings from crime fiction ("Crime Stories"). He argues that the criminal investigator as central protagonist and plot patterns revolving around crime and its detection have found their way into the urban fantasy genre and serve to make "the social criticism of the societies in which the stories

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[19] The *Handbook* was published in 2023 and contains not only Łozińska's chapter but also one by Dean-Liathine McDonald on "Punk Subculture in Urban Fantasy: Life on the Border". McDonald's conceptualisation of the genre draws on the 'usual' sources (John Clute, Stefan Ekman, Alexander C. Irvine, Leigh McLennon) and develops its argument with regard to Terri Windling's *Borderland* novels. Thus, I have sidelined the chapter in my own discussion of the gerne. However, I find it noteworthy that such a recent edited collection, and one which proclaims the scope of its subject matter to be global, has not only one but two chapters on urban fantasy, which one may take as an indication of the genre's topicality.

are set and, by extension, of the reader's society . . . more powerful, more compelling—and perhaps more noticeable" ("Crime Stories" 56). This article may be fruitfully read alongside Catherine du Toit's "Murder and Magic: Sorcery and Suspended Identity in Contemporary Crime Fiction", which treats the kind of urban fantasy/crime fiction crossover as one of two strands in what she calls "[t]he hybrid genre of 'occult crime fiction'" (119) and invigoratingly focuses on texts outside of the Western tradition – but finds "the Western model of criminal justice" (134) to still appear dominating.[20] A third article by Ekman from 2018 then provides more in-depth textual analysis on London urban fantasy specifically and examines the "physical and cultural traces of history" ("London" 380). Ekman reads "the historical perspective of underground places" as another expression of "the Unseen" (394), which resonates with Hadas Elber-Aviram's claim that a psychoanalytic reading of archaeological elements in urban fantasy reveals "suppressed histories" ("Past" 6), but this argument remains largely unexplored in the article.

The various arguments are joined in the impressive monograph on urban fantasy which Ekman published in 2024. *Urban Fantasy: Exploring Modernity through Magic* consists of eight chapters and two interludes, which take the reader on a tour de force to explore urban fantasy's generic origins and core concerns. Ekman is demonstrably well-read and the sheer breadth and versatility of the genre shines through in all of his discussions as well as the most comprehensive and extensive review of urban fantasy from the 1950s onwards and its scholarship since the 1990s that has hitherto been published. However, this strength in the broad choice of texts is also the book's only weakness, as it poses the problem that the particularities of individual urban fantasies tend to be cut short for the benefit of making broader claims about the genre. Ekman is well aware of this lack of analytical depth in the discussions and self-critically points out that "[e]ach of the main examples . . . deserves book-length studies of their own; regrettably, this book is not one of those studies" (163). I hope that my own study will at least partially overcome this limitation. Overall, the study reflects Ekman's interest in the ontological status of the different worlds, the narratological possibilities they afford, and the characters that populate them as well as their development. It thus provides a much-needed introduction to the scholarship of urban fantasy, even though broad claims of the genre in its variety are favoured over individual readings due to the study design.

Throughout the book Ekman argues that the denominator *urban* in the genre label is "not a required feature for a given story" but rather "a reminder that the stories are set in a modern world defined by urbanity" (*Urban Fantasy* 11). This claim arises from his understanding of the city as "[t]he foremost icon of the modern world" (271). For all the merits of his study, I find

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[20] Barbara Korte's article on the *Rivers of London* series, which is published in the same edited collection as du Toit's also addresses the intersection of crime fiction and fantasy (173–78). Similarly to McLennon, her conclusion is that hybridity on the generic level reinforces the thematic occupation with hybrid identities.

myself mostly disagreeing with the totality of this claim, despite his acknowledgement that the city provides an important setting for many urban fantasies (12). The rejection of the denominator's topofocal valence arises out of Ekman's focus on the genre's breadth and versatility, which may well result in the necessity to downplay the importance of individual cities for the genre *at large*. However, if one starts to look at individual clusters of urban fantasies, as indeed I do, one inevitably finds that the respective city matters a great deal to both the authors who write these stories and the characters who populate them. In particular, I find Ekman's choice of example for the substantiation of his claim rather peculiar. He points to Ben Aaronovitch's *Rivers of London* series, which includes an instalment in which the protagonist Peter Grant leaves London for investigating a child abduction in rural Herefordshire (*Foxglove Summer*), as evidence that urban fantasy series not necessarily have to always be set in cities. If read closely, however, one discovers that *Foxglove Summer* is as much about London as the other instalments of the series, despite – or maybe even because of – its rural setting. A stauncher Londoner than Peter Grant is hard to find even among London urban fantasy characters and the narration of *Foxglove Summer* devotes a significant amount of time to Grant's complaints about Herefordshire's many shortcomings *in comparison to London* (e.g. 25, 48–50, 73, 89–90, 157). The British capital may thus be removed from the novel as a direct setting location, but it nonetheless features in it *ex negativo* and influences the protagonist's perception of his environment to the extent that Grant deploys the same strategies of magical culprit catching that he learned during the other cases in London. Grant acknowledges towards the end of *Foxglove Summer* that the trappings of magic as well as the people living in Herefordshire are different from London after all, but that difference is then relieved of its hitherto strongly evaluative tone. Nonetheless, I would argue that London remains Grant's dominant frame of reference to a specific a way of life throughout and that he applies and adopts his understanding of Londonness to rural England.[21]

The first part of the chapter has surveyed existing scholarship about urban fantasy, particularly to demonstrate how little attention has been paid to the implications that sticking the label *urban* on the genre has for the types of stories that are told. I will now proceed to offer my own approach to urban fantasy through its two denominators, *fantasy* and *urban*, though I will focus more specifically on London when I later discuss the concept of urbanity that underlies the types of stories I examine in this study.

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[21] A detailed analysis of the relationship between city and country in Aaronovitch's series will follow in the chapters 4.1.2 and 4.2.2.

2.2 Towards a Definition of London Urban Fantasy

As stated before, I do not pretend to offer a comprehensive definition of what urban fantasy is, and the preceding survey of existing attempts at doing so should have conveyed the futility in trying to capture all varieties of the form without losing any sense of particularity. Since there is no definition of urban fantasy that I fully agree with but do not want to add yet another, I have decided to frame this chapter in a processual manner, as I set out towards a definition without hoping to arrive at the desired destination. By the end of this chapter, however, I hope that it will have become clear how my assertion that I see London urban fantasy as being characterised by a productive interplay of its two denominators, *fantasy* and *urban*, has impacted my understanding of the genre and by extension my choice of texts for this study.

2.2.1 The Fantastic and Fantasy

A comprehensive theory of fantasy in general is beyond the scope of this dissertation. Such attempts have been made, with varying degrees of success, and I will refer to some of them in the course of this chapter, which has three purposes to which I will confine myself: firstly, to explain what I mean when I talk about fantasy as a denominator of urban fantasy in order to determine what type of fantastical stories London urban fantasies are; secondly, what purpose storytelling in the fantastic mode serves; and thirdly, how urban fantasies have developed historically in relation to other fantastical stories. This is primarily intended to provide some terminological clarity and an understanding of how I compiled my research corpus.

Quite confusingly, *fantasy* is used both synonymously with and subordinate to *the fantastic* in literary criticism. In the latter, maximalist use, *the fantastic* is "adopted by critics as a general term for all forms of human expression that are not realistic, including fantasy and s[cience] f[iction]" (Westfahl). Realistic, in this respect, is understood as representation of the real world with verisimilitude.[22] At times, fantasy and science fiction as the two manifestations of the fantastic are extended by horror as a third (Wolfe, "Preface" viii). In this sense, fantasy is usually delineated as being concerned with the impossible and inexplicable, whereas science fiction deals with the unlikely yet (pseudo-)scientifically explicable – at least within the story – and horror is characterised

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[22] For want of a better word, I will use the term *real world* for our consensus reality, which I will explain later, while acknowledging that any study that owes as much to constructivist tenets as this one has to take the position that reality is, at the end of the day, a construction and does not refer to a transcendental, stable reality. Other critics may prefer the term *actual world*, which stems from impossible world theory (e.g. Ekman, *Urban Fantasy* 18), but mean the same extradiegetic domain. Other descriptive contenders are *ordinary world*, which plays on fantasy's roots in the fanciful, and *everyday world*, which, however, loses its critical usefulness when its implied opposite is not a closed-off secondary fantasy world, as is the case in the texts I discuss. I have therefore settled on *real world* to indicate that urban fantasy of the kind I am concerned with mimics our consensus reality in some respects but includes the supernatural in others.

by the particular emotional response it elicits from its readers.[23] Critics who use *fantasy* synonymously with *the fantastic* have likewise adopted the broad conceptualisation of the term as appearing to be, as Rosemary Jackson puts it, "'free' from many of the conventions and restraints of more realistic texts" (1). As a consequence, when it comes to literary representation, the dominant distinction is one between modes which depict the narrated world as either conforming to or disregarding the laws of physics that govern the real world. Roland Barthes has usefully drawn attention to the fictionality of realist representation with the term *l'effet de reel*, the reality effect, as "the basis of that unavowed verisimilitude" ("Reality" 148) in an essay by the same title. Evidently, the fantastic foregoes the semblance of realist representation to a greater degree.[24]

Jackson has further pointed out that a minimalist, more structuralist approach to fantasy tends to privilege discussions of the *poetics* of the fantastic over its *politics* (6).[25] While the discussion of urban fantasy's amalgamation of different lines of literary tradition in this chapter focuses on the genre's poetics, the subject of my analytical chapters are its politics. As urban fantasy's politics are of particular interest to this study, I will follow the maximalist argument which places fantasy as one form of the fantastic that can be loosely delineated from science fiction and horror and see urban fantasy in the tradition of genres that use fantasy as a mode of writing the impossible. This is, however, less a delineation with regard to sharp boundaries, as they are rather fuzzy, but one which refers to the conventions and expectations which have come to be associated by readers, authors, and scholars with one label or the other and thus heeds the discursive negotiation of such categories.[26]

The tremendous difficulty in defining fantasy is almost universally noted in respective publications, observing how "[w]hat Fantasy means now is entangled with a deep heritage of works,

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[23] It should be noted that this broad, maximalist conceptualisation of the fantastic is dominant in recent scholarship, especially in Anglophone countries. There is, however, also a minimalist approach which sees itself especially indebted to Tzvetan Todorov's influential structuralist *Introduction à la Littérature Fantastique* (1970; trans. by Richard Howard in 1973 as *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*). Readers may be referred to Uwe Durst's *Theorie der phantastischen Literatur* (2010) for a thorough examination of both approaches to the fantastic and an argument for a narrow conceptualisation. China Miéville's "Editorial Introduction" to *Historical Materialism* vol. 10, no. 4 (2002) presents a convincing argument on fantasy's and science fiction's differing, and distinctive, relations to the impossible. On the affective character of horror, see Noël Carroll's *The Philosophy of Horror* (esp. 13–58).

[24] To avoid the terminological confusion, the term *speculative fiction* has gained currency as an umbrella category for the fantastic in recent years, which likewise draws attention to the nonrealist mode of depicting the narrated worlds it seeks to describe.

[25] For criticism on Jackson's own structuralist tendencies in constructing the corpus on which she bases *A Literature of Subversion*, which qualifies the extension of her argument to fantasy at large, see Bould ("Credibility" 58–64). Bould's essay provides a neo-Marxist theoretical corrective to Jackson's psychoanalytical reading of what, in essence, is only a narrow variety of fantasy she considers, that is, "a fantasy canon of already-canonical texts" (71).

[26] Whenever I speak of *fantasy* in the following discussion, I thus do not want to suggest that there has ever been a monolithic category which was designated by that label. The term has been and continues to be used decidedly inconsistently. I also do not regard this as a 'bad' thing, but it necessitates that I contextualise my own use of the term.

social fashionings and cultural traditions" (Sangster 18).[27] For instance, Brian Attebery states in his introduction to an edition of the *Journal for the Fantastic in the Arts* concerned with theorising the fantastic that "[p]art of the reason for the relative scarcity of fantasy theory is that it is such a vast and varied field", which is why "it is no wonder most fantasy scholars stick to histories, source studies, and critical examinations of individual writers and texts" (333). Edward James and Farah Mendlesohn's introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to Fantasy Literature* comprises only four pages, notes that "[f]antasy literature has proven tremendously difficult to pin down" (1), and limits itself to naming the works of Tzvetan Todorov, Rosemary Jackson, Kathryn Hume, W. R. Irwin, Colin Manlove, John Clute, Brian Attebery, and Farah Mendlesohn herself as valuable contributions to the genre's theoretical criticism. They then proceed to state that

> all agree that fantasy is about the construction of the impossible whereas science fiction
> may be about the unlikely, but is grounded in the scientifically possible. But from there
> these critics quickly depart, each to generate definitions of fantasy which include the texts
> that they value and exclude most of what general readers think of as fantasy. (1)

The *Companion* then leaves theoretical matters to its individual contributors, none of whom approaches fantasy with the intention to offer a comprehensive definition. Farah Mendlesohn's *Rhetoric of Fantasy*, one of the most "serious attempt to anatomize the genre" (Attebery, "Introduction" 334) in the last twenty years also takes great lengths to clarify right at the beginning that "[t]his book is not about defining fantasy" (xiii). She further observes that scholars of fantasy will "pick and choose among . . . 'definers' of the field according to the area of fantasy fiction, or the ideological filter, in which they are interested" (xiii). For Mendlesohn's own project, this concerns the question of how the fantastic enters the text and results in the four categories of portal-quest fantasy, immersive fantasy, intrusion fantasy, and liminal fantasy, to which I have referred in the beginning of this chapter.[28]

I have cited these examples not in order to lament the lack of theoretical work concerning fantasy – on the contrary, there is a lot of valuable scholarship. Rather, I intend to make clear that fantasy is such a variegated form that there is no universal definition to be offered that captures all of its incarnations to the point that Matthew Sangster declares "the difficulty of providing a neat summation" to have "become one of Fantasy scholarship's enduring clichés" (22). I agree with Attebery that the theoretical scarcity arises from the breadth and variation of texts, and I also agree with Mendlesohn and Sangster that any attempt at pinning down the meaning of fantasy is

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[27] Several authors trace the variety of fantasy to its various points of origins. A particularly succinct examination is offered by Matthew Sangster in the introduction to *An Introduction to Fantasy*, which juxtaposes Tolkien's efforts to publish *The Lord of the Rings* as one source of fantasy's increasing institutionalisation to a deliberate break from science fiction in academic societies and a storytelling tradition rooted in the American pulp magazines (1–16).

[28] Mendlesohn categorises urban fantasy as immersive, whereas Stefan Ekman and I agree that most narratives rather conform to the pattern she classifies as intrusion. However, it becomes clear that Mendlesohn's taxonomy does not aptly reflect all urban fantasy.

contingent on the scholarly project that is undertaken, and thus necessarily idiosyncratic. In what follows I will thus pick and choose theoretical works that I deem suitable to explain what is fantastical about urban fantasy.[29]

As any understanding of what fantasy means cannot be disentangled from its historical development, some context on the origins on fantastical writing are first in order. In this regard, Nancy H. Traill points out that the fantastic "is linked to modern science's re-examination of the supernatural" and "grew out of an analogous restructuring of the fictional world, where mysterious forces traditionally treated as supernatural are integrated into the natural domain" (204). As the evolution of what we now call modern science had enabled the 'demystification' of nature from the Copernican Revolution onwards, the framework for determining what counted as *super*natural changed as well. The rise of "free-thinking . . . and progress in the pure and applied sciences" made the natural world "something one could both understand and control" (Mendlesohn and James 14).[30] Where previously religion offered the primary prerogative of interpretation for the possibility of supernatural influences on and in the world, scientifically obtained knowledge was increasingly able to provide explanations for these phenomena and rendered nature significantly more understandable for humans. Consequently, the measurement for physical possibility or impossibility is the world as we perceive it, which we understand as being governed by the physical laws formulated by the natural sciences. When these laws are transgressed or violated, we think of an event as impossible.[31]

In *Natural Supernaturalism* (1971), Meyer Howard Abrams draws attention to natural philosophers' attempts to reconcile spiritual faith with the emerging dominance of scientific explanations that is particularly evident in the writings of Georg Hegel and Friedrich Schelling (67). Moreover, the metaphysical poets of the Romantic period, most notably William Blake, sought to preserve religious paradigms, thus leading Abrams to conclude that "Romantic philosophy and

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[29] Since Brian Attebery's proposal to think of fantasy as a fuzzy set has accrued special importance in the field, I must explain why I do not use it in my conceptualisation of urban fantasy. Attebery proposes to define fantasy not by boundaries but by its centre whose increasingly indeterminate distinctions invite us to think about degrees of resemblance (*Strategies* 12–13). The model has the advantage to avoid the "definition wars" (*Strategies* 11) Attebery deters, to acknowledge a work's participation in multiple fuzzy sets, to avoid black-and-white conceptualisations of belonging, and to highlight the diachronic contingencies of genre discussions. However, one is still faced with the question of which work is placed at a fuzzy set's centre as the quintessential prototype. For fantasy at large, Attebery suggests *The Lord of the Rings*, but this, as Sangster observes, "reflects an Anglophone bias" (30). Moreover, as the previous survey of urban fantasy scholarship has highlighted, urban fantasy itself is such a variegated genre that it is hard to pinpoint one prototypical text as the centre of its fuzzy set. The choice is ineluctably arbitrary and says as much about the predilections of the person choosing it as about its own qualities.

[30] Arguably, Mendlesohn and James allude here to Michel Foucault's analysis of modern science as a controlling endeavour in *The Order of Things* (1966; English translation 1970).

[31] It would be remiss not to point out that this development is one that has taken place predominantly in the so-called Western world and is entangled on a religious level with Christian theology. Nonwestern understanding of the supernatural operate much closer to what is usually called magical realism, which is not the subject of this study. For an introduction to magical realism, see for example Maggie Ann Bowers's *Magic(al) Realism* (Routledge, 2004; second edition due to be published in 2025) or Elena Gomel and Danielle Gurevitch's *The Palgrave Handbook of Global Fantasy* (Palgrave, 2023), which discusses definitional problems of fantasy on an international level.

literature are a displaced and reconstituted theology, or else a secularized form of devotional experience" (65).[32] Abram's observation clarifies, firstly, the osmosis of religious tropes into modern fantasy that has also been noted by McAvan, and, secondly, the understanding of fantasy as opposed to intentional realism in representation. As a result of this process, notions of magic and wonder were relegated to the realms of the fanciful in nineteenth-century Romanticism, whereas science and reality were henceforth understood as true and objective.[33] Moreover, the nineteenth century also saw a gradual bifurcation of the hitherto close relationship of the fantastic and the natural world in form of the Urban Gothic, as increasing industrialisation and urbanisation brought urban concerns to the fore which were then also negotiated in writing infused with the supernatural.[34]

This constructivist approach to the fantastic as the violation of natural laws rests firmly on the assumption that we as readers of stories know instinctively what is real and normal in order to identify what is not. In order to highlight the constructive character of this knowledge, Kathryn Hume has introduced the term "consensus reality" (xi). This entails that our understanding of what counts as real can change over time, as has been the case during the scientific revolution briefly outlined in the previous paragraph. Hume identifies fantasy and mimesis as the two "impulses" (20) in literature and describes fantasy as "the *deliberate* departure from the limits of what is usually *accepted* as real and normal" (xii; my emphasis). Whereas mimesis aims at representing consensus reality with verisimilitude, as has been discussed, fantasy alters intentionally the norms that govern it. John Clute adds to Hume's conceptualisation that "the perceived impossibility of these stories *was their point*" ("Fantasy"; original emphasis) as opposed to mythology, which predominantly served to make unintelligible phenomena more understandable by reframing them as meaningful acts of divine entities; an act that was also increasingly rendered obsolete by the natural sciences.

Although Hume deliberately eschews the use of the term *mode*, what she calls "literary impulses" resembles Traill's typological conception of a mode that she based on Northrop Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism*. Brian Attebery, who shares both Traill's approach to literature on the basis of fantasy and mimesis as two contrasting modes and her use of Frye's work, concisely defines a

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[32] On the particular influence of Romantic mythopoeia on specifically twentieth-century fantasy, see William Gray's *Fantasy, Myth and the Measure of Truth: Tales of Pullman, Lewis, Tolkien, McDonald and Hoffmann* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

[33] Following Michel Foucault's observations with regard to how society dealt with insanity, Oliver Bidlo argues that it was the exclusion of the fantastic from the everyday world and its banishment to the margins of epistemological discourses that made it possible to demonise the fantastic as escapism, believing it to involve an elimination of reason (34–36). For a similar argument, see Monleón (6–20).

[34] The close genealogical relationship between Urban Gothic and urban fantasy will be examined in more detail later in this chapter. A much more comprehensive history of fantasy at large is provided by Farah Mendlesohn and Edward James's *A Short History of Fantasy*, which spans almost 300 pages despite its title. Jamie Williamson's *The Evolution of Modern Fantasy: From Antiquarianism to the Ballantine Adult Fantasy Series* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2015) charts the development of fantasy from the eighteenth century until the 1980s with a specific focus on the canonising work done by Lin Carter at Ballantine in the 1950s and 1960s.

mode as "a way of doing something, in this case, of telling stories" (*Strategies* 2). The fantastical literary mode, then, can be conceived of as telling a story in a fantastical way, that is, in a way that clearly and deliberately violates our consensus reality, which we understand as being governed by natural laws, and infuses it with the impossible. In fantasy, the impossibility of events is never explained in a scientific manner according to real-world standards but attributed to magic, regardless of how elaborate explanations of different magic systems in fantasy texts might be. I find this ultimate impossibility of the supernatural in relation to our consensus reality to be a constitutive characteristic of all urban fantasy stories; within the storyworld, the characters usually accept the existence of the supernatural for their reality.

Traditionally, possible world theory has proven a fruitful approach to grapple with the meaning of the fantastic.[35] In this regard, Traill proposes to view *the fantastic* as a distinctive mode of writing which emerged in the late eighteenth century in opposition to the beginning dominance of the realist mode in the novel as a new paradigmatic literary form which relied on a fairly mimetic representation of the extradiegetic reality. She claims that "the fantastic is constituted by the confrontation and interplay within the fictional world of two contrastive alethic domains, the supernatural and the natural" (197).[36] In her terminology, the natural domain refers to "a physically possible world", whereas "the supernatural domain . . . is a physically impossible world" (198–99); a conceptualisation that is shared by other critics (Clute, "Fantasy"). It is important to note again at this point that the levels of (im)possibility always take the real world as their point of reference. In our consensus reality, what is termed fantastic is impossible, and therefore we judge texts which

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[35] The common separation of fictional fantastical otherworlds as primary and secondary owes much to possible world theory. The distinction is usually traced to J.R.R. Tolkien's essay "On Fairy Stories" as the explanation of his own mythopoetic activity. Tolkien terms the world from which he writes, that is, our consensus reality *primary world* and the fictional fantasy world *secondary world* accordingly. Tolkien inextricably links the two worlds by arguing that the act of sub-creation, of creating secondary worlds out of material found in the primary world, is an inclination that resides within all beings (138–39). However, the recognition that however much a fictional setting might try to imitate our extradiegetic reality, it cannot achieve complete verisimilitude, has complicated Tolkien's use of terms and has caused a terminological shift. While any setting for a fictional story is a secondary world in the original Tolkienian sense, the term has since come to designate a fantasy world in particular which is considerably different from our own consensus reality, most notably the many proliferating medievalist fantasy worlds (Wolfe, *Terms* 115). *Primary world* now tends to refer, in fantasy parlance at least, to the attempt at imitating our consensus reality with verisimilitude up to a certain degree. Possible world scholarship focused on fantastical world building takes this argument as a cue and has significantly expanded on Tolkien's ideas more widely. The most prolific scholar in this regard is arguably Mark. J. P. Wolf, whose publications *Building Imaginary Worlds: The Theory and History of Subcreation* (Routledge, 2012) and *The Routledge Companion to Imaginary Worlds* (Routledge, 2018) provide excellent introductions. Stefan Ekman has also engaged with world-building and different types of fantastic otherworlds in *Here Be Dragons: Exploring Fantasy Maps and Settings* (Wesleyan UP, 2013). Joanna Gavins and Ernestine Lahey's edited collection *World Building: Discourse in the Mind* (Bloomsbury, 2016) brings together a variety of contributions which engage with world building beyond the fantastic. Since my study is concerned with texts which narrate contemporary London from our consensus reality in a recognisable way, and thus are recognisably about a real city, the question of the relation between primary and secondary worlds is not among the central foci of my work. However, I will briefly return to the texts "degree of secondariness" (Wolf 25) later in the discussion.

[36] In linguistics, alethic modality is a modality of truth that "concerns the necessary or contingent truth of proposition" (Nuyts 8). Traill uses the term in a sense that Nuyts considers as "truth in the world" (9), that is, what is and is not possible in any given world.

deal with the fantastic as being unrealistic, or nonmimetic. Even though our consensus reality and the storyworld are on different ontological levels, the process of literary representation links them with regard to the question of (im)possibility. As Roger Callois has put it, "[t]he fantastic is the impossible that unexpectedly appears in the world from which the impossible has previously been banished by definition" (46; my translation). This does not, however, constitute a difference in the level of fictionality, since a fantastical text is not more, nor less, fictional than a realist one. The crucial difference here is that they are written in different modes which relate differently to our consensus reality, namely by mimicking the physical laws that govern it as closely as possible in one case and by departing deliberately from them in the other. In other words, both modes are equally fictional, but fantasy does not pretend to be mimetic, whereas realism does. In summary, fantasy is a mode in the sense of telling a story in a manner which significantly veers from the natural laws as they have been formulated by modern science after the Copernican revolution, which govern our consensus reality.[37]

Eventually, as Henning Kasbohm has pointed out by building on Wolfgang Iser's reader-response criticism, the fantastic "only exists through the communication with the reader function inherent in this structure" (45; my translation). The central characteristic of any text in the fantastical mode, then, is that the text's attributes require the implied reader to accept a set of laws that do not conform to the rationally scientific models of explanation with which we make sense of our consensus reality.[38] In other words, while the actual reader may or may not be willing to suspend their disbelief in the possibility of the story's impossible elements, in order for fantasy to work the implied reader of the fantasy text is expected to treat the elements technically violating our understanding of the natural laws as if they were possible for the duration of the story.[39]

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[37] Albrecht Koschorke has proposed this to be a universal possibility of all storytelling. In comparing narrations to what he calls story games, he argues that "within its realm narration rules uncontrolled and omnipotent; it does not have to care about any congruency with outside reality; it takes the liberty of declaring each and every possible thing an object in the world. Like thinking and speaking in general, narration does not have a sufficient intrinsic truth-sign at its disposal. As in a vortex, mixed within it are elements of truth, semblance, hearsay, ignorance, error, lies. Stories can slide back and forth between the two possible extremes, commit themselves to faithfulness to reality in a way that suits them or else entirely cut their relationship with it; but neither alternative touches on their inner constitution" (4).

[38] The distinction between implied and actual reader is important here, because a text cannot compel its actual reader to do anything. As Mark Bould notes facetiously, postulating that an actual reader possesses the intended attitudes "necessary for the text to be completely effective" is tantamount to "forcing Schrödinger to check up on his cat" ("Credibility" 57).

[39] My formulation here is deliberately based on Samuel Taylor Coleridge's famous dictum of the willing suspension of disbelief in the *Biographia Literaria*. Tolkien ascribes this to the internal credibility of the fantasy story, which cannot violate the laws which govern its own fictional world in order to compel the implied reader into accepting the supernatural as part of the narrated world ("Fairy Stories" 132). Departing from Coleridge's notion of suspension, which he dismisses as something more passive, Tolkien terms this reader-world contract *secondary belief* (132). One can also reasonably well assume that most readers of fantasy are indeed willing to suspend their disbelief, otherwise their engagement with the genre would not make much sense. However, for the sake of critical clarity, I believe the distinction into implied and actual reader is a necessary one here, even though reader-response criticism has no further bearing on my study.

The fantasy story's narrator plays an important role in mitigating the relationship of the fantasy world to our consensus reality. With regard to texts like urban fantasy, which blend elements from our consensus reality with the supernatural, Brian Attebery observes that readers usually extend the narrator's observations: "If the story mentions London, we can assume Paris. We can fill in Tower Bridge and the dome of St. Paul's, whether or not they are invoked specifically" (*Strategies* 131). In this aspect, texts insist on the 'principle of minimal departure' – a term which Attebery borrows from Marie-Laure Ryan – which means that the texts insist their worlds be treated as the actual world (131–32). Once the supernatural is introduced, Attebery argues "the principle of extension ceases to operate", since we no longer can trust the storyworld to conform in all aspects to the world we know to be real: "No longer can we be sure that the fictional London is situated across the Channel from a fictional Paris or that its history matches any part of the history we know" (132). However, as this would result in completely dislodging the narrative discourse from any background knowledge, readers usually move fairly quickly beyond questioning the correspondence of the storyworld to our consensus reality and simply accept that this fictional London, to stay in Attebery's example, is indeed located across the Channel from a fictional Paris, unless the narrator tells otherwise. Real-world knowledge is brought to the storyworld in order to fill in "at least an approximation of the story's background" (132). Moreover, readers then draw on their knowledge of storytelling traditions to assume contingencies of the impossible events for which they have no referential knowledge from their own extradiegetic consensus reality. This means, in other words, if readers encounter a London which conforms to every aspect of the London that exists in our consensus reality except that it happens to have supernatural denizens, then readers will fill in inessential background knowledge about these supernatural inhabitants from other, similar storytelling traditions they know until their assumptions are corrected by the narrator.[40]

In terms of its function, the binary opposition between fantasy and consensus reality does not entail that fantasy *cannot be about* reality. Quite the contrary, since fantasy's impossibility does not constitute a separate ontological domain but can only ever be constituted in relation to what is accepted as real, fantasy inevitably refers back to reality and deals with conflicts and issues from its authors' and readers' consensus reality in a fantastical way. In this sense, fantasy is quite real, as

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[40] One look at virtually every fan forum online confirms this hypothesis, as fans usually love to speculate about the contingencies of inessential background knowledge that the narrator has not (yet) explicated for this specific storyworld. Moreover, urban fantasy's proclivity for postmodern pop culture intertextuality plays with these mechanisms. For instance, when in Ben Aaronovitch's *Rivers of London* PC Peter Grant is recruited into the Metropolitan Police's branch responsible for supernatural crime, his new supervisor DCI Thomas Nightingale reveals to him that he is a wizard (44). Like avid fantasy readers, Grant extrapolates from this information with the help of other storytelling traditions and asks Nightingale whether he means wizard in the sense of *Harry Potter*, to which Nightingale exasperatedly responds that no, not like Harry Potter, because he is not "a fictional character" (44).

Frank Weinreich pointedly notes (22). Even more so, it challenges the very binary distinction into science and reality on the one hand and magic and fantasy on the other. Precisely because fantasy is not realist, it provides a notion of estrangement from our consensus reality, as we are prompted to view real conflicts and issues from a perspective which we deem impossible in principle. Thus, fantasy defamiliarises the familiar, as it "removes objects from the automatism of perception" (Shklovsky 24). As narrators are liberated from the laws and norms of consensus reality and allowed to narrate more freely than they could in a realist mode, readers find the possibility to negotiate conflicts and issues from their consensus reality in fantastic texts in a defamiliarised way (Weinreich 25–29). "In the literal untruth", Brian Attebery sees fantasy's potential "to tell many symbolic truths" (*Stories* 4), often through literalising metaphors (*Fantasy* 9–10). These symbolic truths and the capacity to render the familiar strange makes fantasy applicable rather than merely allegorical, as J.R.R. Tolkien has pointed out: "I think that many confuse 'applicability' with 'allegory'; but the one resides in the freedom of the reader, and the other in the purposed domination of the author" (xxvi).

In this sense, fantasy is often likened to playful elaborations of philosophical thought experiments which provide readers with frameworks that help them navigate their consensus reality. Because readers are prompted to form opinions that are applicable to their consensus reality and are stimulated to negotiate conflicts, "the narrative structures of fantasy, which offer a chance to rewrite common wisdom and unconsidered habit, tug at the world outside the fiction" (Attebery, *Fantasy* 130). Brian Attebery has linked this capacity for performing cultural work to fantasy's "utopian impulse" in Tom Moylan's critical sense of the term,[41] because fantasy stories can "tell us that things need not be the way they are. The world could be, if not better, at least run on different principles" (*Fantasy* 3). Similarly, China Miéville has deemed fantasy stories to be texts that are "*good to think with*" ("Editorial" 46; original emphasis), because they are estranged engagements with reality. They challenge what Michel Foucault has termed the naturalised "regimes of truth" (*Biopolitics* 18) which structure our consensus reality, and which have become so familiar to us that at times we do not see them any longer as the constructions they are but treat them as natural, essential, and unchangeable. Because of "fantasy's apparent disavowal of reference, relevance, and realism", it invites us "to think laterally, symbolically, and structurally" (Attebery, *Fantasy* 6). In contrast to realist representations of the world, fantasy is "a more aesthetically defamiliarized form . . . [able] to resist existing forms of representation as being ideologically bound" (M. P. Williams 181) to these regimes of truth. Precisely because fantasy departs from the totalising notion of a mimetically represented consensus reality, it "points to or suggests the basis upon which cultural

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[41] Later, Attebery clarifies that *work* in this context is meant as "working *on* us, changing us, challenging us, and enabling us to remake the world" as literature becomes "a powerful tool for investigating power and pretense and injustice and ignorance" (*Fantasy* 6; original emphasis).

order rests, for it opens up, for a brief moment, on to disorder, on to illegality, on to that which lies outside the law, that which is outside dominant value systems" (Jackson 4). Because "the invention and reception of imaginary worlds are shaped by the same political anxieties and hopes as any human activity", it are only "the mechanisms by which those dreams and fears are translated into narrative [which] are different from those that produce satire or fictional exposé" (Attebery, *Fantasy* 130). All fantasy, in this vein, "is political", as Mark Bould and Sheryl Vint observe in their contribution to *The Cambridge Companion to Fantasy Literature*, "even – perhaps especially – when it thinks it is not" (102). Precisely because fantasy deals with the experiences we call real life, Gerold Sedlmayr and Nicole Waller point out in their introduction "The Politics of Fantasy", these stories "can and must be measured by the exigencies of their real-world social and political contexts. If it were otherwise, we would ban them into a purely esoteric realm, which would not do them any justice" (3). With reference to the work done by Fredric Jameson on the power of romance, Sedlmayr and Waller maintain that "we can attempt both: to place fantasy in its historical and political context and to examine how fantasy, as 'traveling theory,' can serve to explain and establish new historical and political contexts" (7).

It has often been taken to be an inherently subversive manner in which fantasy comments on the experienced conditions of our existence, which increasingly means our existence as urbanites in the twenty-first century. This sentiment is likely to encourage a celebration of "the power of literatures of the fantastic to help us see the world anew and to engage responsibly in the creation of better futures" (Bould and Vint 111). As a consequence, appraisals of the transformative power of fantasy abound, which range from the claim that fantasy can "encourage healthy skepticism about other sorts of fabricated narratives" (Attebery, *Fantasy* 146) to Matthew Sangster's evocative assessment that

> Fantasy connects us into networks across time and space, serving as a means of explaining ourselves to each other, of sharing enjoyments, negotiating difference, imagining alternatives, constructing histories and forging cultures within which we can agree, disagree, imagine, reimagine and iterate in manners that speak both of ourselves as individuals and of our fears, aspirations, dreams and desires as groups and collectives. (49)[42]

I do not want to disagree that the telling of fantastic tales "can give us glimpses behind the ballot and the barricade, to understand how stories fuel action and form identities" and that, "once we understand, we have the power to change our stories, our story-spaces, and ourselves" (Attebery, *Fantasy* 147). If I did, the writing of this thesis would have been a very different

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[42] Sangster follows this up in a similarly lyrical manner: "Many of the infinite circular paths into and out of Fantasy will be taken unremarked, leaving little trace upon the world. However, some will be shared in conversation or in writing or in art, and some will be mapped by individuals and groups in networked collaborations and made available as part of our common cultural property. Not all fantasies speak to everyone, but Fantasy as a form gives us the tools to speak ourselves and others better, as we expand and reconfigure a vast constellation of alternative possibilities that can entertain, inform, enlighten, inspire and – ultimately – create change" (52).

endeavour. However, one must not overlook the fact that fantasy is ineluctably based on established representational paradigms from our consensus reality, which we can escape only with difficulty, and thereby maintains the real conditions of our existence also in its conservative impulses. Brian Attebery has put this succinctly when he observes that "[e]ach . . . nightmare[] can be traced back to someone's dream of a better world" (*Fantasy* 100). Fantasy does not just contain a utopian but also a dystopian impulse as well, since both are necessarily two sides of the same coin. On the one hand, dystopian writing contains the possibilities for improvement on the status quo and thus "is a device for uncovering current tendencies that threaten to become tools of oppression" (Attebery, *Fantasy* 98). José B. Monleón cautions that, on the other, fantasy can easily serve in "the defense of the status quo and the preservation of economic order" (14). In the end, "a fantasy text . . . functions like any cultural text to reproduce dominant ideology" (Bould and Vint 102). Mark Bould therefore rightly warns that any attempt "to eulogise fantasy fiction *as a mode* as being 'subversive' or 'progressive' will be as one-sided as the alternative stern denunciation of the form as 'mystificatory' or 'reactionary'" ("Credibility" 83; original emphasis).

Since fantasy contains both utopian and dystopian impulses, Sedlmayr and Waller ask whether we must then "tailor our readings of the politics of contemporary fantasy to an endless back- and-forth between interpretations of fantasy as conservative and subversive" (1)? Alas, we must not. They observe that fantasy tends to negotiate the sense of explanatory hesitation which already informed Todorov's definition of the gerne with narrative resolutions which more often than not "seem to reduce complexity and ambivalence in rather reactionary ways" (2). These two options – hesitation and resolution – inform precisely "the debate about fantasy's subversive and conservative tendencies, a debate which still remains dominant in discussions of the politics of fantasy" (2). To this bifurcation of political functions, Sedlmayr and Waller add a third option. When read as emphasising "the very act of choosing between conflicting worldviews and ideologies", they argue,

> fantasy addresses the ambivalence involved in making sense of differing interpretations of the world by depicting the process of making sense as a process of making decisions, a highly political undertaking. While ambivalence is resolved, this resolution remains temporary, the result of a decision instead of an essential truth. . . . Arguably, then, fantasy fictions assume functions that, in pre-modernity, were fulfilled by mythical tales. They try to be *ersatz* mythologies in that they propose alternative, "otherworldly," lenses through which to view this world and judge the nature of our own predicament in it, although – and this is the point of hesitation – it is never easy to decide where or when precisely the purely fantastic assumes real-world relevance, be it psychological or other. (Sedlmayr and Waller 2, 7; original emphasis)

As I will demonstrate, in combining the political with the aesthetic, the novels I discuss in this dissertation are located in the space in-between subversiveness and conservatism, retaining an

ambiguous character which presents them neither as a fully utopian nor fully dystopian tale about our contemporary urban existence. As has become clear by examining fantasy's political implications at large, however, is that any impulses the texts contain – be they reactionary or progressive – necessitate contextualisation and historicization in order to be rendered meaningful. I will therefore end this chapter by locating briefly the genesis of urban fantasy within the overarching evolution of contemporary fantasy.

As survey of the state of research at the beginning of this chapter has shown, there is a certain consensus among scholars of urban fantasy that the label has originated as a meaningful term in the 1980s, though it is hard, and perhaps even quite pointless, to pinpoint the first text which has been called an urban fantasy. In general, the label became necessary to describe stories which were set in a recognisable version of the modern world in contrast to Tolkenian secondary fantasy worlds. In *A Short History of Fantasy*, Farah Mendlesohn and Edward James argue that classical sword-and-sorcery fantasy set in a medievalist secondary world seeking to emulate the success of *The Lord of the Rings* has been the dominant formula within the fantasy tradition until the late 1980s, until readers grew somewhat tired of this style. As further evidence of the lack of innovation they cite the increasing number of parodies of the established form, the most notable proponents of which are Terry Pratchett and Dianna Wynne Jones (143–44). Indeed, Jones's *The Tough Guide to Fantasyland* (1996) can be read as a handbook for writing formulaic sword-and-sorcery fantasy. In this vacuum, stories originated which relocated the fantastic into the primary, modern world, such as Megan Lindholm's *Wizard of the Pigeons* (1986), Terri Windling's *Borderland* series (1986–2011), Emma Bull's *War for the Oaks* (1987), or Charles de Lint's *Newford* stories (1990–present). Laurell K. Hamilton's *Guilty Pleasures* (1993) begun the successful and still ongoing *Anita Blake: Vampire Hunter* series, which provided the romantically inclined template for the type of stories which would later become paranormal romance. Neil Gaiman's *Neverwhere* (1996) began the tradition of London as a setting for urban fantasy. Finally, as I have suggested previously, Jim Butcher's incorporation of the stereotypically male hardboiled detective into urban fantasy in *Storm Front* (2000) engendered the generic split between paranormal romance and urban fantasy, with the former retaining more influences from romance and the latter from crime fiction. Simultaneously, the 1990s saw the rise of the New Weird, which significantly influenced secondary world urban fantasy. Notable authors in this respect include Jeff VanderMeer and China Miéville, among others.

This rather hodgepodge origin story of urban fantasy lays no claim to completeness. Since Stefan Ekman has offered a far more extensive history of the genre (*Urban Fantasy* 37–70), I limit myself to concluding by pointing out merely two things: firstly, that urban fantasy has developed in the 1990s as a response to secondary world fantasy in the Tolkienian tradition and presents its

magic as mundane instead of arcane;[43] and secondly that the label has meant quite many things during the 1990s which have resulted in three increasingly separate developments in the twenty-first century. The type of story interested in romantic relationships has become paranormal romance, the type of urban fantasy set in secondary worlds has taken on characteristics of the New Weird, and the type of urban fantasy set in the primary world has solidified its generic blend with crime fiction. All three types tell similar, but different stories, and it is the latter in which this dissertation is interested, with a particular focus on urban fantasies set in London in order to heed the local character of these stories which a transnational approach lacks.

2.2.2 The City and Urbanity

Before examining London in its idiosyncratic particularity, in what follows I will first turn to the second constitutive element of urban fantasy, urbanity in general, which is as elusive a concept as fantasy. Etymologically, the stem root of *urbanity*, *urban*, derives from the Latin word *urbs*, which literally means 'large/walled town', but in the Roman parlance almost exclusively denoted Rome. *City*, in contrast, derives from the Latin *civis*, which means 'citizen'. *Cives*, citizens, in the Roman sense were those privileged enough to be awarded special rights, that is, Roman citizenship (*civitas*).[44] Here, the argument becomes somewhat circular: citizen is whoever is awarded citizenship, and citizenship depends on being considered a citizen.[45] These etymological origins of the two words most commonly used to describe a large settlement of human beings already hint at two defining characteristics, one quantitative and the other qualitative: the large settlement denoted by *urbs*, and the notion of self-governance and a somewhat elevated position in society, that is, a certain way of life, that is denoted by *civis* and *civitas*. Via French, both words have made their way into the English language, though the meaning has, to a certain extent, been turned on its head. In contemporary use, *city* denotes a large settlement whereas the adjective *urban* refers to everything pertaining to a city, including its specific way of life.[46] This way of life, then, is what is designated

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[43] In the evolution from arcane to mundane magic, urban fantasy mirrors the development of fantasy at large. Usually, characters from the narrated urban fantasy storyworld note that there is an older magic present whose folkloric origins are located outside of the city in more 'natural' environments, but which has lost its valence. In my corpus texts, this sentiment is most explicitly present in Ben Aaronovitch's *Rivers of London* series and Kate Griffin's *Matthew Swift* series. The relationship between London and the English countryside as the location of such folkloric remnants of magic is further examined in chapter 4.

[44] The etymology makes clear here how closely the city is connected to the idea of civilisation, as both terms derive from the Latin *civis* and the notion of *civitas*. The introduction to Leonardo Benevolo's extensive (architectural) history of the city, for example, maintains that the gradual emergence of cities as the Neolithic period gave way to the Chalcolithic period necessitated the development of script and thereby "marked the beginning of the age of *civilisation* and of *written history* and thus the end of *prehistory*" (6; my translation, original emphasis).

[45] In Antiquity, the idea of citizens as the free inhabitants of a city – in contrast to slaves – was fairly uncomplicated as long as the city in question was equivalent to a city state with clearly delineated boundaries, most notably the *poleis* of Ancient Greece. This congruence ceased once the city states expanded and those under the city's jurisdiction but living outside of it were also considered citizens, if they fulfilled the necessary criteria in terms of, for example, possession of property or their gender.

[46] While having acknowledged the different etymological origins of *city* and *urban*, as well as their derivations, I will use them interchangeably throughout this dissertation.

by the term *urbanity*, and which is of interest for the subsequent discussion regarding urban fantasy, since any attempt to define *city* by size is a futile endeavour in the contemporary world as soon as the definition is meant to be at least somewhat universally applicable, or even to cross national borders. The United Nations' Department of Economic and Social Affairs' (DESA) *Demographic Yearbook*, for instance, declares that there is a "wide variation among national definitions of the concept of 'urban'" (5), and therefore offers a five-page-list of definitions, most of which include four-digit numbers of inhabitants (120–25). Even within the UK, the geographical area with which this study is primarily concerned, the size of built-up areas that classify as urban environments given by DESA vary from 3,000 or more inhabitants (Scotland) to 5,000 or more (Northern Ireland) to 10,000 (England and Wales). By these numbers alone, it becomes strikingly clear how much London, whose population is listed at 8.8 million inhabitants by the Greater London Authority based on the latest census from 2021 (GLA City Intelligence), plays in its own league, and how little quantitative classifications of urbanity help make sense of it. Subsequently, I will therefore survey key developments in the theorising of the city, predominantly from sociology and cultural geography, as I move from the city as an abstract space to London as a concrete place before considering its literary representations in the next section.[47]

The problem of a merely quantitative definition of the city was already recognised by the urban philosopher and sociologist Georg Simmel in 1903: "The most significant aspect of the metropolis", he wrote, "lies in its functional magnitude beyond its actual physical boundaries and this effectiveness reacts upon the latter and gives to it life, weight, importance and responsibility. . . . the city exists only in the totality of the effects which transcend their immediate sphere" ("Metropolis" 17). Simmel broke here with the absolutist idea of space as a mere container for human actions that was dominant at the beginning of the twentieth century. In a series of lectures held in Berlin in 1905, he based this relational understanding of space as transcending physical boundaries on Immanuel Kant. Space, according to Simmel's interpretation of Kant, is itself not a spatial thing, as paradoxical as this might sound at the first glance (Simmel, *Kant* 62).[48] Rather, the fact that we imagine space does not prove its reality but *constructs* it. In other words, space is onto-formative insofar as it conditions our existence as a result of our imagination, which constructs our reality (64).[49] Simmel's proto-constructivist understanding of space thus paved the way for

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47 In the introduction to *Space and Place*, the geographer Yi-Fu Tuan writes that "'space' is more abstract than 'place.' What begins as undifferentiated space becomes place as we get to know it better and endow it with value" (6). As John Agnew has pointed out, this binary positioning of space and place does not imply mutual exclusion but a relation (89). The particularity of place is what allows human beings to form attachments to it; a phenomenon which Agnew referred to as "sense of place" (89). It is on this idea that I build when I argue for the necessary recognition of urban specificity in London urban fantasy. See also Massey and Thrift.

48 For a meticulously detailed historical and interdisciplinary overview of the epistemology of space, the reader may be referred to Peter Merriman's introduction in his four-volume series *Space*, and indeed the entire series.

49 In the modernist understanding, constructing space through perceiving it depended largely on vision (Löw, Steets, and Stoetzer 13). The emphasis placed on *seeing* the city, and thereby (re)producing it, contributed to the emergence

conceiving of the city in a way which acknowledges that there is more to urbanites' existence than just the material dimension, thereby allowing *representations of urban space* to become a legitimate object of academic study.[50]

Simmel's ideas heavily influenced the sociologists of the so-called Chicago School, particularly Louis Wirth, who offered one of the earliest and most widely accepted definitions of the city in 1938.[51] Even though he concisely states that "[f]or sociological purposes a city may be defined as a relatively large, dense, and permanent settlement of socially heterogeneous individuals" (8), he points out that "the characterization of a community as urban on the basis of size alone is obviously arbitrary" (4). As a consequence, Wirth distinguishes between the material city and urbanism as "a mode of life" (4), characterised not only by the extensive heterogeneity of the city population and the social relationships within it, but also by "a set of attitudes and ideas, and . . . typical forms of collective behavior" (19). The city, as Wirth's colleague Robert E. Park puts it succinctly, is "a state of mind" (1). Moreover, Wirth stresses that urban practices and attitudes are regulated by "characteristic mechanisms of social control" (19). In other words, he sees the modern city simultaneously as a material settlement and a certain, distinct way of living within social and political formations which structure and regulate it.[52]

The theoretical deliberations of the Chicago School and the urban crisis of the 1960s provided an impetus for the French Marxist philosopher and sociologist Henri Lefebvre to propose a theory of the urban that rests on the assumption that "the capitalist mode of production determines a capitalist way of life, and inequalities of the city are formed by the power structures of the capitalist society" (Pleßke 95). While his Marxist point of view prompted Lefebvre to focus on the economic structures of post-Fordist capitalism, his theory of space helped fathom the crucial role of power structures in the production and reproduction of both material and representational urban space. Configurations of space can therefore be understood as negotiating power relations. In *The Production of Space*, Lefebvre argues that "(social) space is a (social) product" (30) and distinguishes between three interrelated levels of spatial production, which may amplify or

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of the *flâneur* narrator in literary representations of the city. I will return to narrative perspective in chapter 2.4 and a more extensive discussion of the *flâneur* is offered in chapter 6.2.2.

[50] I speak of proto-constructivism here, as the foundational work of constructivist theory is generally taken to be Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann's *The Social Construction of Reality*, published in 1966.

[51] The persistence of Wirth's definition can still be observed in much more recent sociological theory on the city (e.g. Massey, Allen, and Pile; Berking).

[52] Wirth was already cautious to identify urbanism solely with the entity of the city, since "the technological developments in transportation and communication . . . have enormously extended the urban mode of living beyond the confines of the city itself" (4–5) and, thus, "[t]he influences which cities exert upon the social life of man are greater than the ratio of the urban population would indicate, for the city is . . . the initiating and controlling center of economic, political and cultural life that has drawn the most remote parts of the world into its orbit" (2). For a similar conceptualisation, see Harvey ("Managerialism" 6). As the following discussion will reflect, urban scholars have argued that in the globalised world of the twenty-first century that which Wirth regards as the urban way of life can be seen as having become the dominant mode of living at least in the Western hemisphere (Häußermann and Siebel; David Harvey, *Social Justice*; cf. also Henry Lefebvre, *La Révolution urbaine*, Gallimard, 1976).

contradict each other, but which are always effective at the same time: (1) spatial practice, (2) representations of space, and (3) spaces of representation (33). This "conceptual triad" (33) seeks to explain how power relations act on and in space in general, and urban space in particular. By spatial practices, Lefebvre understands space-related behaviours, that is, the everyday practice of producing and reproducing spaces through routines as well as the subjective experience, or perception, of these spaces (33, 38). This practical dimension of space is intersected by its representations. For Lefebvre, representations of space consist of conceptualised space, that is, "the space of scientists, planners, urbanists, technocratic subdividers and social engineers . . . all of whom identify what is lived and what is perceived with what is conceived" (38). Representations of space manifest on a seemingly objective level, such as maps or plans. It is on these two levels that Lefebvre's Marxist understanding of space is most readily visible, because the capitalist logic of production and consumption is the guiding principle for structuring and regulating space conceptually. These capitalist structures are then reproduced by spatial practices, whose monotonous repetition leads to alienation (50).[53] The third level, spaces of representation, complements the structural and practical dimension of spatial production. By spaces of representation Lefebvre means "space as directly *lived* through its associated images and symbols, and hence the space of 'inhabitants' and 'users'" (39; original emphasis). The idea of collectively lived space entails notions of appropriation, which can challenge and subvert the capitalist, hegemonic conceptualisation and reproduction of space by imagining other spaces (Löw, Steets, and Stoetzer 54). In summary, Lefebvre really offers not one but two conceptual triads. On the one hand, he points out the semiotic aspect of the production of space, which is characterised by the relation between the three representational levels outlined above. In addition, he understands space as being produced by being perceived, conceived, and lived. As Stefan Güntzel notes, this is less a semiotic triad but a phenomenological one, as the production of space is conceptualised by three layers of perception (89). Güntzel further argues that both triads offer quite intentionally room for confusion. Nonetheless, their intersections make clear that a sense of space arises out of a complex relationship between semiotic practices and onto-formative experience(s). Individuals experience space in their daily lives, which is simultaneously conceptualised in scientific studies and through regulatory practices and lived collectively by society by the allocation of "complex symbolisms" (Lefebvre 33; cf. also Güntzel 90).

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[53] The idea that everyday experience in the city can be extremely alienating can already be found in Simmel's opus. Contrary to Lefebvre, however, Simmel does not see the source of this alienation in capitalist structures, but attributes it to the overstimulation of the nervous system in urban environments due to their density and heterogeneity. In order to cope with the multiplicity of sensory impressions, Simmel argues, urbanites develop a blasé attitude of relative indifference ("Metropolis" 12–14). As my survey of literary London scholarship demonstrates, such ideas were already discussed in literature in the late eighteenth and especially the nineteenth century.

The question of who actually produces these spaces remains unanswered, however, although Lefebvre suggests that it is the state and "its constituent institutions" which then "organize [the spaces they produce] according to their specific requirements" (85). Through this political lens, he repudiates any conception of space "*as such* – as a thing or set of things" (320; original emphasis) but emphasises that it should rather be thought of as "fragments in a homogenous totality" (320). Fragmentation of homogenous space into spaces, which are nonetheless held together in the semblance of a homogenous whole, is a necessary condition for the social control exerted by political power, "which creates [fragmentation] in order to control it" (321). Precisely this aspect of fragmentation and control causes people's alienation from the space in which they move in their daily life, because, imprisoned as they are by state capitalism and the "slavery of everyday life" (Löw, Steets, and Stoetzer 55; my translation), their spatial practices can only be reproductions of the capitalist logic that conceived spaces in the first place. Lefebvre locates the only way out of this logic of constant production and reproduction in spaces of representation, that is, in imaginaries which allow to move beyond the capitalist materiality and imagine space as something else, as "counter-space" (Lefebvre 383; cf. also Löw, Steets, and Stoetzer 55), although his analytical focus rests less on this subversive potential of cultural imaginaries than on the alienating influence of capitalism on the production of space.

The seminal groundwork provided by Simmel, the Chicago School, and Lefebvre, among others, has led to the understanding that space is a paradigmatic category that determines and is determined by our social life. If until the 1980s time had been the dominant paradigm in the humanities, the increasing focus on space constituted a paradigmatic shift, commonly denoted as the spatial turn.[54] In the wake of this paradigmatic shift, postmodern theory influenced the critical

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[54] For an interdisciplinary perspective on the spatial turn, see the eponymous anthology by Barney Warf and Santa Arias. Literary and cultural scholar Doris Bachmann-Medick notes in this regard that the spatial turn "was born out of the realization that postmodernism with its spatially influenced self-definition was replacing modernism with its orientation toward time" (211). She is careful to stress, however, that "the aim is not to replace time with space" as the focus of study but rather adopt the perspective of spatialisation as "a new methodological attitude toward research" (225). Moreover, she assesses that "[t]he perspective of the spatial turn arises from [a] tug of war between discourse and social production progresses", which "is based on a conceptual redefinition of a category in the study of culture and the social sciences that extends to the level of spatial representation" (211). For literary studies, Bachmann-Medick speaks of a "topographical turn" rather than a spatial one, since literature is concerned with representations of space and therefore connected "to topography as an inscription (and description) of space" (232). The term was coined earlier by the cultural scholar Sigrid Weigel, who posits it against the way space was discussed in the Anglo-American cultural studies (153). Weigel's approach places itself in "the continental European tradition of philosophical, sociological and anthropological conceptualisation of space", in contrast to cultural studies as a "political project in which counter-discourses on ethnicity and participation are negotiated in spatial terms" (Döring and Thielmann 15–16; my translation). Following Bachmann-Medick, Michael C. Frank has pointedly criticised the inflationary proclamation of ever more turns, whose subsequent "nesting true to the Matryoshka principle" renders "the already problematic proliferation of turns ad absurdum" (62). Whether spatial or topographical, the (r)evaluation of space in literary studies in this dissertation is reflected in the spatial and representational understanding of its subject matter as I am outlining it here and in the organisation of its analytical chapters around spatial categories and metaphors.

academic study of urbanisms, particularly in the Los Angeles school of urban studies.[55] Globalisation, a post-Fordist mode of production, and the increasingly "polycentric, polyglot and polycultural characteristics" (Pleßke 100–01) of urban centres were approached with the help of postmodern and poststructuralist theory by Frederic Jameson, Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Jean Baudrillard, but also feminist and postcolonial criticism, among other intellectual movements. In this sense, Edward Soja, by adapting Henri Lefebvre's triadic structure of urban space, defines the city "as a distinctive material and symbolic context" (*Postmetropolis* 8). While Soja is concerned with "the meso-level of urbanity" (Pleßke 101), looking for characteristic elements of postmodern urbanity in general, he observes that any city retains a certain particularity that resists generalisation. Thus, what Soja terms "[u]rban spatial specificity" is a concept that "refers to the particular configurations of social relations, built forms, and human activity in a city and its geographical sphere of influence" (*Postmetropolis* 8). He links this concept of urban spatial specificity to a level of "more abstract conceptual and experiential expression" in what he calls "the urban imaginary", that is, "the ways we think about cities and urban life" (*Postmetropolis* 149). In other words, if we turn this relation on its head, then there seems to be a distinctive urban way of life, something that the city as an abstract concept represents, which forms a reservoir of symbolic and discursive meanings, but this abstract reservoir is realised, or articulated, in each city's spatial specificity.[56] Though Soja focuses his analysis on the level of urbanity in general, that is, as an abstract concept, the observation propounded in *Postmetropolis* at least points to, if not directly directs attention towards how individual cities articulate, and thus appropriate, a distinctively urban way of life in the twenty-first century.

The notion that an abstract idea of urbanity must necessarily be realised by actual cities, and that, by extension, different cities realise 'their' urbanity differently, informs a branch of urban sociology that has been pursued in Germany since the mid-2000s. Martina Löw and Helmuth Berking proffered the concept of cities' intrinsic logic in an eponymous edited collection in 2008.[57]

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[55] Whereas the Chicago School saw Chicago as the paradigmatic city of the early twentieth century, the massive changes in every aspect of social, political, economic, and cultural life over the course of the century necessitated a new kind of urban analysis. Theorists such as Edward Soja, Michael Dear, or Allen Scott, to name but a few, see the urban reality of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century best studied in Los Angeles, hence the name of the L. A. school (see, for instance, the suggestively titled chapter "It All Comes Together in Los Angeles" in Soja's *Postmodern Geographies*, 1989). Their fundamental argument about Los Angeles's paradigmatic character for contemporary urban life, however, does not remain uncontested and has been criticised, among other things, for the disregard of (Neo)Marxist theorists such as David Harvey or Manuel Castells. For a particularly harsh piece of criticism, see Mark Gottdiener's article "Urban Analysis as Merchandising: The 'LA School' and the Understanding of Metropolitan Development", in which he scathingly dismisses the idea "hat somehow Los Angeles is uniquely positioned as the exemplar of contemporary urban studies" as being "as ridiculously false as anything Dr. Seuss may have said about the lunar landscape" (159).

[56] Here, Soja's line of argument reminds of Agnew's sense of place.

[57] In the German original, Löw and Berking speak of the "Eigenlogik der Stadt". The English translation into "intrinsic logic" stems from an article Löw published in 2012 in the journal *Urban Research & Practice*, which was translated by Rhodes Barrett and presents Löw's central claims for the first time in the English language.

They develop their argument by noting that the focus on globalisation's effects on cities in the so-called New Urban Sociology, as displayed, among others, by the works of David Harvey, Manuel Castells, and Edward Soja, has led to two trends in urban sociology: firstly the subsumptive equation of city with society on a macro level,[58] and, secondly, a subsequent disregard of the idiosyncrasies of a particular city.[59] At the same time, they argue that the previous ethnographic studies done by the Chicago School, which did focus on the micro level, have provided a sociology *in* the city rather than *of* the city, which leads Löw to assess that "the city has no clear place in the distinction between micro and macro levels" (*Soziologie* 48; my translation).[60] Instead, Berking and Löw posit their concept of cities' intrinsic logic against this logic of subsumption (*Subsumptionslogik*) that understands the city as society and against the logic of concretion (*Konkretionslogik*; for both terms see Berking 18) that studies social relations *in* the city. They highlight that, while the concept of a city must necessarily be delineated theoretically, that is on an abstract level, a consideration of both the differences between individual cities and what Löw calls "the strategies and forces of individuation" (*Soziologie* 40; my translation) merits academic attention, which she and Berking find to have hitherto been lacking.[61] The intrinsic logic of the city, therefore, seeks to excavate

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[58] Hartmut Häußermann and Walter Siebel, German advocates of the New Urban Sociology (*Neue Stadtsoziologie*), argue that cities have been subsumed into nation states and therefore do not constitute independent entities anymore, in contrast to city states prior to the formation of nations (*Neue Urbanität*). Moreover, from an economic point of view, cities are inextricably bound up with globalised flows of goods, thereby reducing their independency further. In terms of economics, they also argue that the traditional line of differentiation between the city and the country, which has largely evolved around two different modes of production, namely one industrial and one agricultural, has now been rendered obsolete. The mode of production in the country is as capitalist as it is in the city. Geographers Ash Amin and Nigel Thrift agree that "[t]he traditional divide between the city and the countryside has been perforated" (1). David Harvey makes a similar argument by diagnosing a "collapse of the distinction between production and distribution", which "has an impact upon the way in which urbanism is viewed" and thus asserts that "urbanism appears as . . . a mirror in which other aspects of society can be reflected" (*Social* 16). For him, "[u]rbanization has always been . . . a class phenomenon" in the sense that "an intimate connection emerges between the development of capitalism and urbanization" (*Social* 315–16). Both arguments the territorial and the economic justify the New Urban Sociologists' assumption that to study the cities effectively means to study society. While this indubitably is a productive research approach, I follow Löw in her observation that this line of argument tends to disregard idiosyncrasies of the city beyond the primacy of economics. In chapter 4, for example, I will examine arguable differences between London and the English countryside which are not only structured along purely economic lines but still possess a powerful imaginative potency.

[59] In an anthology preceding the paradigmatic *Die Eigenlogik der Städte*, Berking and Löw have suggestively, and somewhat facetiously, titled their introduction "Wenn New York nicht Wanne-Eickel ist" (roughly translated: "New York is not Wanne-Eickel"), thereby highlighting that a general and abstract discussion of urbanity as a quality seemingly universal to all cities obscures the particularities this quality takes in, for example, a metropolis at the United States' east cost in comparison to a significantly smaller city in Germany's Ruhr area.

[60] Frequently, the issue of the city's indeterminacy with regard to macro- and microstructures is resolved by placing it on an intermediary meso level (see, for instance, Pleßke 80).

[61] In *Die Soziologie der Städte*, Löw outlines the concept of the intrinsic logic of cities as being characterised by a synchronic and a diachronic perspective. On the one hand, she argues, cities differentiate themselves synchronically in contrast to other cities, a relation for which she uses the term *nexus* (my translation; *Konnex* in the German original, see 96). As particularly obvious examples of this kind she cites city-branding campaigns which frequently build on the characteristics of *this* particular city in contrast to *that* other one. Moreover, Löw points out, cities are usually put in relation to other cities, "not towns, businesses, or universities" (97; my translation). In addition to the synchronic level of relation, cities develop their intrinsic logic diachronically, that is, one that has been informed by their particular history. The experiences of aerial bombing during the Second World War, or the lack of them, constitute one example of how "historically motivated stories, experiences, and material layers" (96; my translation) impact the development of different interpretations of materialities or political and economic figurations, which in

structural processes of constructing meaning which operate largely hidden in individual cities (Löw, *Soziologie* 19; "Intrinsic Logic" 310). Löw and Berking's approach, therefore, privileges the level of the local over the global, though both tend to overlook that either level is meaningless without the other (Massey, "Entlastung"; Kemper and Vogelpohl 23–26).[62]

The concept of cities' intrinsic logic builds on the idea that cities, as their denizens, develop specific habitual dispositions which can be more or less clearly distinguished from those structuring daily life in other places. This observation is already latently present in the writings of the Chicago School, particularly in Simmel's description of the urbanite's blasé attitude, Park's dictum of the city as a state of mind, and Wirth's set of attitudes, ideas, and typical forms of collective behaviour in the city, as well as in the more action-theoretical parts of Lefebvre's opus. However, by conceiving of the city as a specific form of sociation, the common adage was that daily life in the city is structured differently *in general* opposed to places that lack the quality of urbanity, such as the country. Löw and Berking, in contrast, claim that the dispositions which structure daily life differ even between individual cities, as reflected by the quip that New York is not Wanne-Eickel.

Moreover, the ethnographic focus of the Chicago School and Lefebvre's Marxist origins accounted for a different focus of their respective works, leaving idiosyncratic dispositions of the individual cities they studied largely unexplored. The British cultural scientist Martyn Lee and, in the German-speaking area, the sociologist Rolf Lindner both have appropriated Pierre Bourdieu's praxeological term *habitus* in order to describe these dispositions,[63] which puts the implication that "the *precise specificity of location matters*" (Lee 128; original emphasis; cf. also Lindner, "Habitus") centre stage.[64] However, the idea of a city habitus has also provoked the question in how far the rather somatic character of Bourdieu's concept can be transferred to spatial configurations, as it carries

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turn contribute to the intrinsic logic of a city. Whereas the diachronic perspective of representations of London's intrinsic logic will be of more pronounced concern throughout this study, the *Bartimaeus* trilogy's juxtaposition of London and Prague as two (erstwhile) imperial capitals provides a particularly illustrative example of how London defines its own identity in relation to Prague on the level of the story. As I will discuss in more detail in chapter 5, this relation nonetheless assumes a diachronic opposition of past and present which I read through the lens of hauntology.

[62] On the level of representation, the binary distinction between global and local becomes even less clear-cut, since locally produced representations are globally disseminated but "fashion specific characteristics of place and locality" (Bachmann-Medick, *Cultural Turns* 220). For a study that focuses on these aspects of translocality, see Lena Mattheis' excellent *Translocality in Contemporary City Novels* (Springer, 2021).

[63] Lee defines the city habitus as "certain relatively enduring (pre)dispositions to respond to current social, economic, political or even physical circumstances in very particular ways, ways in which other cities, with different habitus formations, may respond to very differently" (127). Later in the same article, he phrases the definition slightly differently as "enduring cultural orientations which exist and function relatively independently of their current populations or of the numerous social processes through which the location in question may be moving" (132) or, more concisely, as "distinct, durable and adaptive dispositions which in turn generate the place-specific practices of the city" (134).

[64] Thomas Bürk has pointed out that Lee's article has received relatively little attention in the Anglophone community (149). Its impact lies rather in the influence Lee's argument has had on the development of the *Eigenlogik* concept, which is the context in which I discuss it here.

the risk of anthropomorphising the city in unduly fashion.[65] In addition, following Bourdieu's writing on habitus and field, Franz Bockrath points out that habitual particularities only become significant in relation to other habitus belonging to the same field (73). Ergo, to determine the habitus specific to any city requires knowledge of the urban field which conditions this specific habitus, though the field can only be accurately determined with a view to the prevailing habitual features and dispositions, thus rendering the logic fairly circular (Bockrath 80). In consequence, Lindner's line of argument takes into account that the habitual characteristics of a city cannot simply be aggregated from the individual habits, tastes, and characteristics of its denizens, but also emerge in relation to comparable features of other cities. However, Norbert Gestring points out that Bourdieu conceived of habitus as a vertical category, that is, one that is inextricably linked with a person's social class (45). Habitus, according to Bourdieu, works as an intermediary between the position in the social field and one's lifestyle. If, as Lindner contends, entire cities can acquire a specific habitus, the category becomes horizontal, that is, it distinguishes between comparable groups of people in different cities. Gestring condenses this – in his eyes objectionable – transfer of Bourdieu's habitus concept in the pointed observation that, according to the advocates of cities' intrinsic logic, "professors and taxi drivers in city A have more in common than the professors in city A with their colleagues in city B" (44; my translation), which he finds fairly unconvincing (46). Moreover, Gestring argues with reference to Bourdieu that shared habitus in the plural sense emerge from homogenous conditions of existence, which, arguably, is not the case within any one city (46).

Löw likewise criticises the transfer of Bourdieu's habitus concept to cities without adaptation and proposes instead to differentiate between the (interlinked) dispositions that characterise the logic of the city and those of the city's inhabitants. For the latter, she contends, habitus provides an apt framework; the former, however, she and Berking find better explained by what Bourdieu termed *doxa* (*Soziologie* 75–77; cf. also Berking 23–28).[66] In contrast to habitus, doxa is a less individualistic concept, which allows its transfer to describe the processes of constructing meaning by which each city evokes its specific perspective on the world (Berking 25). "The conceptual pair doxa/habitus", Löw writes, "presupposes structured sociality and focuses

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[65] For a thorough criticism of the city habitus concept, see Bockrath, who regards Lee's argument as a "categorical error" (71; my translation). That the imagination of the city in bodily terms retains cultural significance beyond academic precision, however, is evident not just in quotidian assessments of cities as if they were persons, but also in city biographies such as Peter Ackroyd's acclaimed *London: A Biography*, whose introduction insists that "we must regard it [London] as a human shape" (2). A detailed, albeit differently focused, examination of imagining London as a body in contemporary urban fantasy follows in chapter 5.

[66] In his *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, Bourdieu defines doxa as the beliefs taken for granted in a society, that is, its unquestioned truths which influence what is and is not perceived as reality. This is not to say that he proposed an essentialist understanding of 'truth'. Instead, he argues that doxic beliefs are produced by socialisation (164–65). Gestring, however, points out that, for Bourdieu, doxa maintain the social order and are always already false and conceiving (47); a critical aspect that is crucially lacking from Löw and Berking's understanding of the term.

attention on the structures of the respective place" (*Soziologie* 76; my translation). She continues, more explicitly, that "the thesis is that places, as socially constructed phenomena, develop their intrinsic logics, which affect the patterns of experience of those who live in them" (80; my translation).[67] The notion that cities' intrinsic logics are constituted by doxic beliefs which structure them and, in doing so, inscribe themselves into the habitual dispositions of urbanites reflects the praxeological understanding of the concept. In this understanding, each social group of urbanites, irrespective of their very constitution as a group, is both a producer of the city's intrinsic logic and a product of city-specific meaning (Löw, *Soziologie* 84). In contrast to previous scholarship, Löw emphasises that the intrinsic logic of cities is neither an individual, and therefore not generalisable, quality of perception nor a mere result of capitalist structures. Rather, the concept maintains that "there is a routinised and habitualised practice (understood as structured and structuring actions) that takes place in a place-specific manner with recourse to historical events, material substance, technological products, cultural practices, and economic or political figurations (and their interplay)" (*Soziologie* 77; my translation). The intrinsic logic of a city can hence be construed as the interplay of the materiality of the city as a spatio-temporal memory store of historically evolved structural and landscape characteristics which constitute the unmistakable material substrate for the sensory-physical experience of a place inscribed in the habitual dispositions of its denizens (Löw, *Soziologie* 108).

Löw and Berking's concept of the intrinsic logic of cities thus combines the Chicago School's ideas on urbanity, particularly Wirth's definition of urbanism as a specific way of life, with insights generated in the field of the sociology of space after the spatial turn. The materiality of a city is not a mere topographical container that exists *per se* but produces and is simultaneously produced by a network of spatio-temporal actions conditioned by urban doxa. The material and the action-theoretical level of urbanity are complemented by forms of symbolisation and articulation of everyday life that shape its representational side (Löw, *Soziologie* 111–12). In distinction to purely action-theoretical conceptualisations of urbanity, however, Löw and Berking contend that, while individual actions may shape urban doxa, the intrinsic logic of cities ultimately remains a holistic, deterministic structural force.[68] Moreover, while the Chicago School sought for

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[67] The 'London once-over', a quick glance to determine whether a fellow urbanite is in distress or poses a threat to oneself, may be cited here as a particularly prominent example of a London-specific doxic belief that manifests in a concrete habitual practice. Naturally, it has found its way into textual representations of the city and is, for instance, explained to the reader on the very first page of *Rivers of London*'s opening chapter where the narrator denotes the practice as unfailingly designating "a seasoned Londoner" (1).

[68] In the combination of material, action-theoretical, and representational aspects of urbanity in the concept of intrinsic logic, the vicinity of Löw and Berking's proposition to Lefebvre's triadic structure of urban space is hard to miss, though they have trouble reconciling his action-theoretical insistence that spaces are always produced with the idea that actions are determined by an intrinsic logic of the city, as Kemper and Vogelpohl point out ("Anmerkungen" 25). Despite Löw's contention that urbanites' actions "update" ("Intrinsic Logic" 312) the city's intrinsic logic, this interaction is a lot more ambivalent than Lefebvre's stance that (urban) space is, invariably,

a universal model of urbanity, and urban development, a 'sociology of the cities', as Löw proposes it in a monograph of the same name (*Soziologie der Städte*, 2008), must acknowledge that such a universalism is not only futile but reductionist.

From Löw and Berking's arguments follows for a definition of the city that individual cities are formations which can be delimited as the result of a material and social construction process. In other words, it is not what is defined quantitatively by population size or in administrative law that appears as a city, "but rather the formal structure that is experienced as an urban unit in everyday life" (Löw, *Soziologie* 70; my translation).[69] Consequently, Löw understands cities as "specific provinces of meaning", which are characterised by "an ensemble of interrelated bodies of knowledge and forms of expression" (*Soziologie* 78; my translation).[70] In other words, the boundaries of the city are relational, not territorial; they are to be drawn where the constructed doxa lose effectiveness, where a specific way of making sense of the world transforms into others (Löw, "Intrinsic Logic" 312). Evidently, this line of argument does not really produce sharp, clearly delimitable boundaries of the city in the sense of unanimously identifiable geographical points where any city begins or ends. As such, the proposed concept cannot account for a generalised concept of either the city or urbanity. Ergo, Löw is forced to admit that "in many cases, the construction of the form 'city' is tolerant of ambiguity" (*Soziologie* 71; my translation). Following the argument for an intrinsic logic of specific cities, then, there is no way around the rather unsatisfying acknowledgement that the individual city in question must end *somewhere*, and that the location of this elusive somewhere remains open to discursive negotiation.

For a study of the representations of London, as I intend it here, it follows that London can be understood as that which is representatively conceived and marked as London. The texts in my corpus almost unanimously follow the logic that London ends at some point and that this point is marked by the subsiding effectiveness of a specific way of viewing the world. In Paul Cornell's *London Falling*, for instance, one of the protagonists, once he has acquired the ability to see the previously hidden supernatural, sees the effect of magic confined to the city (94), although the exact boundaries of London are not specified. The eponymous protagonist of Kate Griffin's *Matthew Swift* series considers himself an urban sorcerer and thus has trouble conjuring magic in the countryside where it follows a different logic (*Madness* 229–30), though it remains unclear

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socially produced. On the holistic dominance of the intrinsic logic over other structures within the same city, see Löw (*Soziologie* 49, 82).

[69] That Löw conveniently omits the troubling question *by whom* the city is experienced as a coherent unit, or whether that is indeed the case for all urbanites in equal manner, is one of the linchpins of criticism directed against the concept of cities' intrinsic logic. Consequently, Boris Michel warns that, "[i]f cities are demarcated from each other as social realities and units relevant to everyday life, the fact that these realities can be highly different and are probably even contradictory falls from view" (132; my translation).

[70] In the German original, the definition reads as follows: "Eigenlogik der Stadt bezeichnet ein *Ensemble zusammenhängender Wissensbestände und Ausdrucksformen*, wodurch sich Städte zu *spezifischen Sinnprovinzen* verdichten" (original emphasis).

where exactly London ends and where the countryside begins. The implication in the series is that the orbital M25 motorway constitutes such a boundary. Only Ben Aaronovitch's *Rivers of London* series quite firmly asserts that the M25 indeed constitutes London's boundary (*Foxglove* 8; *Lies* 281).[71] Nonetheless, together, these examples illustrate that the texts follow the notion that there are doxa specific to London, a 'Londonness', if you will, that has a boundary and that, in consequence, constructs insiders and outsiders. The exact location of this boundary is contingent and, evidently, inconsequential as long as it remains clear that it exists and produces certain effects. As this dissertation will investigate, and as the brief examples cited above have indicated, this sense of Londonness and its boundary invariably correlates with magic and the supernatural in contemporary urban fantasy.

The concept of the intrinsic logic of cities proffered by Berking and Löw has engendered a wide array of criticism within German sociology. Jan Kemper and Anne Vogelpohl's edited collection *Lokalistische Stadtforschung, kulturalisierte Städte* bears the suggestive subtitle *Zur Kritik einer "Eigenlogik der Städte"*,[72] and pools articles which criticise the concept's tendency to homogenise disparate groups within one city (Gestring 44–46; Höhne 63; Kemper and Vogelpohl, "Einleitung" 8; Michel 132), to perpetuate a reductive essentialism (Häußermann 166–67; Höhne 61–62; Kemper and Vogelpohl, "Einleitung" 8; Michel 132); to reproduce branded stereotypes employed by marketing campaigns and thus to lack political punch (Häußermann 170–71; Kemper and Vogelpohl, "Einleitung" 8), to unduly appropriate concepts of Bourdieuan theory (Gestring 43), and to lack empirical evidence and plausibility (Bürk 140–41; Gestring 43; Häußermann 161, 168). What unites the critics is the assessment that Löw and Berking's concept 'culturises' the city, as the collection's subtitle phrases it. Emblematically, Kemper and Vogelpohl lament in their introduction that

> it is cultural structures that the EdS [*Eigenlogik der Städte*] perspective declares to be the actual object of urban research; cultural structures in the comprehensive sense of a concept of culture that wants 'culture' to be treated as a commonly shared, always already incorporated cognitive pattern and wants to make this the fulcrum for an analysis of social reality. (20; my translation)

Similarly, Höhne opines that Löw "ultimately propagates a radical culturalism for the understanding of urban space: it is a culturally generated logic that not only permeates the entire social space of the city, but also structures and grounds all economic or political phenomena" (63; my translation). And indeed, by 2012 Löw has more openly embraced the cultural elements of her theory, arguing

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[71] Arguably, the M25 constitutes in this regard the contemporary version of the old London Wall as a boundary of the city. The London Wall and the London Griffins which mark its old course in the contemporary City of London are imbued with mystical qualities in Griffin's *Matthew Swift* series, as they delineate the territory in which Swift's powers are strongest, thus suggesting that in this area the sense of Londonness is at its highest.

[72] If translated *verbatim*, the title would read as follows: *Localist Urban Research, Culturalised Cities: Critique of an "Intrinsic Logic of Cities"*.

for interdisciplinarity in urban research: "The theoretical background to this approach", she writes, "is the shift in thinking referred to as the *cultural turn*, drawing on a concept of culture oriented on meaning and knowledge to explain social phenomena" ("Intrinsic Logic" 304; my emphasis).[73]

Although the *Eigenlogik* concepts does have its weaknesses, as the array of criticism I have briefly examined has indubitably, and rightly, pointed out, it does serve to turn scholarly attention away from the dominating focus on globalisation within urban studies. If it has done one thing, then that is claiming that individual cities have idiosyncratic qualities which do impact the lived realities of their inhabitants – and their imagination – thus (re)turning the focus from a global urbanity as a, it seems, now globally dominating way of life to life in individual cities and the distinct imaginaries that accompany it.[74] While sociologists understandably seek to mark, and defend, their disciplinary 'territory' in light of what the cultural geographer Julia Lossau has termed "the fear of or discomfort with a certain precarisation of the social" ("Kulturgeographie" 322; my translation), the unified criticism of the intrinsic logic concept as cultural(ist) simultaneously elucidates its usefulness for, well, cultural studies. Kemper and Vogelpohl's assessment that Löw and Berking espouse a comprehensive concept of culture, which displays a poorly disguised scandalous undertone, becomes a moot point of criticism in a scientific field that is firmly grounded in Raymond Williams's famous observation that culture is "a whole way of life" (*Revolution* 40).

Moreover, the accusation of arbitrariness resonating in this kind of critique may be countered by pointing to the insights of constructivist theory which Simmel already anticipated with regard to the onto-formative qualities of space.[75] If space is understood as being constructed by imagining it rather than "treating the symbolic inscriptions of meaning in spatial environment or matter as if they were constituents or properties of the material world" (Lossau, "Räume" 41; my translation), then there is no way around acknowledging that cultural codes shape precisely this process of the construction and production of space. To quote Lossau again, acting "as if the inscriptions were therefore independent of the social and cultural processes through which

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[73] With regard to interdisciplinarity, the cultural geographer Julia Lossau also speaks of a cultural turn in both sociology and geography and argues that it did to the two disciplines what the spatial turn has done to cultural studies, namely paving the way for understanding the entanglement of culture and space ("Kulturgeographie" 321–23).

[74] Arguing that "the metropolis . . . implies the particularisation" of socio-political developments such as Globalisation, Postcolonialism, Postmodernism, or Blairism "in a variegated and centralised environment where necessary adaptations and combinations will delineate urbanity from society" (80), Nora Pleßke has offered a similar critique of the tendency to neglect urban idiosyncrasies as being always both spatial and cultural. She contends that the "concept of mentality fills the missing link between city as form and an urban way of life" (113) and thus approaches the literary corpus that informs her study from the vantage point of cultural mentality studies.

[75] Kemper and Vogelpohl argue that the intrinsic logic of cities offers a "mode of interpreting reality", which "entices . . . to process the social world as it presents itself in its symbolic representations and spatialised objectifications" ("Anmerkungen" 18; my translation). This indicates a quasi-constructivist notion that there is, on the one hand, a realm of genuine, or real, social and material reality and, on the other hand, the realm of constructed reality in the sense of being merely imagined. This understanding, then, attributes to sociology the realm of the former and results in – from this perspective really quite understandable – irritation when the assumption is offered that the distinction between real reality and constructed reality actually cannot be maintained.

meaning is generated and reproduced" ("Räume" 41) is tantamount to committing an epistemological error. Thus, she argues that any geographical space, such as a city, "which is supposedly unambiguously and unmistakably given in its physical materiality, [is] always already provided with meanings" (Lossau, "Räume" 43).[76] The symbolic content of spaces of meaning, therefore, "are not determined by their physical materiality but are products of cultural attributions" (Lossau, "Räume" 43).[77] Similarly, Frank Eckardt has pointed to the influence of Derrida's deconstructivist theory in urban studies in arguing that it does not make any sense to retain the distinction between the material and nonmaterial city any longer, which so characterised the works of Simmel and the Chicago School, since the material place is inextricably linked with its representations, and thus language (63–64). In other words, the materiality of the city is not just *there*, it does not exist by itself, but is always already perceived through a system of meaning and thus the symbolic patters that structure it. Therefore, Eckardt acknowledges, binaries, or dualistic patterns of thought, still largely inform representations of the urban in an attempt to exclude the rather paradoxical elements of urbanity (64). The production of particular representations, then, can be understood as an attempt to fix meanings, and it is the aim of scientific study to focus on the production of such patterns of thought in a particular temporal and historical context.

While Löw and Berking's concept is criticised heavily within sociology for its cultural premises, I argue that assessing the constructedness and production of meanings, as well as the spaces in which they manifest, is a genuine objective of cultural studies. By combining cultural with literary studies, this dissertation thus seeks to do precisely that with regard to the construction and production of the meanings of London in contemporary urban fantasy. Therefore, I indent this study as contributing to an understanding of Londonness by examining fantastical representations of the British capital in the twenty-first century, which I see still largely constructed along the lines of well-established binaries such as the city-country dichotomy (chapter 4), past and present, present and future, body and mind, centre and periphery (chapter 5), and security and freedom (chapter 6). The questions that underlie my examination, therefore, are less focused on how we can move beyond them, as Eckardt urges, but rather inquire which forms these binaries take, which functions they serve, and why they still possess such potency in producing the meaning(s) of London.

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[76] Edward Soja presents a similar argument in *Thirdspace* by claiming that space combines the "'real' material world and . . . 'imagined' representations of spatiality" (6). Thus, he speaks of "*real-and-imagined* places" (6; original emphasis).

[77] In the German original, Lossau speaks of "Räume von Bedeutung", which I have translated here as *spaces of meaning*. In a way, her argument echoes Soja's discussion of Lefebvre's work in that "the organization, use, and meaning of space is a product of social translation, transformation and experience" even though "[s]pace itself may be primordially given". Soja further compares space "to other social constructions resulting from the transformation of given conditions inherent in life-on-earth, in much the same way that human history represents a social transformation of time and temporality" ("Socio-Spatial Dialectic" 210). Lossau, in a more radically constructivist fashion, denies even any 'primordial' existence of space.

2.2.3 From Literary Cities to Fantastic Cities: A Synthesis

In the last two chapters I have provided an inventory of the different conceptual strains pertinent to my discussion of urban fantasy. I have first surveyed notions of the fantastic before turning to the discussion around the spatial turn in the social sciences and in cultural studies, which I linked with the cultural turn in geography in order to argue that the meanings of London and of being in London – what I have termed *Londonness* – arise out of a complex entanglement of the city's materiality and its literary representations. More precisely, at the focus of this dissertation are the stories told about London in the twenty-first century in the fantastic mode. This entails that the objective of my investigation is to assess how and in which ways London signifies in this particular type of literature. I am thus not attempting to determine what London *is* but how it is imagined and how the process of imagining constructs and constitutes meaning. Therefore, this chapter will bring the two conceptual domains of the fantastic and representation of space together and relate existing scholarship on literary London more generally to an understanding of fantastic London as a particular nexus which produces the cultural formation of London urban fantasy.

The Londons that fictional stories narrate are literary representations that are shaped by and shape the material city of our consensus reality and that are implicated in the production of the cultural meanings attached to this place.[78] Within the humanities it is a widely accepted notion that stories form an integral part of our daily sense-making processes (e.g. W. Fisher; Koschorke; Lawler). These stories manifest in texts and accumulate to a texture of different meanings in the urban imagination, which Rolf Lindner has termed "the imaginary of the city" ("Imaginary" 289). Lindner points out that the imaginary of any city transcends the physical place of its location and semanticises it as a culturally coded space ("Textur der Stadt" 140–41; cf. also "Textur, *Imaginaire*"). In a similar vein, Ben Highmore argues that "the city is simultaneously a textual and geographical actuality", which is why "to experience the city can sometimes just require immersion in textual materials" ("Metaphor" 26). Our experiences are, after all, "syncopated and punctuated by an accumulation of images and signs" (*Cityscapes* 5). The concept of the urban imaginary builds on Gerald D. Suttles' observations regarding the "characterological unity of local collective representations" (294), which allows to approach how urbanites appropriate urban space and translate their material cities into symbolical representations.[79] As Suttles already emphasised in

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78 Theresa Fuhrer, Felix Mundt, and Jan Stenger call "the process through which an image of a city or an urban landscape is imaginatively constructed" (1) cityscaping. More generally, Maria Belshaw and Liam Kennedy argue that representation is the means by which places as "sites of spatial contiguity, of interdependence and entailment . . . take on contours of identity and location" (6). Sharon Zukin also points to the entanglement of materiality and representations, but foregrounds capitalist mechanisms, when she discusses "the city's symbolic economy, its visible ability to produce both symbols and space" (2).

79 Suttles, in turn, draws on the research of Richard Wohl and Anselm Strauss, who, in 1958, published an article titled "Symbolic Representation and the Urban Milieu" in which they argued that cities "are characterized by an indigenous symbolism" (531), that is, sense-making processes which help capture and articulate the uniqueness of

1984, an analysis of the imaginary of a city should involve every instance of popular culture: "not just what people put in their museums, but also what they put on their car bumpers and T-shirts" (284), and the growing corpus of urban fantasy texts indicates that the symbolical representations of London increasingly involve the use of the fantastical mode, which nonetheless has hitherto remained an understudied aspect of Londonness.

While both Lefebvre and Soja are concerned about the "epistemological precedence" (Soja, *Postmodern* 125) of spatial representations over space's social reality, Peter Merriman notes that "spaces appear to be physical as well as social, material as well as political, and shaped by the laws of physics as well as by the actions of powerful actors" (14). Similarly, Maria Balshaw and Liam Kennedy point to the crucial "role of representation (and more particularly its cultural forms – ideational, narratological and imagistic) in the production of space" (3). Although acknowledging that the city "is neither identical with nor reducible to" its representations, Balshaw and Kennedy draw attention to the "complex questions about how representations traffic between physical and mental space" (3). It follows from these considerations that urban fantasies' Londonness is not a mere reflection of some normative reality as it is, but that these stories *produce* London in specific ways which accrue onto-formative efficacy. What I mean by Londonness, in other words, is as much contingent upon the materiality of the city as on the stories which shape how we perceive it, constantly slipping between the two poles of materiality and representation. This slippage engenders a sense of simultaneity of and in representation which responds to the objection that the study of the urban imaginary somehow impinges upon the study of the urban real. Thus, contingency, not only of materiality but of representation and the socio-cultural reality as such, is a way of evading the deterministic or naturalising tendencies common in theories after the spatial turn – which Roland Lippuner and Julia Lossau have critiqued as a 'spatial trap' (*Raumfalle*, 47) – because the objective at hand then becomes one that focuses on the *production* of structure- and meaning-generating spatial metaphors. Since representations cannot, and do not, exist autonomously from what they represent, the production of (urban) space always relies on the concurrence of material (physical), symbolic (social), and imaginary (mental) aspects, as indeed Lefebvre's trialectic of space posits.[80]

In *Toward an Urban Cultural Studies*, Benjamin Fraser suggests that this notion of contingency is genuine to cultural studies: "There is an understanding within cultural studies

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a city. The vicinity of this idea to Löw and Berkin's *Eigenlogik* concept is, I believe, obvious, and indicates the pervasiveness of urban symbolic representations.

[80] It may help to recall here Lossau's constructivist argument that materiality cannot be perceived outside of cultured meaning ("Räume" 43), which also implies a simultaneity of materiality and meaning. In a similar fashion the literary scholar Jürgen Joachimsthaler argues with reference to Juri Lotman that "[s]pace is always culturally mediated, a component of a cultural text . . . Every adolescent must first learn to get into 'their' textual space, which is finally imposed on them by their environment, into the semiosphere that has a different profile in each concrete place" (251; my translation).

method that material conditions influence cultural imaginaries and that cultural imaginaries in turn influence material conditions – an understanding that each influences the other, at the very least, and that each may in fact even *include* the other" (20; original emphasis). Thus, "[t]he material conditions of urbanization have evolved hand in hand with the development of an urbanized cultural imaginary" (24). According to Fraser, this urbanised cultural imaginary is constituted by "any . . . concrete form of urban social practice whatsoever" (21), chief among which he sees, for historic rather than artistic reasons, literary and cinematographic texts, music, and visual representations of the city.

Within the urban imaginary, some meanings are selected and privileged over others, a process that Roland Barthes identifies as *anchorage* in "The Rhetoric of the Image" (39). Barthes uses the term to describe the function of linguistic text in a polysemous image as a technique "intended to *fix* the floating chain of signifieds" (39; original emphasis) in order to facilitate interpretation. Balshaw and Kennedy, too, argue that "representation provides us with an illusory – partial and provisional – framing of the city as a legible space" (4). The notion of the legibility of space results from the rapprochement between spatial studies and literary studies in the course of the topographical turn, which was predicated upon post-structuralist semiotics and led to transferring the text paradigm to the concept of space. Space thus appears legible, and literary space certainly even more so (Weigel; Wagner).[81] Accordingly, Wolfgang Hallet and Birgit Neumann begin their introduction to an edited collection about space and movement in literature with the statement: "In literary texts, space is not only the place of action, but *always* also a cultural carrier of meaning" (11; my translation and emphasis). "Spaces in literature", they continue, "are humanly experienced spaces in which spatial conditions, cultural attributions of meaning, and individual modes of experience interact" (11), indicating the importance of narrative perspective for the legibility of space which I will discuss for each text specifically in more detail at the end of this chapter.

Influenced as it was by the neo-Marxist social geography of Lefebvre, Harvey, and Soja, the constructivist understanding of space I have previously outlined blends with literary studies as a theoretical and methodological framework in the emerging (sub)discipline of spatial literary

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[81] In a way, the movement towards legibility in urban cultural and literary studies can be linked to Marxist premises. According to a Marxist view of contemporary capitalism, its ideology alienates the individual by obscuring the relationships between ostensibly fragmented elements of contemporary life, that is, separating the economic from the political, from the cultural, from the social, and so on. Hence, alienation produces the illegibility of contemporary (urban) life by obscuring the fact that all of these elements are aspects of an encompassing capitalist mode of production. Emphasising legibility, then, becomes an empowering method of disalienation, of refusing to live by capitalism's alienating terms, for it strives to integrate all quotidian aspects into a legible, organic, meaningful whole. On alienation in urban theory, see Henri Lefebvre's multivolume *Critique of Everyday Life*. On disalienation as a method, see Fraser (65–67).

studies.[82] This entails that investigations of aesthetic spaces in literature highlight the interconnections between literary spatial practices, cultural practices and mentalities, and social and political conditions. In doing so, Hallet and Neumann postulate, narrated spaces offer insights on a representational and performative level. Firstly, as representations of space, they provide access to culturally dominant spatial orders. Secondly, "as constructions of cultural orders they allow statements to be made about the power of the spatial models staged in literature, which help shape or undermine the reality of power relations" (16; my translation). It follows that literary studies are uniquely suited to provide the tools for analysing, firstly, how spaces are symbolically and aesthetically constituted and, secondly, the relationship between empirical spatial realities and their textual figurations, since the analysis of narrative symbolisations and representations of cultural phenomena is one of the core competencies of the discipline (Hallet and Neumann 22–24). Similarly, Balshaw and Kennedy argue that "[t]he making of urban space invites theoretical consideration of the conditions and effects of the signifying practices, discourses and images that give it legible form" (4). Thus, they continue, "[r]epresentation does powerful cultural work in a wide variety of forms to produce and maintain (but also to challenge and question) common notions of urban existence" (4). One of the principal insights that has resulted from literary spatial studies is that as an epistemological medium literature performatively participates in constituting the spaces it represents.[83] Thus, literature can serve as the stabiliser, challenger, or mediator of (spatial) discourses (Zapf 261–66).

In the wake of the spatial turn in cultural and literary studies, the prominence of cities as spatial configurations has led to the emergence of a dedicated literary urban studies (LUS) at the beginning of the second decade of the twenty-first century. The branch of research was institutionalised in 2017 with the foundation of the Association for Literary Urban Studies (ALUS) in Helsinki.[84] Former ALUS president Jason Finch, an English literature scholar by training, points out in *Literary Urban Studies and How to Practice It* that "LUS emphasises the 'citiness' of its study material" (6). He elaborates that "[c]ity literature relates to actual cities on a range of different levels", for instance as "a response to material cities, as a semi-autonomous construct, and as an active shaper of how we think and talk of cities, their everyday life, their problematics, planning

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[82] Hallet and Neumann note that research on literary space precedes the spatial turn, and cite studies by Ernst Cassirer, Juri Lotman, and Michail Bakhtin as evidence (16). For a more detailed examination of Lotman's and Bakhtin's legacies see the article by Michael C. Frank in the collection edited by Hallet and Neumann and for a survey of further studies which seek to systematise literary representations of space see the article by Nünning in the same collection.

[83] Hallet and Neumann term this onto-formative power of literature spatial *poiesis* (*Raumpoiesis*; 22).

[84] ALUS grew out of the Helsinki Literature and the City Network. As to the association's aim, its statutes proclaim to "provide an international and interdisciplinary platform for scholars studying the city in literature". The activities comprise a biannual international conference dedicated to interdisciplinary investigations of the intersections of literary and urban studies as well as the publication of an academic series contributing to the same goals.

and development" (7).[85] Thus, according to Finch, LUS is "the academic investigation of literary urban representations, and of what they tell us about actual human lives in cities" (23). The second part of this statement raises an important point, one that has frequently been emphasised by cultural studies scholars working with literature: namely that literature provides access to what Raymond Williams has famously termed the "structures of feeling" (*Marxism* 132) of a society.[86]

"Literature", as Nick Hubble and Philip Tew similarly note, "has the unusual capacity to encapsulate an ideological, experiential framing undertaken by individuals of their environment, often as if in several snapshots, particularly with regard to the urban space" ("Introduction" 5). In doing so, narrators tie the stories they tell to idiosyncratic contexts in time and space, thus allowing for them to be decoded as concrete articulations of specific structures of feeling. They constitute, so to speak, a thread in culture's "webs of significance" (Geertz 5), that is, the texts provide forms in which culture as a whole can be examined. Their analysis then yields insights into "the degree to which its meaning varies according to the pattern of life by which it is informed" (Geertz 14), as the representations of cities within texts are inseparably linked to their counterparts in our consensus reality. Thus, the urban configurations represented in urban literature are part of the "'City as a Whole'" (Wohl and Strauss 524) because they simultaneously make use of the reservoir of meanings stored in the urban imaginary and become themselves part of this reservoir. In his essay "On Fairy-Stories", J.R.R. Tolkien presents a very similar metaphor when talking about myth and fairy tales, which he terms the "Cauldron of Story" (125). He compares each individual tale to a soup made from the ingredients in that cauldron. However, "the Cooks do not dip in the ladle quite blindly. Their selection is important" (128). Even though his essay is very author-centred (or cook-centred, to stay in the metaphor), Tolkien points out that any story only becomes meaningful through the selection of ingredients which, in post-structuralist thought, depends more on the cultural context than on the creative mind of the author-cook.

To think of literary representations as an unmitigated 'window' into the minds of people, however, would thus be tantamount to committing a categorical error. As Finch points out, "[n]ovelists and other creative writers use imagination: they make things up; they combine; they speculate" (25). Hence, literary stories about cities "can contain lies, distortions and outright

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[85] Finch's book has the sound and character of a handbook, and indeed advertises itself in the preface to researchers at all career stages as giving them "tools you can actually use, to help you with concepts and explain modes of analysis so that afterwards you are able to practice them yourself" (xiv). Consequently, Finch focuses on the question of what LUS does instead of what it is (6), and seeks to avoid getting tangled up in the "disciplinary awkwardness" (Hones 147) between literary and cultural geography, spatial literary studies, and other offspring of the spatial and cultural turns in the humanities and social sciences. As this is not the place to discuss disciplinary ambiguities further, suffice it to say that this study understands itself as contributing to the study of the literature of London. Those who wish to boldly venture into the depths of the disciplinary jungle may instead be referred to the debate between Robert Tally Jr. and Sheila Hones in the *Literary Geographies* journal as a starting point.

[86] Williams's concept has been expanded as being concerned with affective practices by affect studies scholars. The interplay between literary representations and representations of affect will be the focal point of chapter 3.1.

inventions – indeed, they're supposed to" (35). Rather, then, it seems prudent at this point to revisit Stuart Hall's argument about representation, on which I have briefly touched before: that representations are governed by "codes" (Hall, "Work" 7), which have onto-formative power and are indicative of specific prevalent discourses of knowledge. In this sense, literary representations "shape the metaphors, narratives and syntax which are widely used to describe the experience of urban living", and their analysis "is not simply a study of images of place or narratives of urban consciousness" but rather "responds to the cultural work of representations of urban space" (Balshaw and Kennedy 4). In doing so, these representations "offer us specific readings and visual practices for approaching the spatiality of the city" (Balshaw and Kennedy 4). In a similar vein, the literary scholar Jens Martin Gurr argues in *Charting Literary Urban Studies* that "literary texts serve as a particular type of qualitative model", by which he means that "they are diametrically opposed to quantitative models in their selection of which elements of complex urban reality to include or to leave out" (6). Gurr's idea of selection immediately reminds of both Roland Barthes' notion of anchoring and Tolkien's cauldron metaphor and draws attention to how representations privilege specific meanings over others independent of the individual author's choices simply by virtue of which discourses are dominant, or even available, for representation at a given time.[87] In other words, selection is always already a signifying practice. Literary representations of cities are discursive formations that simultaneously shape and are shaped by the culture which produces them, as their very form is conditioned by the rules, the codes, of sense-making that prevail in this culture.

Even though literary urban studies as such are a relatively recent branch of study, scholars have conducted research on the representation of cities in literature *avant la lettre*. In an article on city literature included in *Stadt: Ein interdisziplinäres Handbuch*, Christoph Heyl suggests that the evolution of the modern metropolis has been vital to the emergence and dissemination of the realist novel as a new form of literature in the eighteenth century. He argues that the early novel told fundamentally different stories than the hitherto prevalent narratives of myth, religion, and history, because it engaged creatively with stories about people who could live right next door, which required representing them with verisimilitude (Heyl 234). This historical development bifurcated

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[87] Later in the same book, Gurr argues for literature's function as "an assembly of case studies", that is, providing "an arsenal of strategies for dealing with situations that is developed in fiction but can lay claim to real-world applicability" (127), again echoing similar thoughts voiced by Tolkien with regard to fantastical stories. This process of narrative sense-making is largely achieved by emplotment, the "telling of stories that allows the expression of human experience, of history and of human identity" (130), and rests on the premise that, "culturally embedded beings that we are, we cannot help sharing a – surprisingly limited – number of figures of thought, cognitive models and plot patterns available to us in negotiating and making sense of reality" (132). Gurr builds here on the work done by Hubert Zapf, among other German literary scholars, under the label of *Funktionsgeschichte*. For a more detailed overview of literature's functional history than I can give here, please see Gymnich and Nünning.

the traditions of the realist urban novel and a storytelling tradition which would later influence the constitution of fantasy.

Research into the relationships between cities in the real world and their realist literary representations has been legion. Of the extensive corpus of scholarship I can highlight here no more than a few influential and more recent contributions. According to the book's subtitle, Richard Lehan's seminal *The City in Literature* (1998) offers "an intellectual and cultural history" of urban literary representations. Lehan engages only in passing with urban literature(s) from the Antiquity and the Middle Ages, since he frames his survey periodically from the Enlightenment to Modernism, with a coda devoted to Postmodernism. In doing so he charts the development of urban literature from the beginning of capitalism-induced urbanisation to the hostile, alienating city of the Victorians to the inward turn in Modernism where "the city as a physical place gave way to the city as a state of mind" (Lehan 76). In the "discontinuous and indeterminate" world of Postmodernism, where urban signs have lost their former stability, the literary city eventually is "held in place by . . . culture's institutions (that is, by power)" (Lehan 267). In addition to Lehan's study, Kevin McNamara's *The Cambridge Companion to the City in Literature* (2014) offers a comprehensive start into the field, for it not only covers the more than two thousand years of literary writing on the city since Antiquity but also comprises chapters on "Gay and Lesbian Urbanity", "Urban Dystopias", or "Postcolonial Cities", to name but a few special foci, thereby indicating the breadth and depth of the field.[88] *The Palgrave Handbook of Literature and the City* (2016), edited by Jeremy Tambling, comprises almost 900 pages and claims to give "the most complete single account available of how cities exist at the moment in theory and literature" (vii). Indeed, the handbook's seven parts cover the impressive scope of the city in theory, urban literatures on all five continents, and dominating urban themes. Consequently, Tambling has asked contributors to discuss how the writing "take[s] character from the city, or help[s] construct it" (x). Aiming to be "less encyclopaedic" (1) that Tambling's handbook, *The Routledge Companion to Literary Urban Studies* (2023), edited by former ALUS president Lieven Ameel, focuses on "(1) key concepts and genres of literary urban studies; (2) a reassessment and critique of classical urban studies theories and the canon of literary capitals; and (3) methods for the analysis of cities in literature" (2). Malcolm Miles's *Cities and Literature* (2019), published in Routledge's *Critical Introductions to Urbanism and the City* series, focuses on "particular ideas [that] emerge from the relations between cities and literature" (ix), such as utopian and dystopian images, ruinscapes, post-

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[88] In addition to McNamara's general overview, five other *Cambridge Companions* are dedicated to the literature of specific cities: Berlin (edited by Andrew J. Webber, 2017), London (edited by Lawrence Manley, 2011), Los Angeles (edited by Kevin R. McNamara, 2010), New York (edited by Cyrus R. K. Patell and Bryan Waterman, 2010), and Paris (edited by Anna-Louise Milne, 2013). The fact that all these companions and handbooks were published in the last fifteen years testifies to the overall vitality of literary urban studies.

war cities, or cosmopolitanisms. Methodically, Miles juxtaposes theoretical arguments with individual readings, mostly of nineteenth-century literary examples. The newest addition to this list of academic examinations of literary cities is Monica Manolescu's chapter on "The City" in Neil Alexander and David Cooper's *The Routledge Handbook of Literary Geographies* (2024), which provides a dense survey of theories about literary cities as well as Anglophone scholarship on the matter after the turn of the millennium, before turning to New York as a salient example.

Precisely because "[t]he city, as a whole, is inaccessible to the imagination unless it can be reduced and simplified" (Wohl and Strauss 524), literary representations overwhelmingly strive to render the city meaningful, legible, or decipherable by presenting a highly symbolical and highly structured account. In this sense, any narrator interprets the polysemous urban imaginary by anchoring particular meanings of the city in stories.[89] The focus on the (il)legibility of urban space has led to two dominating but distinctive modes of (re)presenting urban environments: the city as society and the city as a sign system. The former kind aligns with contemporary urban sociology's tendency to equate urban life with the society as a whole, thus rendering literary representations of it almost a form of literary social survey.[90] In the English literary tradition, this form of urban literature has co-opted hallmarks of the condition-of-England novel, which historically "developed in the 1840s as a result of a disturbance of the social conscience among the middle classes about the way of life of those working in industrial cities and in factories" (Cuddon 149), but which has now "reached a second peak after its Victorian heyday" (Lusin 247). The narrated world readers encounter in a condition-of-England novel, which is more often than not an urban world, "is always emblematic of the state of the nation as a whole" (Lusin 249).While in its Victorian form, the condition-of-England novel is linked with writers such as Charles Dickens, Benjamin Disraeli, and Elizabeth Gaskell, writers dominating the twenty-first-century rendition of the form such as Zadie Smith, Martin Amis, or Ali Smith examine life in the contemporary British city, predominantly in metropolitan London. As a literary genre, these novels "explore key aspects of the social reality of their time" (Lusin 249) in addressing "topics like money, justice, the role of the media, the housing crisis, class, and the gap between rich and poor" (247), thereby offering more or less explicitly social commentary and criticism (249).[91]

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[89] On the analytical implications of selecting and ordering the extra- and intertextual material for the narration, see exemplarily Nünning (39–44). On narrating space, see Dennerlein.

[90] I have discussed this tendency in urban sociology with reference to the works of Hartmut Häußermann and Walter Siebel in chapter 2.2.2.

[91] Stefan Ekman's arguments in *Urban Fantasy* congeal around the two claims that urban fantasy is a literary form in which *urban* is equated with *modern* and that it offers social commentary. Where his examples are chosen from British literature, they can therefore be linked to the tradition of the condition-of-England novel, although Ekman does not make this connection. As my own subsequent analyses will demonstrate, this critical perception of the nation is indeed present in London urban fantasy, but it is not the only defining feature of the form.

The second dominating mode of narrating the urban (re)presents the city as a sign system, and therefore as a sometimes more, sometimes less legible space. This type of urban literature is significantly influenced by early twenty-century urban semiotics which likened the city to a text which can, or cannot, be deciphered. "Those who can read the city know their way around it; those who can't are lost in it" (11; my translation), writes literary scholar Andreas Mahler. Thus, these texts tend to engage in considerable passages of ecphrasis, that is, "virtuosic description of physical reality . . . in order to evoke an image in the mind's eye as intense as if the described object were actually before the reader" (Cuddon 228). Moreover, where the city-as-society type of urban literature favours multiperspectivity to depict the state of the city, urban literature of the city-as-sign type tends to be focalised through one single character who either is or is not an adept decoder of the urban semioscape. The most prominent character type in this regard is certainly the *flâneur*. Going back to Walter Benjamin's seminal, though unfinished, *Arcades Project*, the *flâneur* denotes "a metropolitan male, middle-class/bourgeois dandy figure, who walks the streets for pleasure and is characterised by his voyeuristic gaze" (Pleßke 185).[92] Although the *flâneur* presents the typically blasé urban wanderer in Simmel's sense, Nora Pleßke has pointed out that he "is caught up in urban production and can be seen not only as the personification of urbanity *per se* but also as the urban chronicler, urban writer, and cultural critic" (186; original emphasis). As such, the character interprets the urban sign system and renders it legible for both himself and the reader, if only to a certain degree. In contrast to this legible urban space, the endless postponement of meaning in a poststructuralist, Derridean sense has led to an increase in postmodernist literary representations which emphasise the illegibility of urban space. These texts connect with the long-established metaphor of the city as a labyrinth, whose nightmarish potential was already exploited in Urban Gothic tales of the nineteenth century such as Robert Louis Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886), insofar as "the postmodern metropolis represents a labyrinthine enigma that metaphorically stands in for the dizzying plurality of contemporary urban living" (Bentley 175). Nonetheless, Bentley notes, the *flâneur* persists also in postmodernist urban literature, attempting to disentangle the "multiplicity of texts" emphasised by "the city as a palimpsest of histories and narratives" (176).

While this dual typology accounts for influential literary representations of the city, it would be remiss not to point out that, like all typologies, it is certainly a rather simplified classification of urban narratives. According to Bentley, for example, there exists a third type of postmodern urban writing, which depicts the city as "the physical manifestation of a culture of consumerist excess"

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[92] Benjamin builds his typology on the works of Charles Baudelaire and Edgar Alan Poe's "The Man of the Crowd" (1840). The narrators of urban fantasy owe much to the point of view of the *flâneur*, as my reading of Kate Griffin's *Matthew Swift* series in chapter 6.2.2 highlights in particular. Since the *flâneur* figure was almost exclusively male, the specific use of male pronouns in this part is deliberate and no oversight of gender diversity on my part.

and "bears the traces of earlier images of the modernist metropolis in which an implicit critique of contemporary culture is manifest alongside the dehumanizing effects of hyper-urban living" (175). Rather than seeing this as a third type, however, one could argue that this type of urban literary representation combines elements of the other two: the semiotic implications of excess, which can either be decoded meaningfully or not by the urban protagonist, and the potential for social criticism of the urban condition-of-England novel.

A more compelling example that demonstrates how urban structures of feeling cut across the two modes and how thematic concerns can manifest in several ways can be found in the attention devoted to urban literature by postcolonial scholarship, which emphasises how "urban space becomes a key site of colonial oppression but also of anticolonial resistance" (C. Herbert 201). Postcolonial literary studies have not only shown how to explore space ontologically, that is, regarding "their own situatedness in modern world literatures" (Bachmann-Medick 230), but also how urban space features as a topic. Many postcolonial urban novels *both* survey the contemporary political and social status quo of and in erstwhile imperial cities *and* simultaneously explore the polysemy of urban space by drawing attention to how spatial representations have been, and still are, complicit in (re)producing experiences of power as well as how migrant communities attempt to engage with and rewrite this space.[93] In doing so, these texts "invite us to reflect on the experience of reading the city and on the ethical implications of imagining its past, present, and possible futures in collaboration and in conversation with other writers, readers, and reader-walkers" (213), as literary scholar Caroline Herbert argues by drawing on the well-known image of walking in and around the city.

However, all of these novels and the academic studies which are concerned with them tend to privilege the realist novel over the urban fantastic and thus ignore what is a significant part of the urban imaginary. If at all, it is usually only with cursory reference to the Urban Gothic in the late nineteenth century that the supernatural is recognised as entering the city in literature (e.g. Heyl 237; Lehan 37–39). The lack of consideration bestowed on fantastical urbanities in academic anthologies of urban literature therefore incorrectly suggests that the city is represented in the literary imagination primarily as a 'de-sacralised' or 'disenchanted' space.[94] As my survey of existing scholarship on urban fantasy in particular has already demonstrated, the bias on the nineteenth century can also be found in studies that do focus on the urban fantastic and the supernatural,

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[93] Many novels by Zadie Smith, whom I have listed above as one of the most prolific contemporary condition-of-England novelists, are prime examples in this regard, as they not only engage with the state of the British capital, and by extension the nation, but also foreground the experiences of migrant protagonists in postimperial London.

[94] The idea of modernity's disenchantment was famously proposed by Max Weber, who argued in "Science as a Vocation" that the advent of modern science and technology had caused the world to yield its mysteries and that, consequently, it had become disenchanted (488). In the German original, Weber speaks of the "Entzauberung der Welt". The vicinity of Weber's argument to the short history of fantasy as fuelled by the scientific revolution as I have presented it above is, in my opinion, almost impossible to disregard.

albeit to a less totalising degree. Moreover, while the category of space has received heightened attention in fantasy studies after the spatial turn, as the brief subsequent survey will demonstrate, fantastic cities are often marginally discussed among other fantastic landscapes and studies focusing on the fantastic imaginary of a specific city hardly exist beyond nineteenth-century Urban Gothic. It is thus a lacuna in both literary urban studies and fantasy studies that this dissertation seeks to fill by examining the fantastic literature of London in the twenty-first century.

In fantasy studies, topofocal studies have congealed predominantly around a focus on world building. Beyond approaches informed by possible world theory, there is a considerable body of scholarship which concentrates on spatial representation in maps provided at the beginning of many fantasy novels since *The Lord of the Rings* introduced this practice. Stefan Ekman's *Here Be Dragons: Exploring Fantasy Maps and Settings* gives an extensive overview of existing scholarship on fantasy maps and extends it by providing topofocal readings of fantasy series in order to argue that settings are as important to fantasy stories as characters and plot patterns (2). In contrast to Ekman's critical interest in later publications, urban environments in fantasy provide a focal point mainly as nature-culture interfaces in one analytical chapter, which links "the manner in which the relation is portrayed . . . to central concerns" (13) in four selected examples, none of which is a type of fantastic urban city as I discuss it with regard to London. In fact, Ekman deliberately eschews the consideration of cities which resemble counterparts from our consensus reality too closely due to his interest in fantasy's potential to imagine radically other worlds: "If a story is set in (a version of) a city from the actual world, such as London or New York, no matter how fictionalized, the relations between nature and culture in the fantasy city could be influenced by circumstances in its actual-word counterpart" (134). My reading of the city-country dichotomy in chapter 4 thus complements Ekman's reading of fantastic cities with a higher degree of secondariness.

Patricia García's *Space and the Postmodern Fantastic in Contemporary Literature: The Architectural Void* (2015) starts with the observation that

> the literary Fantastic . . . is not found only in the haunted houses, remote castles and further Gothic enclaves of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century; neither is it limited to its migration into the city, as occurred at the turn of the nineteenth century with the acceleration of Modernity, nor restricted to appearances in such contemporary spaces as metro stations or airports. (2)

This sweeping assessment is in line with García's subsequent claim that "space *is* the Fantastic" (2; original emphasis) instead of merely providing a frame in which it appears. However, it also reduced the city to an assemblage of Gothicised haunted spaces and (subterranean) nonspaces instead of allowing for a more nuanced notion of urbanity in conjunction with the supernatural. García sets out to theorise the fantastic as a phenomenon of space after the spatial turn and argues that the

fantastic "transgression of space disrupts the comforting notion of space as objective entity in favour of the idea of space as constructed and conventional" (7–8). The examples she uses to do so are picked "to strike a balance between canonical French, Spanish or English-speaking authors . . . and emerging voices" but focus on authors who "are well-established writers of the Fantastic in their own countries but less well-known internationally (very often due to the lack of translations)" (8). The choice of Spanish-speaking authors, particularly from South American storytelling traditions, move her textual corpus closer to magical realism, which thus lends her study a different perspective than mine. The "Fantastic of Space" (9) in which García is interested entails that the impossible element of the story is spatial in nature, which is hard to reconcile on the level of the story with cities which have a counterpart in our consensus reality, such as London. Nonetheless, her study advanced the understanding of fantastic spaces by two hitherto understudied dimensions: the fantastical qualities of space itself and the fantastical function of narrative space.

Gwilym Lucas Eades's *Spatialities of Speculative Fiction: Re-Mapping Possibilities, Philosophies, and Territorialities* (2024) betrays its title insofar as the primary material on which he performs "ekphrastic readings" (1) is assembled almost exclusively from science fiction. The writers discussed in his book under the New Weird label – Jeff VanderMeer, M. John Harrison, and China Miéville – are the ones who can also be considered as writing fantasy, or at least as blurring the lines between fantasy and science fiction. Eades starts out from the assumption that "it is the aspect of being spatial (i.e. its 'spatiality')" which characterises "the speculative novum" (2) of nonrealist literature. By this, he means to theorise "how speculative fictions provide arguments for spatially defined subjectivities that have been mapped into various kinds of futures, and extrapolated into new mangles of spacetime" (22). In other words, Eades argues that in the wake of the spatial turn speculative extrapolations about conditions which are different from the here and now of our existence are as much about spatiality as they are about time in the sense that future developments are spatialised. Here the focus on science fiction becomes most apparent, as the theoretical introduction provides a clear understanding of literature as retro-futurist thought experiments about (mostly technological) developments. While Eades touches on New Crobuzon as a fantastic city in Miéville's *Bas Lag Trilogy* (2000–2004), fantastic urbanity is not discussed as such.

Karl Bell's edited collection *Supernatural Cities: Enchantment, Anxiety and Spectrality* (2019) argues for the persistence, relevance, and vitality the urban supernatural by offering a rich cultural history that explores the relationship between supernatural beliefs, urban legends, and urbanisation. Organized around the programmatic themes of enchantment, anxiety, and spectrality, the individual contributions from historians, geographers, anthropologists, folklorists, and literary

scholars examine urban supernatural cultures across five continents from the late eighteenth to the twenty-first century. The book analyses how the different varieties of the urban supernatural have been continually adapted to reflect and address social, economic, and environmental anxieties. Bell's comprehensive introduction to the volume echoes the claim that "the scholarly exploration of urban supernatural cultures remains diffuse and the subject woefully understudied" (1) and advocates to "recognise the prevalence, importance, and vitality of the supernatural as an intrinsic element of urban cultures in the modern world, intimately and endlessly interwoven into the fabric and experiences of everyday urban existence" (2). The fusion of the fantastic and mundane is taken to "enable urban dwellers to talk about social and environmental anxieties, spatialised communal politics and power relations, providing them with both an alternative viewpoint on social realities and a subversive means of articulating political critique" (9); an assessment with which I find myself agreeing profoundly. However, the collection's strength in assembling contributions which cut across disciplines and centuries also entails that its aim is not to provide an inventory of the fantastic urban imaginary of one single city and necessarily sacrifices analytical depth for a broad temporal and geographical scope. The only contribution focused on London, Alex Bevan's essay, reads the London Underground through a Gothic lens as reflecting socio-cultural anxieties about the rise of modernity, while also conveying a counter-narrative of tragedy, hauntings, and the emotional impact of such spaces. While the Gothic informs my hauntological reading of the texts in my corpus in chapter 5, the chapters 4 and 6 demonstrate that the Gothic is not the only prism through which affective engagements with literary urban landscapes can be understood.

Elana Gomel's *Narrative Space and Time: Representing Impossible Topologies in Literature* (2014) laments the tendency of cultural and literary studies to limit themselves more often than not to an investigation of "the way in which physical space is parceled into cultural and social sites" (2) even though "[n]on-Newtonian spaces define the postmodern spatial imagination" (3). Her study seeks to fill a gap by studying the narrative techniques used to represent textual topologies which are deemed impossible according to our natural laws and their cultural significance. While this is a valuable endeavour and Gomel's book remains one of, if not the most extensive study on fantastic space(s), the generic and historical breadth of texts she treats ineluctably limits the depth of examination. With regard to urban space, Gomel discusses the "phantasmagoric cityscapes" (58) in three novels by Charles Dickens, whom she christens "the patron saint of Steampunk" (39) by dint of his valence for "reimagining postmodernity as a Dickensian carnival of urban misrule" (40) in contemporary neo-Victorian steampunk novels. Moreover, one chapter is devoted to "group of texts that push against the very nature of narrative as a temporal sequence of events in order to explore the conflation of space and time in our experience of urbanism" (174). These texts by Haruki Murakami, China Miéville, Neil Gaiman, and Tim Lebbon are referred to as urban fantasies,

but they are predicated on a much more inclusive definition of the term than the one that undergirds the present study. Gomel admits to "expand[ing] the genre's limit" (174) by her choice of texts and subsequently focuses on a set of common narrative techniques she identifies in them, which rely on fantasy's capacity for literalising the metaphorical: "techniques that facilitate construction of the chronotope in which time *literally* becomes space and topology is *literally* shaped by 'the movements of time, plot and history'" (174; original emphasis). Gomel focuses on the collapse of history and urban space and systematises these narrative techniques as the vertical city, the simultaneous city, and the omnivorous city which make apparent that the postmodern city resists being made ontologically intelligible through omniscient third-person narration (174–75).[95] She links fantastic urban representation to the literary renderings of Jerusalem and Babylon as the emblematic cities of light and darkness, arguing that "[c]ontemporary urban fantasy has embraced this duality" and that these stories thus "excel at imagining monstrous cities, echoing the antiurban sentiment of political discourse" (176). Thus, her argument that contemporary fantastic cities exemplify the postmodern collapse of time and space entails the conceptualisation of a city's narrative history as being "haunted by ghosts of its past, populated by spectral memories of collective traumas" (177). The "collapsed urban chronotope" is typified as an "entanglement of memory and trauma, utopia and dystopia, desire and fear in both the lived experience and the narrative representation of the city" (178). While these observations will shine through in my discussion of haunted London in chapter 5, my reading of Kate Griffin's *Matthew Swift* series in particular will expand Gomel's argument to an examination of London's haunt*ing* qualities, which collapse not only the past into the present but also the future.

Bell's edited collection and Gomel's reading of urban fantasy's series as collapsing past and present into an exemplification of the intelligibility of the postmodern urban condition both display the continuity of contemporary urban fantasy and nineteenth-century Urban Gothic to which other scholars have drawn attention as well. Before linking urban fantasy to its literary predecessors from realist urban literature, Urban Gothic, and crime fiction, I want to pause for a moment to stitch together what I have hitherto said into a synthesis of how I define the subject matter of this study. At the beginning of this chapter, I have lamented that scholars writing on urban fantasy often do not acknowledge the specific meanings invoked by the genre's two denominators. Subsequently, I have offered an understanding of *fantasy* as referring to a particular mode of writing, namely one that deliberately diverges from the mimetic conventions of realism in ways we deem impossible

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[95] On the notion of intelligibility in connection with the city, see also Nora Pleßke's book *The Intelligible Metropolis: Urban Mentality in Contemporary London Novels* (2014). In Gomel's taxonomy, the vertical city is characterised by underground spaces as the locus of the city's traumatic history, the simultaneous city is predicated upon the psychological disintegration of the city and its inhabitants into a single narrative entity, and the omnivorous city combines time, space, and subject into a narrative of endless metafictional intertextuality (180–81).

with reference to our understanding of the natural laws formulated by modern science. Moreover, I have contextualised my definition of the *urban* element of urban fantasy with recourse to the qualitative elements of urbanity as proffered by urban sociologists and cultural geographers. I have also examined how the notion of urbanity as a specific way of life has resonated with literary and cultural studies, claiming as others have done before me that the rich literary tradition of London can be taken as exemplary in this regard, and that urban fantasy proves no exception.[96] In contrast to the trend of equating *urban* with *contemporary* or *modern* (e.g. Ekman, *Urban Fantasy*), I insist that notions of localised urbanity in urban fantasy are a *conditio sine qua non*, an indispensable element of the genre.[97] Urban fantasies do not simply happen to be set in the respective authors' immediate environment but reflect the urge to tell stories about this specific place and make sense of their respective urbanities.[98] However, previous studies on the urban fantastic have tended to be latitudinal in character rather than focusing on one city's fantastic urban imaginary in particular.

Consequently, an analysis of London urban fantasies is deeply interesting with regard to an extrapolation of contemporary structures of feelings. This entails asking how the urban imaginary manifests in fantastic texts and how, vice versa, fantastic texts can inform us about the structure of the urban imaginary. As this study will demonstrate, I read the London urban fantasies under scrutiny here as negotiating the meanings of London in a way that indicates specific structures of anxious feelings which are embedded in discursive power formations, simultaneously maintaining and challenging them. Although such an analysis has been done by taking realist literature as its source, a systematic analysis of the fantastic part of London's urban imaginary in the twenty-first century has not been published yet.

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[96] As John Clute has observed already in the late 1990s in an entry in *The Greenwood Encyclopedia*, urban fantasies "are set in cities that have already had stories told about them" (852), which adds to their overall intertextual character. Early texts emphasise the writers' desire to localise their stories in environments taken from our consensus reality in contrast to fantasy set in de-localised secondary worlds. To give but two emblematic examples beyond the corpus of this study, *Buffy: The Vampire Slayer* is set in Sunnydale, a fictitious, generic, and small Californian city, and Laura K. Hamilton's popular *Anita Blake: Vampire Hunter* series takes place in St. Louis, Missouri, where Hamilton lives. As international reception of the genre grew, the urban element in urban fantasy has predominantly come to mean 'metropolitan', and stories were moved to New York City, Los Angeles, Chicago or, in the British context, London. It stands to reason that the big metropolises better offered to blend local idiosyncrasies and global demands, that is, to amalgamate "the degree to which magic was localized by many writers" (Mendlesohn and James, *Short History* 143) and an iconicity and iconography that appealed to international readerships. Notably, in British urban fantasy the setting has almost invariably been London from Gaiman to Miéville to Aaronovitch, as London exemplifies like perhaps no other city the trend towards 'glocalisation'. To the best of my knowledge, the sole notable exception to this rule of London's ubiquity in British urban fantasy is T. L. Huchu's *Edinburgh Night* series (2021–).

[97] The trend of equating *urban* with *contemporary* when it comes to designations of fantasy at large is particularly visible in bookstores, where it is not uncommon to find, for example, J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series on a shelf that proclaims its contents to be urban fantasy. How Rowling's series, which removes almost its entire plot from the confines of the city and celebrates a decidedly Romantic ideal of idyllic natural landscapes, can be classified as *urban* fantasy truly escapes my comprehension.

[98] I am using the term in plural here to reflect the argument by Löw and Berking that cities have their own idiosyncrasies, their individual logics.

Because the realist London novel, Urban Gothic, and crime fiction have gifted tropes, plot structures, and characters to urban fantasy it is necessary to first address these major aesthetic influences. The origins of all these literary traditions lie in the nineteenth century and are literary responses to sprawling cities, particularly early-nineteenth-century London (Heyl 237). At the centre of Urban Gothic and crime fiction in particular is the shared notion that the city has become confounding, mysterious, and menacing. These cultural anxieties are discussed in the two traditions in different ways. While the Urban Gothic negotiates conflicts of, often deviating, sexuality and individual identity that still resonate loudly in urban fantasy's sister genre, paranormal romance, crime fiction indicates concerns for public order and security. Moreover, crime fiction has produced the investigator character as a protagonist who is able to navigate and decode the overstimulation of senses in the urban environment into a decipherable sign system for readers (Heyl 238). To varying degree, all of these characteristic elements have influenced urban fantasy texts and become its markers as well.

2.3 Lines of Tradition

I have already indicated toward the end of the last chapter that it would be false to suggest that urban fantasy constitutes a *radically new* genre. Rather, in this section I want to stress its continuities, both in terms of content and form, which I see in urban fantasy's relationship with the London novel in general as well as Urban Gothic and crime fiction. As it is my contention that elements of urban writing characterise urban fantasy, I will, firstly, examine recent scholarship on the London city novel, before turning to the characteristics urban fantasy shares with Urban Gothic and crime fiction as two other prolific, and highly stylised, genres. In doing so, I hope to offer a concise overview of urban fantasy's continuities before devoting the principal part of this study to its particularities.

2.3.1 London City Novel

As the previous survey of recent trends in literary urban studies has already indicated, London is of primary interest for this branch of study. The British capital offers a rich history as well as, especially in the last two decades, the global reputation as a high-quality city and the concomitant marketing and branding strategies to attract visitors, inhabitants, and investors.[99] Sebastian Groes contends in the introduction to his study on the British capital in contemporary literature that "[m]ore so than any other city, London is covered by a thick crust of poetry, urban legends,

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[99] Löw notes the potential of city branding for assessing "the condensation and verbalisation of urban doxa" (*Soziologie* 86; my translation). Nigel Thrift draws attention to the affective component in city branding (58). For an essay on branding London visually, please see Robert Tavernor's contribution in *Visualizing the City*.

historical narratives and literary fictions, and mythology" (1).[100] Certainly, with regard to British literary representations of urbanity, London is, as Oliver von Knebel Doeberitz and Ralph Schneider facetiously assess, indeed everywhere (1). To that list may be added scholarly accounts of the various representations of London, literary and otherwise, as they, like their subject matter, are legion. It follows that the subsequent survey of recent academic publications on the literature of London can only be selective and does not raise claim to completeness. Rather, I have chosen to limit my elaborations to recent studies which, firstly, illuminate the vitality of the research area, secondly, have informed my own research, and, thirdly, expose the peculiar omission of London's fantastic literature in the twenty-first century which this study seeks to address.

One of the most recent and extensive considerations of London's literary tradition is Lawrence Manley's *Cambridge Companion to the Literature of London* (2011). The volume ranges from medieval literature to the twenty-first century while also covering not only prose, poetry, and drama but also visual culture. Particularly noteworthy for this study is John McLeod's chapter on "Writing London in the Twenty-First Century", in which McLeod offers "three ways of regarding London writing since 2000" (244): (a) fictions concerned with London's polycultural population, (b) narratives focusing on the social strata disenfranchised by the city's rise as a global financial centre, and (c) writings exploring the "social impact of contemporary change" (244), particularly in the wake of the terrorist attacks of 9/11 and 7/7. While the urban fantasies I examine in this study do indeed relate to these thematic concerns, the range of novels considered by McLeod makes clear that his typology, as well as the scope of Manley's collection in general, stems exclusively from realist fiction.[101] Other anthologies which survey the literature of London across the centuries are Paul Bailey's *The Oxford Book of London* (1995), Pamela Gilbert's *Imagined Londons* (2002), Susana Onega and John A. Stotesbury's *London in Literature: Visionary Mappings of the Metropolis* (2002), and Vanessa Guignery and François Gallix's *(Re-)Mapping London: Visions of the Metropolis in the Contemporary Novel in English* (2008). All of these collections, however, privilege realist literature over the fantastical imagination except for sporadic discussions of either London Gothic of the nineteenth century or those focusing on the returning past in the form of hauntings.[102] Nick Hubble and Philip Tew's *London in Contemporary British Fiction: The City Beyond the City* (2016) is the most recent addition to the long bibliography of literary London anthologies, and the one which focuses predominantly on twenty-first-century literature. Notably, its inclusion of Mark P.

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[100] China Miéville makes the same point in an interview with Mark Bould: "London is one of the cities that refracts literature with a peculiarly intense hallucinatory power".

[101] In her chapter on the Victorian novel, Rosemarie Bodenheimer refers cursorily to Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* as an example of Gothic fiction, but only in the context of "a London hardly distinguishable from that of Dickens" (153).

[102] See Julian Wolfreys's chapter in Pamela Gilbert's *Imagined Londons* for urban hauntings in 1990s literature. For a discussion of hauntology after the spectral turn, see Roger Luckhurst's article "The Contemporary London Gothic" in *Textual Practice*. I will employ a hauntological lens myself in chapter 5.

Williams's discussion of China Miéville's opus makes it one of the few anthologies considering fantastical representations of London, but overall it both testifies to and reinscribes the movement towards realist fiction in London writing. Nick Bentley, Emily Horton, Nick Hubble, and Philip Tew's *The 2010s: A Decade of Contemporary British Fiction* (2024) is another notable exception due to including Anna McFarlane's chapter on speculative fiction, though she discusses mainly science fiction. Albeit not exclusively concerned with literary representations of London, Oliver von Knebel Doeberitz and Ralf Schneider's volume *London post-2010 in British Literature and Culture* (2017) should be mentioned here for the inclusion of Stephanie Lethbridge's article on the *Rivers of London* series.

Due to the evident limitations of the form, monographs concerned with London literature tend to focus either periodically or thematically on their subject matter. One notable exception comes from "the probably most productive contemporary researcher on the city" (Pleßke 26), Julian Wolfreys, who published three volumes on *Writing London* between 1998 and 2007. Wolfreys builds from the observation that "London is iterable, it returns as never quite itself, each and every time providing a singular example", thus placing itself "always in the process of self-transformation" (*Writing London I* 6–7). Consequently, his extensive study focuses on close readings of London texts in order to determine the uses to which the rhetoric of imagining London is put, that is, studying "the forms it takes, and the ways in which such various and diverse rhetoric can be read as allowing us access to a greater comprehension of *what London feels like*" (10; my emphasis). However, he cautions that the notion of gaining access should not be mistaken for "access to our supposedly true primary subject or object", but rather "as a way of bringing into focus questions of the purpose behind the very structure" (10) of the formations of London visible in the text. As such, London literature assumes the role of a mediation of the city's "presence as a cultural, political and psychic force within which to structure narratives" (15). In other words, Wolfreys approaches London as an imaginary site, and concentrates on the strategies by and the purposes for which this site is constructed. In doing so, his three-volume study has become programmatic for the scholarship of London literature.

Lawrence Phillips's *London Narratives: Post-War Fiction and the City* (2006) covers, as the book's subtitle already betrays, the period of London writing from 1945 to 1990. Two German-language dissertations, Doris Teske's *Die Vertextung der Megalopolis: London im Spiel postmoderner Texte* (1999) and Dagmar Dreyer's *London literarisch: Stadtentwürfe im zeitgenössischen Roman, 1990-2000* (2006), also advertise the period under survey in their subtitle, though Teske in particular strives to connect postmodern representations of London with literary predecessors, thereby emphasising the longevity and continuity of London-specific tropes. Sebastian Groes's *The Making of London: London in Contemporary Literature* (2011) understands the contemporaneity of

its subject matter to stretch from the 1970s to the early 2000s and charts it by their authors, thereby stressing the coherences and transformations in their respective opus rather than looking at individual bodies of works. Thematic studies on literary London around or after the millennium's threshold focus on postcolonialism (John McLeod, *Postcolonial London: Rewriting the Metropolis*, 2004; Anette Müller, *London as a Literary Region: The Portrayal of the Metropolis in Contemporary Postcolonial British Fiction*, 2007), (dis)orientation (Martina Deny, *Lost in the Postmodern Metropolis: Studien zu (Des-)Orientierung und Identitätskonstruktion im zeitgenössischen London-Roman*, 2009), mentality (Nora Pleßke, *The Intelligible Metropolis: Urban Mentality in Contemporary London Novels*, 2014), or psychography (Ann Tso, *The Literary Psychogeography of London: Otherworlds of Alan Moore, Peter Ackroyd, and Iain Sinclair*, 2020), to name but a few.

Moreover, like the study of urban literature in general, scholarship of literary London has become institutionalised in the early twenty-first century. In 2011, the Literary London Society (LLS) was founded

> to foster interdisciplinary and historically wide-ranging research into London literature in its historical, social, and cultural contexts, to include all periods and genres of writing and representation about, set in, inspired by, or alluding to central and suburban London and its environs, from the city's roots in pre-Roman times to its imagined futures. ("About")

In order to meet these aims, the society organises an annual conference and publishes scholarship in the *Literary London Journal*. Moreover, the society's website hosts a variety of short, critical essays about "single works of fiction with London settings" ("London Fictions"). It reflects the general disregard of contemporary London urban fantasy that the overwhelming majority of texts receiving attention in this essay series are realist fiction. Of the novels that form my corpus, none is included. The one strand of London fiction which deals in the fantastic and has achieved considerable academic pedigree so far is the Urban Gothic, whose literary influence has also extended to urban fantasy.

2.3.2 Urban Gothic

Although paranormal romance relies more heavily than urban fantasy on the incorporation of elements from the Gothic, the common genealogy of the two genres entails that Gothic conventions also impacted the conception of urban fantasy, most notably the urban environment. The history of Urban Gothic commences in the eighteenth century, and it commences in London specifically, for

> [t]he eighteenth century saw repeated attempts to organise the metropolis to exemplify Enlightenment values of order and clarity, with prisons, hospitals, cemeteries and workhouses being relocated to urban peripheries. Yet the city proved resistant to such purification, with much of the city increasingly polluted, claustrophobic and marred by deathly squalor. (Wasson, "Built Environment" 38)

After the 'invention' of the Gothic by Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* in 1764 and its consolidation in the early nineteenth century, London Urban Gothic crystallised predominantly around two dominant themes: the rapid industrialisation and urbanisation of Britain, which drew many people to the capital, and London's status as an imperial capital in an Empire that span, at its apex, almost across the entire globe.

As the Industrial Revolution hit stride, the rapidly developing city of London had soon lent itself as a Gothicised setting: "As the nineteenth century progressed, urbanisation enabled cities to take on many of the qualities of the dungeons and castles of early Gothic, city streets becoming claustrophobic mazes" (Wasson, "Built Environment" 36). G. W. M. Reynolds' *The Mysteries of London* (1844–56) can be regarded as beginning the trend to narrate London as an industrialised, hellish cesspool which was continued, among others, by Charles Dickens (Warwick, "Victorian Gothic" 31–32). "By the end of the [nineteenth] century", Alexandra Warwick observes, "the city has become its other, dominantly figured as labyrinth, jungle, swamp and ruin, and described as blackened, rotten, shadowed and diseased" ("Victorian Gothic" 34). A rapidly growing working population reconfigured in the contemporary imagination as a degenerative urban underclass and London's labyrinthine alleys covered by a thick crust of chimney smoke have hence become classic Urban Gothic staples.[103]

Moreover, the extension of the British Empire across the globe heightened concerns 'at home' towards the end of the nineteenth century. In particular, tales of 'reverse colonisation' fuelled imperial anxieties of degeneration.[104] Hence, a "Gothic language of degeneration and delirium also characterises fiction of the British *fin de siècle*" and formed "a blend of increasing population, polluting industries and increasing national anxiety over fading empire combined to drive fantasies of horror within the empire's urban centre" (Wasson, "Built Environment" 40). Consequently, Warwick also notes that "this city of dreadful night is populated by others who threaten to overrun or undermine the fabric of the imperial metropolis" ("Victorian Gothic" 34). The allusion included here is to James Thompson's poem "The City of Dreadful Night" (1874), published under the *nom de plume* Bysshe Vanolis, whose overbearingly bleak tone efficaciously captures the character of the urban imaginary at the time of its publication. The fear of atavistic, degenerative monsters, whether generated by scientific experiments or 'imported' from the imperial colonies, can be seen at work in many of the prototypical Victorian Gothic tales set in London, such as Robert Louis Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1888), Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891),

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[103] Robert Mighall points out the prominence of fog as a trope in nineteenth-century Urban Gothic: "The fog obscures, but also reveals, the true character of the city" ("Gothic Cities" 56).

[104] The term *reverse colonisation* goes back to an essay by Stephen D. Arata with the title "The Occidental Tourist: *Dracula* and the Anxiety of Reverse Colonization" (*Victorian Studies*, 1990, vol. 33, no. 4, pp. 621–45). I will return to this idea when I discuss Jonathan Stroud's *The Golem's Eye* as a tale of faux reverse colonisation in chapter 5.1.1.

Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), Richard Marsh's *The Beetle* (1897), and Arthur Conan Doyle's "Lot No. 249" (1892), to name but a few.

While the literary developments in modernism are somewhat incompatible with the conventions of the Gothic (Spooner, "Gothic" 39–42), the destruction of London during the Second World War rekindled a Gothic imagining of the British capital: "In these darker strands of neoromanticism, hallucination and melancholy operate as a counter to Arcadian dreams and rhetoric of national triumph" (Wasson, "Built Environment" 42; cf. also Wasson, *Urban Gothic* 130–56). Moreover, the increasing economic precarity under capitalism and the tendency of capitalist architecture to both symbolise and exert control engendered a strand of twentieth-century Gothic which "emphasises claustrophobic constraint within the built environment" (Wasson, "Built Environment" 44). These developments indicate a shift in terms of the genre's concerns in the second half of the twentieth century, since the Urban Gothic of the nineteenth and early twentieth century had been obsessed with the repression of the past and its return, implying "an attitude towards the historical past and its relation to the present" (Mighall, *Geography* xii). As a result, Mighall argues, the Gothic is less concerned with the supernatural *itself* but presents it as an effect of the focus on the historical, superstitious past (*Geography* xix–xx). The prevalence of Gothic space over, rather than its correspondence with, Gothic time, however, is a distinctly postmodern feature (Spooner, "Gothic" 45; cf. also Meteling 82).[105] The most prolific contemporary writer who exemplifies these concerns is certainly Peter Ackroyd, whose novel *Hawksmoor* (1985) makes memories and historical associations its subject and in doing so is "steeped in . . . the logic of topographical 'survival' that informed Reynolds' and others' interest in the rookeries and former sanctuaries of London" (Mighall, "Gothic Cities" 57).

In addition to a palimpsestic layering of memories and time, Catherine Spooner argues for a shift concerning the treatment of prototypical Gothic monsters. They have evolved from their fearful depiction as a destructive force in nineteenth-century fiction to charismatic, sympathetic, lionised rebels who disrupt order and challenge power structures to creatures who attempt to assimilate (*Post-Millennial* 85; cf. also Crawford 7; Wisker 224). Arguably, this development is continued in paranormal romance as it developed during the late 1990s, where vampires, werewolves, and malevolent fairies have become love interests and life partners rather than fearful creatures of the night.

Neo-Victorian fiction is a final literary trend which continues matters of the Gothic in the twenty-first century and thus bears some resemblance to urban fantasy due to a shared set of tropes.

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[105] The preoccupation with space and time, and particularly with (Victorian) London, is not only evident in steampunk and neo-Victorian fiction, two other fantastical genres which owe many of their generic characteristics to the Gothic, but also in the frequent appearance of the London Underground in urban fantasy, for example in Neil Gaiman's *Neverwhere* (1996) or China Miéville's *Un Lun Dun* (2007).

Neo-Victorianism infuses "contemporary literature with the Victorian past" (Boehm-Schnitker and Gruss 1) and the status of neo-Victorian texts "as cultural *doppelgängers* of the Victorian Age both mimic and challenge the discourses of the nineteenth century" (1–2; original emphasis). With regard to neo-Victorian engagements with the city, Marie-Luise Kohlke and Christian Gutleben argue in their introduction to *Neo-Victorian Cities* that "the period's metropolises are variously resurrected as heritage sites to be preserved and financially exploited, as nexuses of Gothic fascination and terror, and as eroticised matrixes of capitalist romance and exchange" (1). While neo-Victorianism employs the Victorian Age as a lens through which our own time is approached, the urban settings of neo-Victorian literature draw more closely on Victorian London than its contemporary cityscape and often take on an aesthetic borrowed from Steampunk.[106]

In summary, many staples of the Gothic from both the nineteenth and the twentieth century have contributed to and been imported in fantasy fiction set in urban environments in the 1990s and early 2000s, such as the uncanny, the concern with social and cultural anxieties, the depiction of the drab urban environment, and a plethora of supernatural creatures. However, the recognisability of these features as hallmarks of the Gothic has provoked their self-conscious, and often ironic, implementation in contemporary fantasy fiction, including urban fantasy. "Many . . . contemporary texts engage in historical excavations that self-reflexively incorporate knowledge of the Gothic genre itself" ("London" 529), argues Roger Luckhurst, further claiming that "readers of this genre soon note that it is the Gothic revival of the late Victorian era that turns up repeatedly, clearly because this was the moment when a distinctively urban Gothic was crystallized" (530).[107] This development revisits the Gothic's romance origins and is, as I have argued above, the main difference between the paranormal romance and urban fantasy genres, for urban fantasy has incorporated more elements from crime fiction.[108]

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[106] Arguably, Jonathan Stroud's *Bartimaeus* trilogy could be classified as neo-Victorian rather than urban fantasy literature, were it not for the incidental mention of computers. The vicinity of Stroud's novels to neo-Victorian aesthetics, and thus to Gothic concerns, explains why the novels are at the centre of my analysis in chapter 5.1. On the connection between neo-Victorianism and Steampunk, see e.g. Claire Nally's *Steampunk: Gender, Subculture and the Neo-Victorian* (Bloomsbury, 2019) or Helena Esser's *Steampunk London: Neo-Victorian Urban Space and Popular Transmedia Memory* (Bloomsbury, 2024).

[107] A particularly salient example of how self-consciously Gothic tropes are employed in contemporary urban fantasy can be found towards the end of the first *Rivers of London* novel. After the particular supernatural occurrence in the first instalment has led to a riot in central London, the narrator scathingly comments that "the pundits were out in force explaining how the riot was caused by whatever socio-political factor their latest book was pushing", which "was certainly a searing indictment of some aspect of modern society – if only we knew what" (*Rivers* 350–51). The novel facetiously employs here what Baldick and Mighall have called "the anxiety model" (279) of Gothic criticism, which rests on "[t]he assumption that cultural 'anxiety' is reflected or articulated in Gothic fiction" (280). The "pundits" in Rivers seem to follow this model and are only able to make sense of the supernatural in terms of reading it as an indicator of cultural anxieties of any kind. While my own model also draws on anxiety, I do so in a more nuanced context of structures of anxious feelings, as the next chapter will explicate.

[108] It was not my aim, nor would it have been possible to survey the abundant body of scholarly literature on Urban Gothic, let alone the Gothic in general. Beyond the sources I have referred to up to this point to highlight the most salient connections, readers may find the following literature helpful. Maisha Wester and Xavier Aldana Reyes's *Twenty-First-Century Gothic: An Edinburgh Companion* (2019) provides a good overview over contemporary trends in the genre in its own right. Lawrence Phillips and Anne Witchard's edited collection *London Gothic* (2010)

2.3.3 Crime Fiction

As the common roots of Urban Gothic and crime fiction lie in nineteenth-century urbanisation, it is hardly surprising that the city setting ranges among these elements which crime fiction has bequeathed to urban fantasy. The two other prominent elements are the investigator protagonist and the investigation plot. In terms of the environment, crime fiction is also inextricably linked to the city. As Heather Worthington points out, "crime has generally been considered to be a product of the city, as a consequence of urbanisation and the concomitant proximity of rich and poor within the confines of urban spaces" (2). Thus, "[t]he physicality of the city, the very denseness of the mass of buildings, the miles of roads and streets, the urban sprawl, the huge populations and the anonymity conferred on the individual by the crowd, all lend themselves to the construction of the criminal and the creation of crime" (2). Peter Messent also argues that crime fiction is "crucially connected to . . . *city space* in particular" (62; original emphasis) due to the concerns of vision and supervision in an environment characterised by the anonymity of the crowd. Moreover, the sense of anonymity is often linked to "a sense of personal powerlessness" in the city, which "contributes to the prevailing sense that an essential friction exists between the world and the individual" (Evans, Moore, and Johnstone 154). Crime fiction narratives provide "the antidote to [this] deep sense of powerlessness" by fulfilling the "all-encompassing desire for safety, vengeance, and personal freedom" (155). Urban space, in other words, exacerbates the dualities and the opposition on which crime, and crime fiction, primarily rests (Andrew and Phelps, "Introduction" 2).

With the investigator protagonist, crime fiction offers a personalisation of major social issues. Two influential prototypes of crime fiction can be distinguished with regard to their central character. One the one hand, police procedurals centre around the daily work of the police. Due to the protagonists' status as employees of the state, police procedurals particularly explore the dominant themes of controlling the deviant individual for the sake of society at large and the negotiation of power structures (Messent 43–44; Worthington xx). Charles Dickens's Inspector Bucket is generally counted as the earliest examples of this type. On the other hand, since institutionalised policing was quite new,[109] individual detectives, so-called private investigators,

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has assembled an impressive array of essays investigating Gothic representations of the British capital not only across different periods, but also different media, and remains one of the most useful sources in the field. Holly-Gale Millette and Ruth Heholt's *The New Urban Gothic* (2020) broadens the perspective to the global scale by examining trends in the Urban Gothic worldwide. Andrew Smith and William Hughes's *Empire and the Gothic: The Politics of Genre* (2003) focuses explicitly on the connections between the Gothic and the British Empire as well as postcolonial theory. Jamieson Ridenhour's *In Darkest London: The Gothic Cityscape in Victorian Literature* (2013) deals with London's terrifying aspects in representations of many of the writers I have named here, including Dickens, Machen, Stephenson, Stoker, Thompson, and Wilde. Lastly, Karl Bell's *The Magical Imagination* (2012) surveys not a body of literature but investigates magical mentalities in the nineteenth century as "a mode of cognitive or epistemological interpretation manifested through specific cultural practices" (4).

[109] In Britain, the first institutional police force, the Metropolitan Police, was founded in 1829. It gradually absorbed its informal predecessor, the Bow Street Runners, a detective force organised privately by novelist Henry Fielding from 1753 onwards.

quickly became popular as crime fiction protagonists (Messent 38; Worthington 69, 123). The literary detectives created by Edgar Allan Poe (Auguste Dupin) and Arthur Conan Doyle (Sherlock Holmes) are prototypical examples of the gentleman detective, that is, more or less wealthy individuals who could afford investigating mysteries for leisure or in exchange for (small) financial reward.[110] Both the police procedural and the gentleman detective narrative have engendered a rich and vivacious tradition, particularly in Britain. In the United States, as a response to corrupt police forces and the misuse of the power vested in them, literary police procedurals are less common – but have thriven in twenty-first-century television with series such as *CSI* and *Navy CIS* – and the investigator-driven type has typically taken the form of the hard-boiled detective, a world-weary individual either employed as police officer and struggling against the suffocating conditions of his professional environment or fighting 'the system' as a lone wolf. As Worthington points out, this genuinely American genre has incorporated characteristics of its prototypical protagonist from frontier narratives (122–23), and, after the advent of film and the rising prominence of Hollywood, entertained a prolific reciprocity with film noir.[111] Over the course of the twentieth century, the growing popularity of hard-boiled detective fiction has led to the import of this type of protagonist into other literary traditions beyond the United States. By now, it is no longer uncommon of British crime fiction to sport a hard-boiled detective as the main character, and neither is it for urban fantasy. Overall, these developments demonstrate the variability of crime fiction around the central theme of narrating Otherness as deviance (Worthington xxiv). This malleability also helps explain why characteristic elements of crime fiction amalgamated so easily with those of the fantastic to produce the form of urban fantasy with which I am concerned in this study.

As a genre, crime fiction is inextricably linked with Enlightenment values of reason and rationality through its protagonist, for

> [i]n the act of detection, in revealing motives for murder and solution to mysteries, in rationalising the irrational and in ordering the disordered, the detective is very much a creation of a modern world in which, we assume, science and human intelligence can find the answers to everything. (Worthington 32)

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[110] Inspector Bucket is one of the central characters in Dickens's *Bleak House* (1852–53), Poe's detective Dupin has his first appearance in the short story "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" (1842), and Doyle's Sherlock Holmes entered the literary stage in *A Study in Scarlet* (1887). Baroness Emma Orczy's *Lady Molly of Scotland Yard* (1910) featured one of the earliest fictional female detectives.

[111] The emergence of hard-boiled detective fiction is inextricably linked with the names of Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler. In Sam Spade (Hammett, *The Maltese Falcon* (1930)) and Philip Marlowe (Chandler, *The Big Sleep* (1939)) both created crystallising characters for the genre who are defined by their will to achieve justice at all costs, their muscular physique, and a slight drinking problem. The portrayal of both Spade and Marlowe by Humphrey Bogart in filmic adaptations of the respective novels has led to Bogart being perceived as the quintessential embodiment of the hard-boiled detective in the popular imagination. As Californians by choice, both Hammett and Chandler set their stories predominantly in the coastal cities of San Francisco and Los Angeles, which, in combination with real-world problems of crime and criminality, has made crime fiction a crucial component of the cities' urban imaginaries.

The common adage thus is that detective protagonists are characterised by a considerable intellect in solving the respective mysteries with which they are confronted as well as a certain thoroughness and resourcefulness in their methods, thus conforming to the claim that, at the heart, detective fiction hails the Enlightenment value of individual rationality. The three prototypical detectives mentioned before – Poe's Dupin, Dickens's Bucket, and Doyle's Holmes – certainly fit the bill, and the perception of typical detective figures in the popular imagination is influenced to an inconceivably large degree by their portrayal. This conceptualisation of the detective as the Enlightenment figure *par excellence* due to the skilled deployment of rational thinking and the accumulation of knowledge through investigation which are necessary to detain the deviation caused by the crime helps explain why urban fantasy has borrowed its protagonists in particular from crime fiction.

As I have argued in the last chapter, fantastic elements fundamentally contradict both the laws of science and rationality so valued by the Enlightenment. Thus, on first glance, they challenge the established teleological formula of knowledge acquisition "by bringing in elements of the unknown, unexplained and irrational" (Andrew 220) which is so valued by crime fiction protagonists. Precisely because fantasy cannot, by definition, be comprehended with modern science, it engenders an urge to express it in as close an approximation of scientific language as possible, which provides authors with a plethora of possibilities. Consequently, the trend of crime fiction towards science-driven, forensic narratives, where hard evidence is produced with the exactitude of scientific methods (Messent 77; Worthington 33), is mirrored in urban fantasy in the form of criminal investigations centring around supernatural occurrences.[112] At the same time, the inclusion of fantastic elements into the storyworld almost invariably returns the contemporary environment to a pre-technological state, since the fantastic and modern technology are generally presented as being largely incompatible. In a post-9/11 world under constant surveillance, in which technology has taken over large parts of detection work, the elimination of this resourceful tool allows to focus the narrative on 'proper' detection where the characters do most of the actual work to an extent which would be implausible in contemporary crime fiction. Urban fantasy, in other words, re-centres the detective protagonist, who is challenged to employ a rational Enlightenment skillset in the face of undeniably supernatural occurrences.

With regard to its plot structure, multiple scholars have asserted that crime fiction is at the core a conservative genre that is concerned with preserving or restoring the status quo and the control of the individual in the interest of society (Messent 20–21, 26; Worthington 61–62). The

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[112] Exemplarily, in the *Rivers of London* series one of the very first things Detective Inspector Nightingale asks his new employer Peter Grant is whether he understands "the scientific method" (*Rivers* 35). The tenacity with which Grant upholds chains of evidence, files reports, and conducts scientific experiments on the fantastic in the entire series illustrates this point perfectly.

invariable purpose of the plot is teleologically moving towards closure, that is, to solve the crime, although, even while individual cases may be resolved, crime itself cannot be contained (Andrew and Phelps, "Conclusion" 138).[113] Nonetheless, through closure as a key element crime fiction offers "the illusion of security and safety and continuity in what was becoming a disordered, insecure and disturbing world" (Worthington xvii), which finely attuned the genre to social and cultural anxieties (Messent 12; Worthington ix). The conceptual premise to frame crime as deviation from a norm of any kind in the first place lays bare structures of power (Worthington x, 9), which entails that the genre "has a complex and important relationship to both the social and the epistemological order of contemporary western societies" (Evans, Moore, and Johnstone 3).

However, as Maurizio Ascari notes in his seminal *A Counter History of Crime Fiction*, "[a]lthough the critical emphasis that has been laid for over a century on the association between detection and science" (xi), the genre also incorporated elements from non-realist narrative traditions. Ascari demonstrates how "positivism as the triumph of the scientific method and a materialist approach to reality" also involved "an interest in the spiritual and the occult" (66), which inserted itself into the literary imagination. In consequence, detective fiction from the nineteenth century is replete with references to or engagement with widespread mesmerism, spiritualism, and occultism, as well as false apparitions demystified by the detective as "attempts at concealing crime by clothing it with ghostly attributes" (Ascari 87). Around and after the turn of the century, as detective fiction approached its so-called 'Golden Age',[114] the genre diversified and consolidated into more clearly distinguishable strands, Ascari argues, for

> the uncomfortable proximity between these stories [featuring the supernatural] and mainstream stories of detection was perceived as a danger by those practitioners and critics of detective fiction who placed increasing emphasis on the strictly rational basis of this genre so as to 'detach' it from the neighbouring forms of sensation fiction and the ghost story. (87)

As science progressed, detective fiction's "commitment to narrative and epistemological closure" (Dechêne 13) made it more and more untenable to incorporate supernatural elements, which were relegated to the mystery story.

The connection between the two forms, however, was not permanently severed and illustrates how closely typical protagonists and plot patterns are related. As Patricia Merivale and

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[113] The conceptual infinitude of crime, and therefore the perpetual supply of individual cases to be solved, helps explain crime fiction's, and also urban fantasy's, proclivity for serialised narratives.

[114] As any literary periodisation, the denomination of detective fiction's Golden Age is a contested one. Relatively uncontested is the period between 1920 and 1940, which saw the emergence and consolidation of American hard-boiled fiction and quintessential 'cosy' British crime fiction writers such as Agatha Christie, Dorothy L. Sayers, or G. K. Chesterton, to name but a few. The latter's *Father Brown* stories are also an example for the continuation of certain metaphysical elements in detection stories, since Brown's method of detection "is based on an unexplainable intuition and an acquaintance with human nature rather than on reasonable deductions made after the discovery of physical evidence" (Dechêne 21).

Susan Elizabeth Sweeney note, the postmodern incredulity towards metanarratives, and by extension narrative closure in particular, has produced a range of stories which are "parodying or subverting traditional detective-story conventions" (2; cf. also Dechêne 24). Nonetheless, Antoine Dechêne cautions that "[i]nstead of apprehending the metaphysical detective story as a literary development of the classical whodunit", it exists "at the crossroads of different literary influences: the Gothic, the grotesque, and the mystery story" already visible in the short stories of Edgar Allen Poe, acknowledging "that if he can legitimately be considered the father of classical detection, he is also the creator of the metaphysical form" (Dechêne 29). The blend of the metaphysical and detective story conventions results in the generic character of the occult detective, that is, a specialist in supernatural phenomena.[115] Moreover, children's detective fiction particular is another strand of the crime fiction genre that adopted in the (late) twentieth century "the postmodernist tropes of uncertainty, intertextuality and narrative instability" in order to render the mysteries they resolve "supernatural in nature" (Gavin and Routledge 4). Examples in this respect include Enid Blyton's *The Famous Five* series (1942–62), Blyton's *The Adventure Series* (1944–1955), *The Hardy Boys* (1959–1979), which was created by Edward Stratemeyer, and Gillian Cross's *The Demon Headmaster* (1982–2019).[116]

The inclusion of supernatural elements not only subverts the valorisation of the individual detective's intellect and rationality, but also poses the question of the limits of the control exerted by human laws on which the stability offered by crime fiction's narrative closure conventionally rests. In doing so, Lucy Andrew suggests, the (juvenile) crime fiction moves from modernist epistemological to postmodernist ontological concerns:

> These postmodernist, supernatural investigators . . . are a different breed from their modernist predecessors: they are introspective and self-reflexive figures who encourage the . . . readers of their cases to interrogate their own worlds and identities rather than seek comfort in that which can be known and explained away. (229)

Arguably, by the end of the twentieth century the inclusion of seemingly supernatural occurrences in detective stories, which were then given a rational explanation through the accumulation of knowledge by the investigator, has become such a staple element of the genre that the blend with

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[115] The fact that Arthur Conan Doyle played with the conventions of the metaphysical detective story for the most part of *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (1901) suggests that they were already well established by the end of the nineteenth century. Early influential works comprise Sheridan Le Fanu's short story collection *In a Glass Darkly* (1872), Bram Stoker's depiction of Dr Abraham Van Helsing in *Dracula* (1897), and William Hope Hodgson's Carnacki stories (1910–1912), but variants of occult detective characters have also been used by writers in the second half of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, such as Peter Ackroyd (*Hawksmoor*, 1985), Douglas Adams (*Dirk Gently's Holistic Detective Agency*, 1987), and Simon R. Green (*Something from the Nightside*, 2003).

[116] *The Hardy Boys* was created by Edward Stratemeyer, but largely written by a team of ghostwriters, most prominently Leslie McFarlane. The series is American, but was widely reprinted and received in the UK, which is why I included it here. To provide a female counterpart, Stratemeyer also created the *Nancy Drew* series (1930–2003).

the truly supernatural offered a way of subverting established crime fiction tropes and tease readers by denying the narrative closure generated by well-known patterns.[117]

In summary, these innovative developments in what is generally considered a formulaic and conservative genre, coupled with crime fiction's status as "unmistakable cultural-historical feature of the present day" (Beck and Franzen 8; my translation) and its penchant for urban environments, postmodern proclivity for uncertainty and indeterminacy, and the overall fantasy boom in the late 1990s has provided fertile ground for the emergence of urban fantasy as well as its more Gothic-inflicted sister genre, paranormal romance. This chapter has therefore attempted to trace the lineage of contemporary urban fantasy, and London urban fantasy in particular, through an examination of the London novel, Urban Gothic, and crime fiction, whose confluence has contributed greatly to urban fantasy's emergence. In addition to characteristics of other realist city writing, tropes from these two literary traditions have been re-assembled by writers of the urban fantastic in the twenty-first century in order to form the unique blend of contemporary urban fantasy.

2.4   Urban Fantasy's Characters, Plots, and Settings

So far, this chapter has surveyed the existing academic literature on urban fantasy, explored the genre's structural characteristics through its two denominators, *fantasy* and *urban*, and examined tropes from three other storytelling traditions from which urban fantasy borrows heavily, namely the city novel, Urban Gothic, and crime fiction. Before turning to the theoretical and methodological framing of my study in the next chapter, it is now time to briefly bring together the insights from the previous discussions and bring my corpus texts into line with what I have said so far about urban fantasy in general, because my analytical arguments in chapters 4 to 6 rely heavily on the characters, plot structures, and settings of the examined texts. The order in which the texts that make up my corpus are presented is chronological, ordered by the publication of the first novel in the respective series.

Before I proceed, I want to draw attention to one particular commonality. Beyond being set in a more or less recognisable London from or consensus reality in the twenty-first century, all series except Paul Cornell's *Shadow Police* series are narrated from one single perspective in first-person voice.[118] The *Bartimaeus* novels include chapters which are focalised through other

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[117] Like chapter 2.3.2 on the Urban Gothic before, this survey of crime fiction cannot give a complete overview of crime fiction as a literary genre, nor do I lay claim to having done to. Additional resources for the interested reader are legion. In addition to the respective handbooks by Peter Messent and Heather Worthington on crime fiction, on which I have relied heavily, Lee Horsley's *Twentieth-Century Crime Fiction* (2005) provides a comprehensive introduction to the genre. Stephen Knight's *The Mysteries of the Cities* (2012) traces the origins of urban crime fiction in the nineteenth century. Malcah Effron's *The Millennial Detective* (2011) combines essays focusing on trends in crime fiction across different media around the turn of the millennium.

[118] Since the *Rivers of London* series also goes under the name of the *Peter Grant* series, the fact that these four series are all named after their central protagonist underlines their importance for the framing of the story.

characters, but Bartimaeus remains the authoritative voice throughout. Focalisation through a single character who narrates in first-person affords the protagonist-as-narrator a high authority, as his narration must generally be accepted at face value.[119] With regard to the fantastical elements of the narration, I have previously followed those arguing for a suspension of disbelief concerning the story's credibility. Of course there is the possibility that we, as readers, are taken in by an unreliable narrator, who's fantastic(al) tale is not meant to be true, but such a critical position would not have sustained value for a study of fantasy.

Furthermore, following one single narrator along entails that narrated spaces are part of a subjective semantisation process in which the specificity of perception of the individual senses, cultural orders of knowledge, and the materiality of space intertwine in the protagonist-as-narrator. Characters in the fictional storyworld experience space not only according to cultural concepts of space, but also and often above all according to their individual ability to experience and their sensual perception (Hallet and Neumann 25–27). The representation of London in the novels under examination is thus inevitably coloured by the experiences of the protagonists who narrate the novels, which has two implications. Firstly, this renders the narrative process subjective to the extent that the respective character's dispositions must be taken into account. By accruing more than one urban fantasy series, I intend to achieve a more diverse picture than I would have gotten with the analysis of a single point of view. Secondly, as the following chapter will lay out, my approach is one rooted in the affective responses that being in London stimulates. I argue that the first-person narration of the novels makes the characters' experiences more unmediated than a focalisation with more narrative distance, such as external or zero focalisation, would have been able to achieve. When the narrators are themselves the central protagonists of the novels who tell the story from their perspective, what we as readers are getting is an account of how London feels to these characters. This does not mean that we should treat them as if they were real persons – they are not – but the narration is nonetheless tied closer to individual experiences.

2.4.1 The *Bartimaeus* Trilogy (Jonathan Stroud, 2003–2005)

Jonathan Stroud's *Bartimaeus* trilogy comprises three novels: *The Amulet of Samarkand* (2003), *The Golem's Eye* (2004), and *Ptolemy's Gate* (2005).[120] The novels are focalised through the djinni Bartimaeus and told predominantly in first person but occasionally shift to the limited perspective

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[119] Gérard Genette introduced the term *focalisation* as an alternative to *narrative perspective* in the essay "Discours du récit" (1972). The perspective that the novels I examine take conforms to the category of internal focalisation in Genette's terminology, which equates the narrator with one of the characters (Niederhoff 197). For the strongly manipulative effect of focalisation, see Bal (*Narratology* 140–41). The multiperspectivity of Cornell's series is most adequately described as alternating internal focalisation with instances of zero focalisation in which the narrator knows more than the characters, although Cornell's narrator withholds the surplus of information.

[120] There is a fourth novel, *The Ring of Solomon* (2010), but since it is not set in London but in ancient Jerusalem, it is not part of my corpus. The three novels are generally marketed as a trilogy, which is why I have chosen to retain this label and not refer to the novels as a series.

of the young magician Nathaniel and later the nonmagical teenager Kitty Jones, whose perspective is given in third person, which strongly suggests that Bartimaeus remains the narrative authority. Nonetheless, the alternating perspectives highlight the moral ambiguity of the narrated world, since Bartimaeus, Nathaniel, and Kitty Jones all have different motivations and views on the same events, which allows to question each of their actions and beliefs. Due to the focalisation through Bartimaeus, the novels are the only examples in the corpus which are told by a narrator who is not human. The djinni's voice is sarcastic and irreverent. Moreover, chapters from his perspective frequently include footnotes that provide additional commentary and are one of the defining features of the trilogy's narrative, allowing Bartimaeus to break the fourth wall and speak directly to the reader. They often contain humorous asides, historical information about the magical world, or self-aggrandizing anecdotes about his long life as a djinni and his exploits on Earth. They are also an invaluable resource for the novel's perspective on London, as the djinni's longevity allows him to comment on historical developments from a different perspective than a human narrator could. Bartimaeus's world-weariness and sarcasm lent him the appearance of a supernatural hardboiled detective, which is emphasised by the frequent investigation and reconnaissance missions on which Nathaniel sends him.

The trilogy takes place in a version of contemporary London, but this world is markedly different from our consensus reality due to the prominence of magic, the ruling class of magicians, and the presence of supernatural spirits such as the djinni. Out of the Londons depicted in the corpus texts, that of the *Bartimaeus* trilogy has the most recognisably Victorian veneer, but the presence of computers, cars, and aeroplanes indicates a contemporary setting. The world is ruled by magicians, but magic is not an inherent ability. Rather, they summon and enslave spirits from an alternative dimension to do their bidding. This central relationship between magicians and spirits defines much of the conflict and the moral complexity of the trilogy but also influences the representation of London. The timeline of the narrated world in the *Bartimaeus* novels has developed differently from our consensus reality, making the novels an example of alternative history as well as urban fantasy. In Stroud's novels, the British Empire persists, and London is still an imperial capital. The city is portrayed as a bustling, dangerous place where the tensions between magicians and nonmagical people, so-called commoners, are constantly simmering. London's atmosphere thus reflects both its imperial grandeur and its moral corruption. The overall atmosphere of this setting is one of tension and fear, which lets the novels appear dystopic. The commoners live in constant fear of magicians and their spirits, while the magicians themselves are always paranoid about being attacked or overthrown. Magic, while powerful, is also dangerous and unpredictable, and even the most skilled magicians must be constantly on guard against the spirits they summon, as they harbour centuries-old resentments against their human enslavers.

The three instalments follow their individual stories but are also connected by a wider story arc which focuses on the political structures of the narrated world. *The Amulet of Samarkand* introduces Nathaniel, a young magician's apprentice who secretly summons the 5,000-year-old djinni Bartimaeus to steal the eponymous Amulet of Samarkand, a powerful magical artifact in the possession of the magician Simon Lovelace, after being humiliated by him. Bartimaeus resents being enslaved by the boy but is bound by magical laws to obey him. While investigating, Bartimaeus learns that Lovelace is involved in a dangerous plot to overthrow the government using the amulet's power. He also discovers Nathaniel's birthname, which gives him power over the boy and levels the power imbalance between them. Nathaniel and Bartimaeus eventually form a reluctant partnership to stop Lovelace's *coup d'etat*. In a climactic battle, Lovelace unleashes a powerful spirit using the amulet, but with Bartimaeus's help Nathaniel manages to destroy both the amulet and Lovelace, thus saving London from the spirit's destructive rage. Despite their temporary alliance, Nathaniel forces Bartimaeus back into servitude at the end.

The second novel, *The Golem's Eye*, takes place two years later. Now known by his official magician-name John Mandrake, Nathaniel has risen in the ranks of the government and become an important figure in London's Ministry of Internal Affairs. He is tasked with stopping the Resistance, a rebellious group of commoners around Kitty Jones, who aim to overthrow the oppressive magician government. Meanwhile, Nathaniel faces political pressures and rivalries within the corrupt magical elite. The plot expands to include a powerful golem, a magical clay figure with connections to the defeated Czech Empire, that is attacking London and causing widespread destruction. Aided once again by Bartimaeus, Nathaniel investigates the golem's origins and attempts to track down its master. In interspersed chapters, Jones's backstory is explored, revealing her hatred of magicians and her growing role in the Resistance. Nathaniel and Bartimaeus uncover that the golem was commissioned by the corrupted Police Chief to expose Nathaniel's department's ineptitude and expand his own jurisdiction. Nathaniel and Bartimaeus, along with Kitty Jones, confront the golem, and although they succeed in stopping it, the relationships between the characters grow more strained. Jones becomes more aware of the darker side of spirits and magic, while Nathaniel continues to wrestle with his ambition, gradually losing sight of his former ideals.

In *Ptolemy's Gate*, London is brought to the brink of collapse due to internal corruption, political unrest, and increasing resistance from the commoners. Now at the height of his power within the government, Nathaniel is disillusioned and isolated. His relationship with Bartimaeus is strained, and he has become more ruthless and self-serving. Meanwhile, Kitty Jones starts to uncover the secrets of magic and spirits, believing that a better relationship between humans and spirits is possible. The moral core of the story revolves around the eponymous Ptolemy's Gate, an

ancient ritual that allows humans to journey to the Other Place, the spirits' origin dimension. Jones believes that this ritual could be the key to breaking the cycle of oppression between humans and spirits as a demonstration of kindness and respect. At the same time, a powerful spirit is released by a group of rogue magicians, many of them minor government officials, and threatens to destroy London. Nathaniel, Bartimaeus, and Kitty Jones must work together to stop the spirit and lead the forces of a joint revolution between liberated spirits and liberated commoners. In the final battle, Nathaniel performs an uncharacteristically selfless act, sacrificing himself to destroy the spirit and thus save the city. In his final moments, he releases Bartimaeus from his servitude. The novel ends with Bartimaeus returning to the spirit world and Jones continuing to advocate for a future of cooperation between humans and spirits.

In my corpus, Stroud's trilogy constitutes an example of early London urban fantasy. As the publication dates show, the novels have been written and published half a decade before the other series in my corpus, and the urban fantasy genre had not been as fully formed at that time. However, all the hallmarks can be identified – an investigator protagonist and crime fiction plot patterns, a setting which represents contemporary London with recognisable verisimilitude, and the inclusion of supernatural events – which makes the trilogy an interesting addition to the corpus.

2.4.2 The *Matthew Swift* Series (Kate Griffin, 2009–2012)

Kate Griffin's *Matthew Swift* series comprises four novels: *A Madness of Angels* (2009), *The Midnight Mayor* (2010), *The Neon Court* (2011), and *The Minority Council* (2012).[121] The novels are focalised through Matthew Swift, an urban sorcerer who has been murdered two years before the narration commences. Upon his death next to a telephone box, his body has incorporated a magical entity which names itself 'the blue electric angels' and has formed out of the human emotions poured into the telephone lines over the years. The narrative is therefore fragmented whenever the angels take control over the narration, which may occur mid-sentence and is indicated by a switch of pronouns from the first-person singular to the first-person plural. The first-person perspective gives the narrative an almost stream-of-consciousness quality at times, with sudden shifts in focus and abrupt changes in tone. However, as Swift becomes more comfortable with his powers and gains greater control over his connection to the blue electric angels, his voice becomes more coherent and confident over the course of the series.

Griffin's series is set in a contemporary London infused with urban magic. In the series, the city *is* magic, as Swift and the angels constantly emphasise. The urban sorcerer draws his magical power from all aspects of modern life in the metropolis and loses power whenever his connection to London is weakened. The city is depicted as a sprawling metropolis where magic is woven into

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[121] Kate Griffin is a known *nom de plume* of Catherine Webb.

every aspect of urban life, from the old cobblestone streets and underground tunnels to the neon signs and the hum of electrical wires. London thus plays a central role in the series and almost becomes a character in itself, which brings the novels close to how urban environments are narrated in the New Weird strand of urban fantasy. While magic is pervasive in London, the majority of its citizens are unaware of its existence. Instead, there is a hidden magical community that operates beneath the surface of everyday life, which is made up of sorcerers, magical creatures, spirits, and other supernatural beings, each vying for power, influence, or survival in the city. The depiction of London is therefore gritty, detailed, and recognizably modern, filled with bustling streets, diverse communities, and everyday life.

The novels narrate Matthew Swift's personal development from an individual driven by revenge against his murderer to a political figure in the magical government of London. Each of the four novels focuses on one central antagonist whom Swift must defeat in order to save the city he loves, but the novels are also connected by Swift's general ascent to political power. In the first novel, *A Madness of Angels*, Matthew Swift tracks down the powerful sorcerer and his former master Robert Bakker, who is responsible for Swift's murder. During this quest, Swift is entangled in a battle against the ruthless Tower, a group seeking to control magic for their own ends. As he navigates London's magical underworld, he discovers his new abilities and role in the city's supernatural balance.

In *The Midnight Mayor*, Swift is unexpectedly chosen as the Midnight Mayor, the supernatural counterpart to the Lord Mayor of London and the city's chief magical protector. As Midnight Mayor, Swift presides over the London Aldermen, who severely dislike him as their superior and sabotage his investigations. A dangerous entity known as the Death of Cities begins attacking the city, erasing significant magical sites, and causing chaos. Swift must embrace his new role and protect London from the Death of Cities while grappling with magical politics. Alongside his allies, he fights to prevent London's destruction and eventually defeats the Death of Cities.

In *The Neon Court*, tensions between two powerful magical factions, the Neon Court and the Tribe, threaten to plunge London into war. At the same time, a dangerous creature called Blackout is unleashed, capable of destroying the city. Swift is caught in the middle of these conflicts, tasked with preventing the war and dealing with the larger threat of Blackout, while he must also face personal betrayals and internal struggles with his powers.

In *The Minority Council*, Swift is confronted with a drug, which grants magical abilities but comes at a deadly cost, and thus poses a rising threat to the wellbeing of London's magical communities. As the Midnight Mayor, he investigates the source of the drug, which is tied to corrupt elements within the magical government. Along the way, Matthew faces a secret council seeking to undermine his political role. He also grapples with the weight of his responsibilities as

protector of the city and the moral complexities of power. The novel ends with Swift's ultimate triumph over his adversaries, which results from his humane approach to governing magical London.

Although not a typical detective, Matthew Swift refers to himself as an investigator multiple times throughout the series and the plot frequently relies on investigations, which allows the series' inclusion in my corpus. The representation of London in the series is the most postmodern of all the texts I examine insofar as the novels constantly blend the boundaries between the magical and the mundane. Moreover, Griffin's writing style is also extremely postmodern in its stream-of-consciousness quality, which will result in longer quotations from the *Matthew Swift* series than from all other texts during the analysis.

2.4.3   The *Rivers of London* Series (Ben Aaronovitch, 2011–)

Ben Aaronovitch's *Rivers of London* series comprises nine novels to date: *The Rivers of London* (2011), *Moon Over Soho* (2011), *Whispers Under Ground* (2012), *Broken Homes* (2013), *Foxglove Summer* (2014), *The Hanging Tree* (2016), *Lies Sleeping* (2018), *False Value* (2020), and *Amongst Our Weapons* (2022).[122] The novels are focalised without exception through Peter Grant, a BAME twenty-something Police Constable at the beginning of the series, who is recruited by DCI Thomas Nightingale to work for the Folly, the branch of the London Metropolitan Police tasked with investigating supernatural crimes.[123] Grant's narrative is filled with wry observations, sarcasm, and humour, because he often comments on the absurdity of the situations in which he finds himself. Having grown up in Kentish Town, Grant is intimately familiar with the British capital and frequently digresses into divulging titbits of London trivia, much to the annoyance of his colleagues. He is also inquisitive and curious, which leads him to question how magic works and attempt pseudoscientific experiments to understand it. Moreover, he is an avid fan of contemporary popular culture, which helps him quickly accept the existence of magic and makes his experiences relatable by intertextual references to other popular culture works. As Grant moves from someone unacquainted with the supernatural to a competent magician, the reader is allowed to follow his initiation into the magical world of London and to learn information at the same time as the central protagonist does.

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[122] There are also five novellas (*The Furthest Station*, 2017; *The October Man*, 2019; *What Abigail Did That Summer*, 2021; *Winter's Gifts*, 2023; *The Masquerades of Spring*, 2024), a collection of short stories (*Tales from the Folly*, 2020), and a series of graphic novels. Due to their different narrative format, the graphic novels are excluded from the corpus, but I will very selectively draw on some the novellas and short stories, which all differ in their narrative perspective from the novels.

[123] The acronym BAME spells out as Black, Asian, and minority ethnic and is used to refer to people in the UK who do not consider themselves to be white. Grant's father is white British and his mother comes from a Sierra Leonian heritage.

The series is set in a recognisable version of contemporary London and the narrative indicates that the time of events roughly corresponds to the publication dates of the novels. Out of all the representations in the corpus texts, Grant's narration represents the city with the most verisimilitude, not least due to his extensive knowledge about its geography, architecture, and history. Beneath the surface of everyday life, there is a secret, magical underworld of which most of the population is unaware. This includes various forms of supernatural beings, such as ghosts, vampires, fae, and river gods. The latter are among the most prominent supernatural features of London, as each of the city's rivers is anthropomorphised as a supernatural entity, a so-called *genius locus*. London's river deities interfere in the city's politics and significantly interact with the officers of the Folly during the entire series. *Foxglove Summer* is the only instalment which is not set in London as Grant is sent to rural Herefordshire to investigate a missing child's case. However, his ubiquitous comparisons between the English countryside and the capital result in London being present in the novel *ex negativo*.

The plotlines often revolve around Grant investigating strange, supernatural crimes that regular branches of the Metropolitan Police cannot handle. The first novel in the series, *Rivers of London*, inaugurates Grant to the world of magic and follows a dual plotline. On the one hand, Grant must resolve a territorial conflict between Mama and Father Thames, the two *genii locorum* who claim the River Thames as their demesne. On the other hand, Grant investigates a series of grisly murders connected to a malevolent spirit, Mr Punch, who fatally reenacts Punch and Judy stories. With the second instalment, *Moon Over Soho*, begins a larger story arc which eventually spans until the seventh instalment, *Lies Sleeping*, although each of the novels also has an individual case at the core of its plot. The overarching story arc puts Grant up against the so-called Faceless Man, later revealed to be one Martin Chorley, a powerful rogue magician who plans to destroy London but whom Grant eventually defeats during the climactic battle in *Lies Sleeping*. Another recurring plot element is Grant's struggle to modernise the Folly and transform its ancient structures, before the Metropolitan Police and other political actors enforce their much less benevolent plans for reform. Since the last two novels published so far, *False Value* and *Amongst Our Weapons*, do not continue the plotline revolving around the battle against Martin Chorley, the Folly's status as an arcane institution in a modern city assumes more prominence, but overall the two novels suffer demonstrably from the lack of connection to their predecessors.

The *Rivers of London* series is a prime example for an urban fantasy that blends supernatural elements with the plotlines and tropes from a police procedural. Its central protagonist, Peter Grant, works for the Metropolitan Police and the novels devote ample space to discussions of daily police work and how its bureaucratic demands can or cannot be reconciled with the supernatural trappings. Since Grant, as Aaronovitch himself, is a Londoner through and through, the novels

also paint the British capital in the most positive colours out of all the texts I discuss, which will be an important touchstone for the subsequent analysis.

2.4.4   The *Alex Verus* Series (Benedict Jacka, 2012–2021)

Benedict Jacka's *Alex Verus* series comprises twelve novels: *Fated* (2012), *Cursed* (2012), *Taken* (2012), *Chosen* (2013), *Hidden* (2014), *Veiled* (2015), *Burned* (2016), *Bound* (2017), *Marked* (2018), *Fallen* (2019), *Forged* (2020), and *Risen* (2021). The novels are focalised through the titular character, Alex Verus. Verus is a diviner mage, which allows him to foresee the future in terms of predictable outcomes. Divination is one of several kinds of magical ability; other mages are more adept at manipulating time, the four elements, the human mind, or life and death. Although Verus is a shopkeeper in Camden Town who likes to mind his own business, he is drawn into the political schemes between London's magical council and a group of so-called dark mages around his former master Richard Drakh due to his divination ability. The focalisation from his perspective limits readers' knowledge to Verus's knowledge and lets them partake in frequent internal monologues which reveal Verus's conflicted character. Verus's voice is often sardonic, using dry humour and wit to cope with the dangerous situations he faces. He is self-aware to some degree and occasionally comments on his flaws or past mistakes, but his actions also tend to contradict his narration.

The London in Jacka's series is recognisably contemporary and the narrative indicates that the time roughly matches the publication dates of the individual novels. Verus lacks the depth of knowledge and enthusiasm for the city's history and geography that characterises Peter Grant in Aaronovitch's series and, as a result, the city sometimes recedes more into the background than in other series and some episodes in the novels are set outside of London entirely. In contrast to other series, Verus devotes more space of his narration to the power structures at play in London, thus lending the city the feeling of a political arena in which brutality and ruthlessness are particular advantageous character traits. Though most people are unaware of magic's existence, a significant part of London's inhabitants is not. They are classified into a strict social hierarchy according to their magical ability, ranging from sensitives to adepts to mages. Mages are split into two factions, which call themselves light and dark respectively, and much of the plot revolves around their struggle for power in London. The so-called Council of Light Mages enforces magical laws with the help of a military-style police force, the Keepers, whom Verus briefly joins during the events of *Veiled*. As an independent mage, Verus is constantly drawn between the frontlines as the two factions vie for power and has to fight for his own survival and that of his friends.

While the novels have individual plotlines, they are all integrated into the overall conflict of power between light and dark mages which forces Verus to choose sides. Over the first three novels, the reader is introduced to the magical world as Verus is slowly drawn into the conflict when dark mages attempt to recruit him for their nefarious plans and he refuses. The first three

instalments also narrate how Verus moves from isolation to assembling a motley group of friends, who are equally threatened by the conflicting powers. During the fourth, fifth, sixth, and seventh instalments, Verus's old master Richard Drakh is gradually revealed to be the puppet master behind the dark mages' activities and emerges thus as the central antagonist of the entire series. Verus temporarily aligns with the light mages and the Council but subsequently discovers that their moral ambiguity does not differ much from their opponents'. During the eight, ninth, and tenth instalment, the conflict escalates to full-fledged war and Verus is forced to confront Drakh multiple times, which exacts a considerable emotional and physical toll from him and transforms his character into a morally ambiguous person. The final two instalments narrate the climax of the conflict between light and dark mages, which becomes increasingly personalised as a confrontation between Verus and Drakh. Having become more ruthless and brutal over the course of the series, Verus is eventually able to defeat Drakh and thus save London from becoming the playing ground of a megalomaniac authoritarian.

Alex Verus likens himself more than once to the prototype of a hardboiled detective, for instance through intertextual references to Jim Butcher's *Dresden Files* series, which revolves around a similar character. The hardboiled prototype commands world-weariness and cynicism, at which Verus excels. The plotline of each individual novel often revolves around an investigation of some sort during which Verus gains important knowledge for survival and the navigation of the larger political conflict around him. While the series is predominantly set in London, the city is not as important to the plot development as in other texts, which makes Jacka's series an interesting addition to the corpus.

2.4.5   The *Shadow Police* Series (Paul Cornell, 2012–2016)

Paul Cornell's *Shadow Police* series consists of three novels: *London Falling* (2012), *The Severed Streets* (2014), and *Who Killed Sherlock Holmes?* (2016). During multiple interviews and in an entry on his own blog, Cornell has said that the series was originally planned as a heptalogy, but that the published withdrew support after the third instalment was published and that publication of the final two instalments was out of his control. Given that it has been eight years after the publication of *Who Killed Sherlock Holmes?* at the time of writing this dissertation and that Cornell has moved on to another, commercially more successful series (*Witches of Lychford*), it seems safe to assume that the *Shadow Police* series will remain unfinished. The series' protagonists are a group of Metropolitan police officers – Detective Inspector James Quill, Lisa Ross, Tony Costain, and Kevin Sefton – who are given the Sight, that is, the ability to perceive the supernatural and therefore form a special unit that deals with supernatural crime. Quill, Ross, Costain, and Sefton all become focalisers at various points of the novels, which fragments the narration into their respective points

of view and level of knowledge. The series blends typical police procedural and hardboiled fiction elements, since all protagonists are grappling with their own psychological problems.

Cornell's series is set exclusively in London and the description of the urban environment reveals that the setting is contemporary. The protagonists' psychological struggles and the horrific aspects of the supernatural occurrences they face lend the novels a demonstrably gritty, dark, and oppressive tone. The existence of the supernatural is not widely known, making magic appear as a subtle, often dark force, which is deeply connected to the city's history, myths, and folklore and exerts a toll from those who encounter it. This hidden layer adds a surreal, eerie quality to London, as familiar locations are revealed to harbour dark secrets or malevolent magical forces. One of the recurring themes is that the city 'remembers' its past, and these memories can take physical or magical form. For instance, the police encounter supernatural manifestations tied to old crimes, forgotten events, or even legendary figures from London's history. This gives the city an almost sentient quality, as if it has a will of its own.

London Falling introduces the protagonists as they are conducting a major drug investigation. Their target mysteriously dies while in custody, leaving the officers baffled. The team stumbles upon the existence of magic when they inadvertently gain the ability to see the supernatural world. With their new powers, the officers uncover that London is filled with ghosts, magical entities, and ancient curses. They subsequently discover that Mora Losley, a witch who uses dark magic to murder children in exchange for eternal youth, is responsible for the drug lord's death. The team must use their newfound abilities to track and stop her, despite being untrained in magic and constantly threatened by the horrors they now see. By the end of the novel, they defeat Losley, but they are left deeply scarred by the encounter with several murdered children and realise that the gruesome supernatural world is now permanently part of their lives.

In *The Severed Streets*, the team investigates a series of brutal murders that mimic the style of Jack the Ripper. The victims are powerful, influential men, and the police soon realise that a supernatural force is behind the killings. The ghost of Jack the Ripper – or something imitating him – is using magic to evade capture while continuing his murderous rampage across London. The killings are eventually revealed to be connected to London's hidden magical currents and ancient powers, culminating in a dramatic confrontation where the team must confront the Ripper and the arcane forces controlling him. By the end of the novels, the officers increasingly question their place in the police force, as the lines between reality and the supernatural blur even further due to the psychological trauma they have suffered.

In *Who Killed Sherlock Holmes?*, the team is pulled into another bizarre and magical case, as someone has killed Sherlock Holmes – or rather, the ghost of Sherlock Holmes. The famous detective's spirit is haunting London after having been brought to life by the collective imagination

of the city's inhabitants. The team must solve the mystery of who killed this spectral version of Holmes while dealing with an increasingly unstable magical London. Alongside the Holmes investigation, the team grapples with personal struggles. Quill continues to wrestle with the cost of his leadership, Costain faces the consequences of his criminal past, and Ross is haunted by her surfacing psychic abilities. As the plot unfolds, the team discover that the magical entities tied to Holmes are part of a larger, more dangerous magical conspiracy involving key London landmarks and historical events. The novel ends with the team resolving the immediate threat, but they are left with the grim realisation that London's supernatural world is growing more dangerous, and they are deeply entangled in its complexities.

Cornell's series blends police procedural and hardboiled fiction elements as well as the fantastic, which makes it an interesting addition to the corpus. What is more, the series is the only one which is not focalised through a first-person narrator but told from multiple perspectives. The fact that it is unfinished somewhat impedes plot analysis, which is why the novels are subject to analysis only in chapter 5.2.1. As a character-driven series, the novels have less to say about larger political developments, though it may be assumed that this would have become more prominent in the two unpublished instalments.

3 Structures of Anxious Feelings

Since each of the subsequent analytical chapters will provide an outline of its own theoretical lens, this chapter is kept notably brief. While writing, I thought of it as a kind of passepartout. The term has two meanings, both of which are relevant for the place of this chapter within the larger dissertation. Originally, a passepartout denoted a master key, one that opened many doors. As such, the theoretical premises introduced here will provide a larger understanding of each of the analytical chapters and, indeed, open the doors to these individual but interconnected case studies. From the nineteenth century onwards, the term has also come to denote either an engraved plate with the centre cut out for the insertion of a different plate or a border for a picture, usually made from a piece of card, with the central part cut out to receive the picture. In this second, more contemporary meaning, the idea is one of framing, which is indeed how I intend this chapter to relate to the subsequent analyses. It frames them more broadly and provides the environment – the cut-out space in the middle – into which the more particular frameworks for each chapter are then inserted. Thus, this chapter seeks to explicate the framing concept that informs this study: structures of feeling. Loosely speaking, this places my work in the context of affect studies; loosely, because at the intersections of neurobiology, psychology, behavioural science, ethnology, sociology, philosophy, literary studies, cultural studies, and art (to name but a few), the field is wide and murky and means different things to different scholars at different times, which results in diverging working definitions in various corners of the academic landscape.[1] It seems therefore prudent to situate my own research before sketching structures of feeling as an analytical tool for cultural and literary studies.

The "turn to affect"– one in a series of turns in the humanities – is usually located at the beginning of the twenty-first century and taken to be capable of "registering a change in the cofunctioning of the political, economic, and cultural" at a time "of ongoing political, economic, and cultural transformations" (Clough 1);[2] so much so that "[a]ffect . . . has become a major

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[1] It is beyond the scope and the intent of this chapter to map the field of affect studies in all its complexity, for it "continues to evolve and mutate as a rangy and writhing poly-jumble of a creature" (Seigworth and Pedwell 4). The interested reader may instead be referred to the excellent work done by Marta Figlerowicz, Sandra Moyano Ariza, Jan Slaby, and Matthew Arthur in this regard. Arthur's bibliography is particularly noteworthy for its inclusion of scholars of colour and non-Western traditions, which seeks to counter the criticism of the field gathered predominantly online under the hashtag #AffectStudiesSoWhite (cf. also Garcia-Rojas). The publication of Gregory Seigworth's *Affect Studies Readers*, vol. 1 co-edited with Melissa Gregg (2010) and vol. 2 co-edited with Carolyn Pedwell (2023), and Donald R. Wehrs and Thomas Blake's *The Palgrave Handbook of Affect Studies and Textual Criticism* (2017) provide further resources for foraying into the possibilities affect studies offer as a field of cultural theory.

[2] The term *turn to affect* has not been without criticism. Notably, Ann Cvetkovich has rejected it in *Depression: A Public Feeling* on grounds of falsely suggesting a novelty of research which in fact "has been going on for some time" (4). The term is thus critiqued as obscuring continuities in researching feelings and emotions, especially in (queer) feminist criticism. Sara Ahmed, to whom I will turn in more detail later, develops this criticism in the afterword to the second edition of *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* and traces how the way the history of scholarship has been put forward as a turn to affect tends to position feminist and queer work "no longer . . . as

element in the organisation of the way we live now" (Sharma and Tygstrup 4). Preceding the proclamation of such a turn, the year 1995 occupies a special position in the field, for it marks the publication of two seminal texts: Eve Sedgwick and Adam Frank's essay "Shame in the Cybernetic Fold", a new approach to the post-war psychoanalyst Silvan Tomkins, and Brian Massumi's "The Autonomy of Affect", which revisits Baruch Spinoza's *Ethics* (1677) and combines it with ideas voiced by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus* (*Les Éditions de Minuit*, 1980). Around these two texts crystallises what can be viewed as a bifurcation of the field, for the Tomkins-Sedgwick strand works (mostly) within the boundaries of representational theory, whereas those favouring the Deleuze-Guattari-Massumi approach seek to go beyond what they see as the limits of representational theory (Hemmings 552–53; Houen 3–5; Moyano Ariza 4–6; Seigworth and Gregg 5). 'Re-discovered' in the wake of the affective turn and extended by other scholars (see below), Raymond Williams's concept of structures of feeling both pertains to and predates the first strand (Houen 11).[3]

Moreover, a few words are needed with regard to what is understood by *affect*. Confusingly, the term is used both synonymously with and in sharp distinction to *emotion*. To briefly exemplify this confusing terminology: Katherine Ibbett maintains that the concept of affect can be primarily used to discuss those visceral forces that are experienced as "feeling outside conscious knowing" (245). Gregory Seigworth and Melissa Gregg argue that it often functions in a more abstract way to describe the "resonant affinities of body and world" (12), that is, the potentialities present in encounters and processes "*beyond* emotion" (1; my emphasis). Sandra Moyano Ariza asserts firmly that she "understands affect as *distinct from* feeling" (2; my emphasis). In contrast, Gesa Stedman and Jana Gohrisch proclaim that "the term [emotions] is often used interchangeably with affect in current emotions research" (3), and Sara Ahmed hopes "for an intellectual horizon in which emotion and affect are not taken as choices that lead us down separate paths" (*Politics* 230). As this haphazard collection of claims demonstrates, the conceptual relationship between *affect*, *emotion*,

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part of that turn" (206). It is not my intention to survey the arguments for or against the formulation; rather than subscribing to any notion of complete novelty, I understand it in conjunction with other notable turns as indicating a *burgeoning* rather than truly novel interest in a specific direction of research. Hence, the term that is paired with *turn* – in this case affect – accrues tremendous currency.

[3] The strand of affect studies which can be, somewhat crudely, characterised as representational criticism has displayed a particular proximity to cultural studies and has been further advanced, increasingly into a politically critical direction. Notable publications in this respect include Rei Terada's *Feeling in Theory* (Harvard UP, 2001), Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's *Touching Feeling* (Duke UP, 2002), Charles Altieri's *The Particulars of Rapture: An Aesthetics of Affect* (Cornell UP, 2003), Kathleen Stewart's *Ordinary Affects* (Duke UP, 2007), Lauren Berlant's *Cruel Optimism* (Duke UP, 2011), Ann Cvetkovich's *Depression: A Public Feeling* (Duke UP, 2012), and Sara Ahmed's *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (Routledge, 2004). While most of these works are not directly relevant to my study, they nonetheless deserve mention for consolidating the research tradition in which I situate my own approach.

and *feeling* is mercurial.[4] Leaving this confusion behind, much of the debate seems to be grounded in the question of the relationship between aspects of human experience and their relation to representation(s), that is, whether affect transcends representation or is bound by it. Since my study is inescapably concerned with representation, the exact terminological problem remains somewhat secondary. Rather, for my culturally sensitive literary analysis, affect theory provides a lens through which I approach the representations of a specific urban space in contemporary texts. I am, therefore, not concerned with the relation of emotions and the subject,[5] nor with theorising affect as a potentially pre-cognitive state, but with the representation of emotions and the meanings attached to them within the distinctive discursive formation that is contemporary London urban fantasy. This is, then, rather an epistemological endeavour, which traces the history of feeling and collective emotions as signifying practices. Such an analysis holds true that emotions are *not* pre-cognitive phenomena that exist outside the constructing constraints of culture as "anthropological givens immune to historical change" (Stedman and Gohrisch 3), but "as collective cultural and historical experiences" (Harding and Pribram 2). Thus, emotions need to be treated as having biological and cultural components, as individual and inner phenomena which are simultaneously "at the core of social practices" (Nünning and Assmann 85).[6] Conceived in this sense, emotions

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[4] For an overview which also takes into account the terminology in use in evolutionary psychology and the issues arising from translation and international scholarship, specifically from a German perspective, see Degener and Zimmermann (esp. 6–10).

[5] The question about the relationship between emotions and human subjectivity has its roots in the dualistic opposition of *ratio* and *emotio*, which contrasts rational human intellect and a supposedly inferior state governed by emotions. This dualism can be traced already in ancient Greek philosophy, for instance in Plato's tripartite theory of the soul in *The Republic*, which placed reason above spirit and desire. Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* built on Plato's theory and emphasised the proper regulation of emotion by reason for virtuous living. The regulatory influence of reason over emotion was also valorised in Stoicism. This framework persisted in Christian theological philosophy, as espoused by Augustine of Hippo and Thomas Aquinas among others, where emotions were often seen as moral challenges to be governed by reason. In modern philosophy, René Descartes argued for the divide between rational mind and emotional body as the basis for conceptualising the human subject. Descartes' view was reinforced by Enlightenment thinkers like Immanuel Kant, who privileged reason as the path to moral clarity. Romanticism later reacted against this idea, celebrating emotion as essential prerequisite for truth and creativity.

[6] This chapter does not deal with recent advances in the fields of neuroscience and psychology. Nonetheless, it is noteworthy that the cultural constructedness of emotions has also impacted research on the science of emotions in these fields. To this end, the psychologist Lisa Feldman Barrett contrasts in *How Emotions Are Made* what she terms the classical view of emotions, which holds that emotions are hard-wired into our brain, triggered by outside stimuli, universally human, and easily recognisable by their outside expressions in our facial and body language, with the theory of constructed emotions, which postulates that emotions are experienced differently in different cultural contexts, where language and culture set particular praxeological frames for experience, and depend on the learned interpretation of bodily reactions, which might even be similar for different emotions (x–xiii, 31–33). What is more, the historian Ute Frevert cautions that any "emotional topography" (53) cannot be properly understood without knowledge of the institutional context in which it circulated. "[T]he way in which a feeling state is labelled, framed, and contextualized", Frevert writes, "deeply influences the way in which it is felt" (54). Studies of love, for instance, have to be contextualised by examining "the institution of marriage vis-à-vis nonmarital relations" (53). Moreover, emotions derive their meaning not just from the language that seeks to define them but "from the practices that they form part of", which "take place under particular social, cultural, political, or economic conditions that set limits to how emotion words can be understood and interpreted by those who speak, listen, and act" (57). This constructivist approach to emotions within affective science is somewhat at odds with scientific models which advocate for aspects of emotional universality (such as Paul Ekman's Basic Emotion Theory). For a brief discussion of the merits (and drawbacks) of both approaches for literary studies, see Hogan and Irish (esp. 2–4).

are "the means by which social and cultural formations affect us, that is, render us as feeling beings in a series of complex, intricate ways, as Jennifer Harding and Deidre E. Pribram argue (13). As Michael Hviid Jacobsen observes with regard to nostalgia, one of the emotions I will discuss in more detail later in this chapter, "[a]ll emotions are embedded within a historical, social and cultural context that provides specific meaning to the way we feel, experience, express and evaluate them" (7). Therefore, affective attachment should be placed "in the context of social narratives and power relations" (Hemmings 562), precisely because "[w]hat one is allowed to feel, and how one expresses such feelings, is socially and historically conditioned, not least by literary and artistic representations" (Stedman and Gohrisch 3). Like any other cultural sphere, emotions are therefore pervaded by power structures, "working to both constrain and enable subjectivities and social hierarchies" (Harding and Pribram 3). In line with Jennifer Harding and Deidre E. Pribram I understand emotions "as cultural practices which help give various social formations their meanings and power" (4). My epistemological endeavour is then closer to what Stedman and Gohrisch refer to as "work on the cultural history of emotions discourse" (3), if one needs a label at all.[7]

Vera Nünning and Corinna Assmann observe that "[t]here are close reciprocal relations between emotions, culture and narrative" (88). Stephen Ahern also notes that the preoccupation of literary studies with emotions is nothing particularly new: "Literary critics have of course long been interested in the role played by emotion in the motivation of fictional character or the response of reader or audience", claiming that "in the Western tradition this interest goes back at least as far as Aristotle and Longinus" (1).[8] However, the turn to affect in the twenty-first century is informed by insights from other disciplines, of which I have named a few at the beginning of this chapter, perhaps even pushing us into the "Episteme of the Affect" (xi), as Eugenie Brinkema puts it. Thus, according to Ahern, "the act of criticism must include attunement to the text's affective valences" which "manifest in the rhetoric, the style, the mood of literary texts written over many centuries, exerting a shaping influence on character, on narrative structure, even on generic form" (7). Closely reading literary stories therefore provides an avenue for "*worlding the story*" (Breger 239; original emphasis) in terms of stories' affective meaning making, as elements of story are inevitably always already affectively charged.

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[7] Burkhard Meyer-Sickendiek speaks of the poetics of affect (9; my translation, *Affektpoetik* in the original). Excellent introductions to and overviews of the history of emotions, the provision of which would take me too far afield here, are provided by Thomas Dixon (*Passions*, *History*), Ute Frevert, Daniel M. Gross, and Jam Plamper. It would also be remiss not to acknowledge here that such a cultural history of emotions works in an ineluctably Eurocentric tradition, which nonetheless conforms to Cultural Studies' radical contextuality (Grossberg, *Bringing* 254).

[8] There are, of course, huge historical differences with regard to the understanding and expression of emotions and their literary representation. One moment of fundamental change, to which one may point for illustration, is the incrementing understanding of emotions as having positive characteristics over the course of the eighteenth century, which differed markedly from the previous view held on 'the passions' as "the instigator of immoral intentions and actions" (Nünning and Assmann 91; cf. also Schlaeger 9).

From these preconditions follows that the study of literary works through an affective lens implies a certain methodology. Criticising the lack of specificity of much academic work done in affect studies, Brinkema postulates:

> The one way out for affect is via a way into its specificities. That approach will be called – unsurprisingly, for historically it was always the way to unlock potentialities – close reading. There is a perversity to this: if affect theory is what is utterly fashionable, it is answered here with the corrective of the utterly unfashionable, with what is, let us say, an *unzeitgemässe* [sic] call for the sustained interpretations of texts. (xv; original emphasis)

Without intending to follow all aspects of her criticism I agree that the close reading of texts allows for an approach of their affective potential within the representation of emotions as a signifying practice. This study, thus, exhibits a hermeneutic interest in interpreting the particularities of the urban fantasy series I examine. I also have the ambition to trace commonalities across them. In other words, I intend to look at the specification of particular patterns, which at the same time only emerge in relationality. This means, precisely, reading for collective structures of feeling, and how they "stick" to spatial formations in what Sara Ahmed terms "affective economies" (119), which brings me to Raymond Williams's seminal concept.

3.1 Raymond Williams's Structures of Feeling

The concept of structures of feeling arose from Raymond Williams's desire to relate art, especially literary art, as a particular articulation to culture as a whole beyond the reductive text-context relationship which dominated much post-war literary criticism.[9] As this chapter will illustrate, the evolution of the idea occupied Williams for much of his working life, which entails that he substantially reworked the concept over a period of roughly twenty-five years between the mid-1950s and the late 1970s. In addition, the concept has been revisited by scholars working in the field of affect studies in recent years. This melange determines that what is to follow is not so much a sharp definition rather than a history of the idea which sketches some of the concept's contours.

The four key texts in which Williams explicates what he means by structures of feeling are *Preface to Film* (1954), co-authored with Michael Orrom, *The Long Revolution* (1961), *Marxism and Literature* (1977), and *Politics and Letters: Interviews with New Left Review* (1979). Sean Matthews relates these four seminal texts to four conceptional evolutionary stages, which he terms "In Solution", "Precipitation", "Crystallization", and "Resolution" (183–91) respectively. Paul Filmer identifies only "three principal moments" (202), as he stretches the phase of initial

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[9] Williams tends to use the singular, *structure*, and the plural form, *structures*, interchangeably without any visible logic. I will stick to the plural form, because I contend that any one time period cannot possibly be fathomed reductively in terms of just one single structure of feeling. Likewise, I will later speak of anxious feelings in the plural to avoid giving the impression that there is one monolithic feeling which characterises contemporary urban fantasy texts.

formulation until 1961 to include *The Long Revolution*.[10] What is germane to both Matthews's and Filmer's discussion of the epistemological history of the concept is the ostensibly "oxymoronic tension" (Filmer 201) between the two denominators, structures on the one hand and feeling(s) on the other. This reflects the proposition of the concept in 1954 as a cultural hypothesis that seeks to bridge the gap between the private, subjective experience of individuals and the broader public, social realities. It emphasises the importance of understanding cultural phenomena not just as static reflections of social structures but as active, formative processes that contribute to the shaping of social reality. Unsatisfied with deterministic Marxist models at the time that might reduce culture to mere base-superstructure-relations without acknowledging the fluid, lived experiences of people within a society, Williams wrote in 1954:

> But while we may, in the study of a past period, separate out particular aspects of life, and treat them as if they were self-contained, it is obvious that this is only how they may be studied, not how they were experienced. We examine each element as a precipitate, but in the living experience of the time every element was in solution, an inseparable part of a complex whole. (21)

In this passage, which provides two of the terms Matthews uses for his periodisation of the concept, Williams relies heavily on a chemical metaphor. The scholarly examination of the past, he argues, is done like a chemical analysis: in separating the elements similar to how a precipitate is solidified from a previous liquid state. These elements from the past, the precipitates, "have gone through selection processes and are therefore easier to access than anything in an analysis of the present moment when everything is fluid and in flux, or 'in solution'" (Seidl 132). This attention to the present moment is what earned Williams the designation as cultural historian of the present, rather than the past. It also highlights that he understood structures of feeling to stand in for the specificity of a historical moment, which is impossible to ever understand in its complex entirety.

Structures of feeling is thus meant to be a concept that tackles both, the structural elements of a given culture at a given moment in time, "its organising rules, regulations and conventions" (Seidl 133), and the lived experiences of the people, which is often circumscribed as "the general mood of a period" (133) or "what it was like to be there" (Sharma and Tygstrup 1). Later, Williams himself termed this quality "the specificity of being present" (*Marxism* 128). In *The Long Revolution*, this sense of spatiotemporal specificity is expressed in a particularising language that reiterates and expands on the chemical metaphor from *Preface to Film*:

> We can learn a great deal of the life of other places and times, but certain elements, it seems to me, will always be irrecoverable. . . . We learn each element as a precipitate, but in the

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[10] Excellent work has been done in retracing the steps which outline how Williams has developed the concept. The articles by Matthews and Filmer are among the best resources, but I would also like to draw attention to Simonetta Falasca-Zamponi's article "History, Ordinary Culture, and 'Structure of Feeling': Revisiting Raymond Williams" (*Il Pensiero Storico*, vol. 7, 2020, pp. 99–118). Instead of reiterating their work here, I will keep the epistemological history of structures of feeling succinct and devote more attention to the link to contemporary affect studies.

living experience of the time every element was in solution, an inseparable part of a complex whole. The most difficult thing to get hold of, in studying any past period, is *this felt sense of the quality of life at a particular place and time*: a sense of the ways in which *the particular activities combined into a way of thinking and living*. (47; my emphasis)

Echoing this particularising sense, Williams ventured perhaps closest to a succinct definition of the concept in *Marxism and Literature*, when he wrote that "what we are defining is a *particular* quality of social experience and relationship, historically distinct from other particular qualities, which gives the sense of a generation or of a period" (131; my emphasis).[11] He then extrapolates the necessity for cultural analysis from the concept's spatiotemporal specificity: "The relations between this quality and the other specifying historical marks of changing institutions, formations, and beliefs . . . are again an open question: that is to say, a set of specific historical questions" (*Marxism* 131); questions which warrant answers. Though the passage indicates that structures of feeling may thus possibly account for incremental cultural change, the contingency of the shared sense of how a period of time feels and how its social formations are organised is evident.

Simultaneously, Williams also specifies what he means by the structural component: "We are then defining these elements as a 'structure': as a set, with specific internal relations, at once interlocking and in tension" (*Marxism* 132). As Ben Anderson comments, the seemingly paradoxical formulation introduced by Williams with the formulation "at once" differentiates his description from "set of internal relations that determines actual occurrences" (122), that is, the structural element is not one that unequivocally dictates a certain form. Rather, due to its sense of pre-emergence, or "pre-formation", which exists only "at the very edge of semantic availability" (*Marxism* 134), the structural element suggests that a structure of feeling "is not an organic whole

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[11] Experience plays a prominent role in the formulation of structures of feeling, to the point of being almost synonymous with feeling. At one point, Williams describes 'structures of experience' as the better term but refrains from using it due to the subjective associations of the word *experience* in the sense that an experience was something that an individual had had in the past, thus imbuing it with a sense of closure that opposes the processual character of structures of feeling (*Marxism* 132). The term feeling, as Ben Anderson explains, "does not, then, simply refer to a scaled-up version of a psychological emotion or a physiological feeling. Rather, the term feeling in structure of feeling names a particularising, shared, affective quality that acts as a type of disposition towards oneself, others and the world and emerges alongside some kind of collective" (119). This prominent role of experience for the concept has been one of the most contested points of criticism. Terry Eagleton in particular has voiced concerns over the epistemological limits of experience as a basis for critical conceptual knowledge (21–42, esp. 21–25). However, as Paul Filmer points out, Eagleton and Williams were working from very different Marxist angles in terms of their idea of critical theory, which led Eagleton to recanting "[o]n the astringency of these and other remarks, as well as on the issue of the experientiality of base/superstructure relations" (Filmer 210) about a decade later. Filmer continues that much of the criticism tended to coalesce around the lack of structural quality of social experiences which is precisely the point in Williams's formulation of the concept, as he pointedly notes: "it is the index, so to speak, of their pre-formation (what Williams later termed their pre-emergence) as structures. If the existing theoretical terms were adequate to the emerging structures of feeling, then it may be that the concept itself would be redundant" (211). In addition to Eagleton, Stuart Hall has found fault with the privilege Williams placed on experience as epistemological (Williams, *Politics* 165), and remarks that "the 'experiential' paradigm . . . cause[s] some theoretical fluctuations in Williams's work" (Hall, "Politics" 63). To this, Williams replies to be weary of "reaching the opposite point in which the epistemological wholly absorbs the ontological" (*Politics* 167). Nonetheless, "the category of experience remains conceptually problematic" (61), as Piskurek points out. Moreover, Piskurek links Williams's insistence on experience to "Cultural Studies' political project to grant agency to those whose experience has mostly gone unheard historically" (62).

in which different elements are seamlessly integrated" (Anderson 122) but composed of contradicting relations which nonetheless may resonate with each other. Cyprian Piskurek has noted in this regard that "[i]t helps to understand 'structure' not in the formal way of classical structuralism, but rather as resembling the more general definition of 'pattern'" (58). As I have indicated earlier, due to this inherent possibility of contradiction I think it more prudent to speak of structures of feeling in the plural to avoid the semblance of any totalising notion in the first place. In this sense, the word seemed to be one indicating "a commonality, a series of relations and repetitions", thus being primarily "a way of insisting that 'feelings' aren't the private property of an individual but are part of a common *social* culture" (Highmore, "Formations" 147; original emphasis). For Williams, feeling is social and communal, not individual, as emotions are also constituted by and circulated in culture.

In summary, Williams describes structures of feeling as social experiences that are in a state of flux, as opposed to the more rigid and established social formations. These structures are often emergent, reflecting new social dynamics and cultural shifts before they are fully recognised or institutionalised. However, "they do not have to await definition, classification, or rationalization before they exert palpable pressures and set effective limits on experience and on action" (*Marxism* 132). Their state of being 'in solution' therefore does not prevent structures of feeling from generating onto-formative efficacy.

Crucially, Williams always linked the concept to its methodological application as art criticism in general, and literary criticism in particular, and art's relation to culture as "a whole way of life" (*Revolution* 40). These cultural expressions make palpable otherwise not yet articulated shared values, experiences, and emotions. In *The Long Revolution*, the theoretical discussion of structures of feeling is therefore embedded in the chapter 'The Analysis of Culture', and while the concept has its own chapter in the later *Marxism and Literature*, it is included in a section headed 'Cultural Theory'. He understood the arts as playing a crucial role in expressing these emergent – later pre-emergent – structures,[12] often serving as the first indicators of a new cultural or social movement (*Marxism* 133). Structures of feeling thus operate as a way of understanding and analysing aesthetic forms, particularly literature, as integral element of a socio-cultural process. Therefore, Williams affirmed:

> The idea of a structure of feeling can be specifically related to the evidence of forms and conventions – semantic figures – which, in art and literature, are often among the very first indications that such a new structure is forming . . . [A]s a matter of cultural theory this is

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[12] Of emergence, Williams writes: "By 'emergent' I mean, first, that new meanings and values, new practices, new relationships and kinds of relationship are continually being created" (*Marxism* 123), usually meant in a subversive sense against a dominant, hegemonic mode which is historically, if not ontologically primary. Emergent culture, William contended, "depends crucially on finding new forms or adaptations of form . . . in effect a *pre-emergence*, active and pressing but not yet fully articulated" (126; original emphasis). Because of the connection to the not-yet articulated, structures of feeling help grasp this condition of cultural pre-emergence.

a way of defining forms and conventions in art and literature as inalienable elements of a social material process: not by derivation from other social forms and pre-forms, but as social formation of a specific kind which may in turn be seen as the articulation (often the only fully available articulation) of structures of feeling which as living processes are much more widely experienced. (*Marxism* 133)

Such a conceptualisation rests on the understanding of both culture and art as ordinary, which "turned art into the means through which one could access the 'structure of feeling'", for as "recorded communication, art outlives its bearers and reconnects us to past-lived experience" (Falasca-Zamponi 107).[13] This is closely tied to Williams's assumption that literature functions as a form of communication (*Revolution* 48), and that thus the understanding of the culture of any given period could be advanced through examining a literary tradition. Such endeavours are ubiquitous in Williams's opus, most prominently visible perhaps in *The Country and the City* (1973) and *The Welsh Industrial Novel* (1979). Literary conventions, tones, and forms hence constitute forms of cultural expression that resonate with the collective experience of a time, revealing within them selective responses to the modes of cultural production and social relations as lived consequences of a period's social reality. As Simonetta Falasca-Zamponi points out, "[t]he excitement and at the same time the challenge of 'structure of feeling' lie exactly in its aim to be addressing a living process" (112). For this reason, structures of feeling as a concept calls for reading together a certain number of (literary) works, because cultural analysis can excavate unconsciously shared structures of feelings only through a body of texts.

The attentiveness to "specifically affective elements of consciousness and relationships" (*Marxism* 132) and its conceptualisation of feeling and thought not in opposition, as propagated by the mind-body dualism of classical Western philosophy (Feldman Barrett xi), but "thought as felt and feeling as thought" (*Marxism* 132) rendered structures of feeling amenable for adaptation by contemporary affect studies (broadly conceived). It is to these additions to Williams's notoriously inchoate concept that I now turn. As the previous reference to Eagleton's criticism has exemplified, the claim that the concept is too imprecise for any useful application is not novel. However, some scholars suggest in this regard that its vagueness might precisely be its value, allowing it "to do the sort of work that a more precise term would inhibit" (Highmore, "Formations" 147) in the sense that "'structures of feeling' was not simply a phrase that sought to attend to culture in solution rather than as precipitate, but that the phrase itself was designed to refuse, or at least delay, the sort of precipitation that results from analysis" (156). Indeed, Paul Filmer argues that, "[a]s with any concept formulated to assist in the analysis of the emergent flux of social process, it is likely to require clarification whenever it is introduced into critical discourse

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[13] Programmatic for this sentiment is, of course, the influential essay "Culture Is Ordinary", which Williams published in 1958.

and whenever it is applied to the critical analysis of concrete, empirical social and cultural practices" (201). Karen Engle and Yoke-Sum Wong similarly point out that they "understand *structure* and *feeling* as entangled, relational, and shifting terms rather than fixed binaries" (6; original emphasis). Moreover, they propose to invert Williams's phrase to *feelings of structure* in order to acknowledge "how things that are felt (rather than known) break apart, reinforce, build up, or bring into focus the various structuring frames of our lives" (6). While I am not fond of the sentiment that such "ludic provocations" (6) necessitate a different label, I do apprehend the usefulness Engle and Wong's observation has for studying the affective qualities that arise from spatial environments. My analysis is concerned with how the urban structure of London is felt in representation, but also how these fantastical representations affect and structure emotional encounters.

In *Encountering Affect*, the cultural geographer Ben Anderson draws attention specifically to the collective implications of structures of feeling. If one accepts that a characteristic element of the concept is that structures of feeling "are forms of affective presence that disclose self, others and the world in particular ways", then this poses the question of how "collective affects come to be organised in relation to 'extra-affective' forces and how do they then come to condition through something like a shared 'dispositional relation' that situates individuals" (107)? Anderson momentarily entertains the idea that any period of time may indeed be defined in terms of a predominant, historically contingent public feeling, "an emotion that when named expresses something about what it feels like or felt like to live in that particular period of time" (107). He then proceeds to argue that this conceptualisation allows for decentring the notion that existence is "an exclusively individual phenomenon" (108). While it may be interesting to enquire about individuals' being in or out of sync with that collective feeling – Anderson often resorts to the term *mood* here – the more interesting questions arise from examining "how public feelings are structured at the level of broader collectives (or a particular section therein)" (108). In relation to these conceptual premises, Anderson formulates three methodological caveats which any study such as mine must necessarily take into account. Firstly, he points out the risk of oversimplification by attributing a single dominant emotion to an entire society, without explaining how different emotions coexist or come to prominence. A second issue arises from understanding how a dominant emotion actually functions within society – whether it influences daily experiences, social self-representation, or both. Lastly, even if we accept the notion of distinct emotional periods of time, defining the boundaries of one period as well as understanding its transition to another posits a theoretical and methodological challenge.

With regard to this study, I agree that homogenising social experiences into one emotion that is then taken to be dominant risks oversimplification. For this reason, I have drawn attention to the plural formulation of Williams's concept: structure*s* of feeling rather than one structure

infuse the organisation of affective dispositions across multiple domains of social life, both with regard to the collective level as well as individuals' situation within it. Likewise, I will speak of anxious feeling*s* rather than proposing a monolithic conception of anxiety to account for a plurality of emotional experiences. As regards Anderson's second caveat, an understanding of the precise capacities of public emotions, I must hope that the following chapters provide sufficient evidence to substantiate my arguments about the different structures of feeling and their epistemic regimes at work in London urban fantasy. Lastly, I have delineated the temporal boundaries of the period under scrutiny in the introduction to this dissertation. I am convinced that there is not yet a transition to another, retaining us in, if one will, an age of anxious feelings (to keep the plural formulation), although I am wary of the totalising label.[14]

Anderson's argument that what is shared among the individuals of a collective is not a feeling per se, but rather "a predisposition to feel and to interpret those feelings in accordance with rules or discourses" (113) is of further import for this study. He refers to work done by Arlie Hochschild and Deborah Lupton and echoes Williams's focus on literary representations as systems of signification which pre-position subjects discursively. Methodologically, "[t]his starting point allows the analyst to show that the unmalleable aspects of feeling can be social or cultural, by invoking a source of determination that exceeds any specific situation and yet structures what can be felt" (113). Where affect theory displays a propensity for nonrepresentational theory, this aspect of structures of feeling, I contend, requires a return to representation rather than a turning away from it.[15] If, as Anderson sums up the concept, "[a] structure of feeling . . . conditions how something appears . . . by organising the way in which it comes to be felt as part of the dynamics of everyday life" insofar as allowing us to say "that a structure of feeling is a collective dispositional relation to the world" (121), then the site where its organising pressures can be observed is in its circulation in society through representational strategies, which cultivate, mediate, and sustain the distinct processes through which collective experiences are perceived affectively.

Conceived of in this way, structures of feelings allow us access to what Ben Highmore has termed "the way feelings and tastes are an activity of 'worlding' that renders life as *this* life and not another, and renders time as *this* time and not another" ("Formations" 146; original emphasis) in an essay about Williams's concept. Although the essay actually expands the concept's application range to cultural material beyond artistic representation, Highmore also stresses the importance of such systems of signification as "the privileged documentary route to recovering a structure of

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[14] I will return to the prevailing idea of an age of anxiety at the beginning of chapter 3.2.
[15] There is a certain vicinity in what I am saying to Margaret Wetherell's assessment of various theories discerning the relationship between affect and discourse, neither of which, she finds, "quite works" (53). As she is concerned with discourse's rather than representation's relationship to affect, however, I will limit myself to this rather cursory remark to the respective chapter in *Affect and Emotion* instead of recounting her argument *tout court*.

feeling" which "saturate the lifeworld in complex ways" (149). The term employed here, documentary culture, also stems from Williams and should not be mistaken into believing that mechanisms of social self-representation in literary texts displays life *as it is*, but rather are laced through with cultural codes, strategies of signification, whose analysis excavates modes of articulating this shared sense of affective relations. Literature, thus, does not *reflect* structures of feelings in a simple straightforward way of mirroring society at a particular time, but *conveys* these structures in the sense that it is not only affected by public feelings but, vice versa, simultaneously affects them.

In this aspect, structures of feeling are what Devika Sharma and Frederik Tygstrup have called "an effective component of social reality" (2) in their introduction to a collection of essays on *Affectivity and the Study of Culture*, which puts Williams's concept centre stage. By working through his chapter on structures of feeling in *Marxism and Literature*, Sharma and Tygstrup also explicate a "dissociative-plus-associative method" (5) designed to make use of the concept. The first step in charting such structures is starting with the feeling-part, dissociatively "itemising the different elements that seem to be somehow at stake when a specific feeling is being expressed" which leads one to arriving at "an entire array of expressive micro-traits that somehow reveal a state of emotional acuteness" (5).[16] They clarify that these traits "are not exactly signs referring back to an emotional content, but rather expressive building blocks with the help of which a feeling eventually surfaces" (5). The building blocks bring one to the next step, which is associative and "aimed toward finding out how such differing elements come together in the configuration of an affect" (5), that is, the researcher has "to identify a specific configuration of relevant elements, a configuration of traits that marks out the profile of a feeling" (5). In proceeding from dissociative to associative, the method construes the affective qualities of dominant emotions as a "distributive phenomenon, an assemblage of small parts of different provenance, which make up, due to an internal system of relations, an unmistakeable phenomenon, a feeling with a verifiable and identifiable structure" (5).

Finally, there is one caveat in using Williams's concept in the manner which I propose, to which the cultural theorist Sianne Ngai has drawn attention in an endnote in *Ugly Feelings*. Structures of feeling, she argues, "cannot be equated with what we ordinarily think of as emotional qualities, since the former are defined as formations that are still in process and barely semanticized, while the latter have distinct histories and come heavily saturated with cultural meanings and value"

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[16] One cannot but note that even these passages from Sharma and Tygstrup's introduction, which are designed to spell out a research framework for an entire collection of essays, are at times struggling to avoid the vagueness that seems to be the hallmark of Williams's concept, as the frequent resorting to *somehow* discloses. Such vagueness as to exactly how one arrives at an itemisation of affective qualities can perhaps be countered by meticulous observation of the research object at hand as well as the documentation and explication of these observations.

(360). She continues by pointing out that "Williams is not analyzing emotion or affect, but, rather, strategically mobilizing an entire register of felt phenomena in order to expand the existing domain and methods of social critique", concluding that clearly "structures of feeling remain inextricably intertwined with belief systems, institutions, and explicit social relationships" (360). The validity of this critique, I believe, is contingent on the question of where one places one's emphasis in Williams's phrase. Certainly, Ngai is entirely correct in pointing out that emotions have cultural history and cannot, then, be conceived of as pre-emergent; the plethora of research on the history of emotions has indubitably proven this conception. However, I understand the notion of emergence not as referring to the aspect of feeling but rather to the structural component of the concept. The specific structural organisation of culturally persisting emotions is what Williams had in mind when he wrote of "the specificity of being present" (*Marxism* 128). This makes the entanglement of the affective with the social a fruitful domain of analysis for cultural historians, whose aim might not so much be "offering 'a materialist analysis' of affect itself" (Ngai 360) but who enquire about how culture is constantly recreated and evolves into new dimensions through the interplay between everyday practices and power dynamics in a process of affective meaning-making.

These deliberations on the relationship between collective emotions and their meaning-making processes open up the sphere of emotions for the political. To use a favourite phrase in affect studies which juxtaposes the active and the passive voice: Emotions both affect and are affected by politics.[17] Debunking the myth that politicised emotions are often only associated with "fascist or aggressive societies" (*Emotions* 2), the philosopher Martha C. Nussbaum claims that all societies need to think about the emotions attached to "the stability of their political culture over time and the security of cherished values", for "[a]ll political principles . . . need emotional support to ensure their stability over time" (2–3). A political cultivation of emotions thus rests on the assertion that "[c]eding the terrain of emotion-shaping to antiliberal forces gives them a huge advantage in the people's hearts" (2).[18] Here the relationship between emotions and representation comes full circle, for artistic representation is, of course, an important area in which the value of political emotions is negotiated, and the role of popular culture in particular has been well theorised

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[17] The formulation goes back to Baruch Spinoza's differentiation between *affectus* (an internal emotional or affective response) and *affectio* (the external cause or event that elicits this response).

[18] Without wanting to suggest that the politics of emotions had not been an area of interest before the affective turn, research on such questions has certainly proliferated since. Nussbaum's own book, out of which I am quoting here, examines for instance the role of love and devotion to ideals in order to foster a shared political space and constitutional principles. Another research focus, among many others, has been the role of disgust in exclusionary politics (e.g. William Ian Miller, *The Anatomy of Disgust* (Harvard UP, 1997); Susan Miller, *Disgust: The Gatekeeper Emotion* (Routledge, 2004); or Zoya Hasan et al., *The Empire of Disgust: Prejudice, Discrimination, and Policy in India and the US* (Oxford UP, 2018)).

in this respect.[19] Since its publication in 2004, Sara Ahmed's *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* has become mandatory reading in this respect. In asking "'What do emotions do?'" rather than what they are, Ahmed argues that "emotions are bound up with the securing of social hierarchy" (*Politics* 4), thus drawing attention to how they are both dependent on and shaping relations of power. Her argument rests on the assumption that emotions are encounters between different objects, which allows to construe emotions as "effects of circulation" and enables us to think about emotions' "'sociality'" (8) rather than conceiving of them in individualist terms.[20] Crucially, Ahmed's analysis is one that is also text-based in its accumulation of data, more specifically texts that, like literary ones, "already exist 'out there' in the public, rather than being generated by the research itself" (19). Conscious of this status of 'being out there', Ahmed cautions that we, as researchers, "need to avoid assuming that emotions are 'in' the material we assemble (which would transform emotion into a property), but think more about what the materials are 'doing', how they work through emotions to generate effects" (19).

Consequently, the questions which form the backbone of this study are: Which specific structures of feeling affect how London is represented in contemporary fantastical literature? Which "palpable pressures" (Williams, *Marxism* 132) are hereby exerted by the "affective economies" (Ahmed, "Economies" 119) of our time? In which ways do the specific literary representations encountered in urban fantasy contribute to the circulation of affective responses to Londonness? And how do these relate to a distinctive politics of emotion? The answer lies, I argue, in conceiving of the emotional structures which manifest in urban fantasy as anxious feelings.

3.2 Anxious Feelings: Nostalgia, Haunting, and (In)Security

The sentiment that the twenty-first century can be characterised by the heightened presence of either of two related emotions, fear or anxiety (or both), is not an original idea. One must only look at the plethora of book titles which have appeared across the disciplines and on the popular science book market, in particular after the terrorist attacks of 9/11, to compound this notion. An extensive and yet incomplete account ranges from *Culture of Fear* (Frank Furedi, 1997), *Creating Fear: News and the Construction of Crisis* (David L. Altheide, 2002), *Beyond Fear: Thinking Sensibly About Security in an Uncertain World* (Bruce Schneier, 2003), *Fear: The History of a Political Idea* (Corey Robin, 2004), *Politics of Fear* (Frank Furedi, 2005), *Fear: A Cultural History* (Joanna Bourke, 2005) *Liquid Fear* (Zygmunt Bauman, 2006), *A Monarchy of Fear: A Philosopher Looks at Our Political*

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[19] Almost the entire body of works of John Storey, who certainly is among the most prominent scholars in this regard, focuses on the politics of popular culture (e.g. *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: An Introduction*, 9th ed., Routledge, 2021). Another cultural theoretician who has devoted many academic projects to theorising popular culture (and its politics) is Lawrence Grossberg (e.g. *Dancing in Spite of Myself: Essays on Popular Culture*, Duke UP, 1997).

[20] The economic metaphor underlying the idea of circulation is no coincidence and builds on Ahmed's work on "affective economies" (see her eponymous article in *Social Text 79*, which elaborates on the metaphor).

Crisis (Martha C. Nussbaum, 2018) on the one hand to *Hope in the Age of Anxiety* (Anthony Scioli and Henry Biller, 2009), *Anxiety: A Very Short Introduction* (Daniel Freeman and Jason Freeman, 2012), *Anxious: The Modern Mind in the Age of Anxiety* (Joseph LeDoux, 2015), *Crisis and Terror in the Age of Anxiety: 9/11, the Global Financial Crisis and ISIS* (Luke Howie and Perri Campbell, 2017), *Politics of Anxiety* (Emmy Eklundh, Andreja Zevnik and Emmanuel-Pierre Guittet, 2017), *Age of Anxiety* (Constantine Tsoucalas, 2019), *Age of Anxiety: Meaning, Identity, and Politics in 21st-Century Film and Literature* (Anthony M. Wachs and Jon D. Schaff, 2019), *Relax, Dammit! A User's Guide to the Age of Anxiety* (Timothy Caulfield, 2020), *Age of Anxiety: How to Cope* (Amrita Tripathi and Kamna Chhibber, 2021), *Anxiety for Dummies* (Charles H. Elliott and Laura L. Smith, 2021), *Twenty-First Century Anxieties: Dys/Utopian Spaces and Contexts in Contemporary British Theatre* (Merle Tönnies and Eckart Voigts, 2022), *A Rule of Law for Our New Age of Anxiety* (Stephen J. Toope, 2023) or *Anxiety: A Philosophical Guide* (Samir Chopra, 2024) on the other.[21] As the list shows, scarcely a year passes by in which not at least one book with either fear or anxiety in its title is published. It seems that this dissertation is therefore in good company.

I have opted for anxiety as the more suitable term for the kinds of feelings which I trace in urban fantasy for two reasons, one definitional and one semantic and etymological. However, both of these reasons point to the basic understanding of anxiety as more diffuse and less concrete than fear, which I deem more precise for my examination. This distinction between fear and anxiety depending on concreteness is commonly deployed in psychology and has its roots in Freudian psychoanalysis. The idea postulates that fear is an immediate reaction to a present threat, while anxiety is a more diffuse, anticipatory response to potential future threats, though definitions usually stress that fear and anxiety are "so closely related . . . that in many circumstances the two terms are used interchangeably" (Rachman 3). Following from this conceptualisation, fear is presented as tending to be short-term and directly related to the external situation, because it

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[21] The original term *age of anxiety* goes back to a poem written by W. H. Auden, published in 1947. The poem is set in New York City during the Second World War and focuses on the theme of existential crisis in the face of a rapidly changing world. This search for meaning, which the poem develops through four characters who meet in a bar and engage in a series of conversations, seems to resonate profoundly with contemporary sense of pervasive unease and uncertainty, which has elevated the title of Auden's poem to one of the most widespread descriptors for the twenty-first century. In addition to literature diagnosing an age of anxiety at large, inadvertent anthropogenic climate change has also been proclaimed as anxiety-inducing, for instance by Sarah Jaquette Ray (*A Field Guide to Climate Anxiety: How to Keep Your Cool on a Warming Planet*, 2020). Moreover, there is a copious number of books which focus on the field of parenting and childhood. Works like David Anderegg's *Worried All the Time: Overparenting in an Age of Anxiety and How to Stop It* (2003) explores how parents, driven by anxiety and social pressures, often engage in overprotective and controlling behaviours that may result in the children themselves becoming more anxious. More recently, books such as Jonathan Haidt's *The Anxious Generation: How the Great Rewiring of Childhood is Causing an Epidemic of Mental Illness* (2024) tend to claim just what Haidt's verbose subtitle suggests, namely that the introduction of the smartphone and social media has caused an increase in anxiety diagnoses for children and young adults. A scholarly approach to the intersections of anxiety and modern communication technologies can be found in Anthony Elliott's *Algorithms of Anxiety: Fear in the Digital Age* (2024), whose title demonstrates simultaneously the proclivity for proclaiming an 'Age of X' and the ostensible interchangeability of the terms fear and anxiety. Elliott argues that predictive algorithm's capacity to anticipate future events by seemingly mathematical exactitude and then disseminate these models quickly has "turbo-charged" (1) disabling anxieties.

activates the body's 'fight or flight' response, preparing one to either confront or flee from immediate danger. Anxiety is more prolonged and can persist even when there is no direct threat. It often involves a general sense of unease, dread, or apprehension, and may not be directly tied to a specific stimulating event or object, but is diffuse, unpredictable, uncontrollable, pervasive, and persistent. Thus, while anxiety motivates in positive terms to prepare for future challenges, it can also cause chronic stress and incapacitate a person in terms of their daily functioning (Rachman 3–8). This latter notion is reflected in the consideration of anxiety as pathological, for example by medical and psychological classification indices such as the *International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems* or the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*. These pathological classifications of anxiety disorder are directly linked to Freud's concept of neurosis as the return of repressed psychological conflicts. Anxiety replaced neurosis as a diagnostic category only in 1980.

Preceding the pathological-diagnostic definition of anxiety is its use in philosophical discourse, most notably as an existentialist concept. In existential philosophy, anxiety (or *angst*) is conceptualised as a fundamental ontological condition rather than a psychological phenomenon.[22] It arises from the individual's confrontation with the inherent freedom and contingency of existence, highlighting the absence of a predetermined essence which allows for human's freedom of choice. However, this freedom of choice is perceived as both appealing and terrifying at the same time, from which results an existential anxiety which compels the individual to grapple with the responsibility of self-creation within an indifferent or even absurd cosmos. As such, anxiety serves as a profound encounter with the nothingness that underlies existence in the sense that one's life consists of undefined possibilities, driving the existential subject towards an authentic engagement with their own potentiality.[23]

I intend to neither draw on the pathological-diagnostic definition of anxiety nor on its meaning in existential philosophy, though they provide important contexts. I concede that both

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[22] In English, the German loanword *angst* is sometimes used synonymously with *anxiety*. This is most likely due to the prominence of Søren Kierkegaard in existential philosophy, who wrote in Danish. His book *Begrebet Angest* (1844) has been first translated into English as *The Concept of Dread* by Walter Lowrie in 1944 but changed to *The Concept of Anxiety* in later editions. Rather than trying to address this translational issue in its complexity, I think it demonstrates very well that texts rely on interpretation. Naming a concept is not an exercise of finding a magic word that always unequivocally expresses all one wishes to say, not even to mention the question how such subtleties in meaning might then be conveyed in another language. I will therefore refer to my subject matter as structures of *anxious* feelings for the reasons I am laying out here.

[23] This notion finds a succinct expression in Friedrich Nitzsche's famous dictum that "if you gaze for long into an abyss, the abyss gazes back into you" (68). Nietzsche's engagement with the individual's responsibility in the cosmos is scattered throughout *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future* (*Jenseits von Gut und Böse: Vorspiel einer Philosophie der Zukunft*, 1886) and *On the Genealogy of Morality: A Polemic* (*Zur Genealogie der Moral: Eine Streitschrift*, 1887). For a deeper engagement with anxiety as a concept in existential philosophy than I am able to offer here, I recommend turning to Samir Chopra's *Anxiety: A Philosophical Guide* (esp. 53–107). For a cultural account of its history that draws heavily on the psychoanalytical roots of the concept, see Sianne Ngai' *Ugly Feelings* (209–15), followed by three case studies on representation (216–47).

definitions usefully highlight the notion that anxiety is a feeling that can be object-less and is certainly more diffuse than its most widely used counterpart, fear. However, both conceptualisations of anxiety as either a psychological disorder or an existential mood conceive of the emotion in mostly – or even exclusively – negative terms. However, looking at the word's semantics and its etymology also opens up a more positive connotation, which is reflected in some instances of everyday language use of the adjective derivate, *anxious*.[24] The expression "to be anxious to do something" is usually meant in contemporary English use to convey a sense of anticipation, but of the exciting and not necessarily the frightful sort. This use is intended to express a sense of eagerness that the task at hand cannot be delayed much longer. If I said to you that I was anxious to meet you, then neither would I be contemplating the existential implications of our prospective meeting, nor would you necessarily suggest I perhaps go seek psychological treatment. This double meaning of *anxious* arises from the preposition that follows it, as a simple exchange of *to* with *about* in the previous example demonstrates. If I said to you that I was anxious about meeting you, you would indeed assume I was worried about our meeting – although the implication of existential dread or mental disorder would still go a little too far in this rather quotidian example. My point is that within the *linguistic* concept of anxiety, or perhaps more aptly still the concept of *anxiousness*, resides a productive tension between the expression of worrisome and eager anticipation, which allows for the word to be opened up to an ambivalent entanglement of mixed feelings rather than an exclusively negative conceptualisation. In language use, this ambivalence is almost exclusively resolved through the adjective form and an accompanying preposition, where *anxious to/for* expresses eagerness and excitement whereas *anxious about* conveys worry or distress.

The semantic ambivalence can be traced etymologically. *The Oxford English Dictionary* gives for the word *anxiety*, from which both the adjective *anxious* and the noun *anxiousness* derive, the classical Latin etymon *ānxietās* and lists the following connotations: "worry, solicitude, extreme care, over-carefulness" ("Anxiety").[25] While the first two of these connotations have become what the *OED* lists as 'meaning 1' – "worry over the future or about something with an uncertain outcome; a troubled state of mind arising from such worry or concern" – the idea of care(fulness) has eventually produced the second meaning I have traced above, which the *OED* gives as follows:

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[24] To be clear, I do not want to deny the existence of anxiety as a psychological disorder, nor do I wish to devaluate the real pain and suffering that goes along with it. I am merely saying that the psychological-diagnostic definition of the term *anxiety* has its limits for epistemological endeavours.

[25] I must acknowledge, however, that the etymological pursuit excavates a proclivity for the word's negative connotations. The Latin root word *ānxius* is derived from *angor*, which means "strangulation" and thus indicates the often-painful constriction of the upper belly or the throat that accompanies feelings of anxiety in the negative sense. The use of *anxious* in the more positive sense I have exemplified above seems to me to be a more contemporary semantic change which is only latently present in the notion of care(fulness) that the word has always carried. I see this ambivalent entanglement of meanings more accurately reflected in *anxiousness* than in *anxiety*, because the derivation formed with an adjective and the suffix *-ness* indicates a quality of being and will therefore henceforth use *anxiousness* whenever syntactical reasons prevent me from using the adjective.

"strong desire or concern for something to happen or to do something" ("Anxiety").[26] Both meanings are about the anticipation of the future, which lends the concept a distinctively temporal quality. What the brief examination of the *OED* entry also reveals is the difficulty of expressing emotions, which almost inevitably leads to naming others and thus deferring to or sliding into other meanings. Starting with a brief detour to a collective arts project, it is this definitional issue which I want to address next before turning to a brief overview of the proposed structures of anxious feelings in contemporary London urban fantasy.

Anxiety is the first emotion named by Ann Cvetkovich in *The Alphabet of Feeling Bad*, a video shot with Karin Michalski in Berlin in April 2012, which had Cvetkovich sit on a messy bed littered with items of everyday use. As Ursula Degener and Andrea Zimmermann observe, the setting thus becomes a sign of living through a personal crisis (5). Cvetkovich recites an abecediary of key terms and explains some of them. As Cvetkovich and Michalski explicate at a later stage, the project had been an attempt at "thinking about bad feelings that resists the vocabulary of clinical psychology and medical diagnosis" (14) in order to elicit a "dialectic of hope and despair that underlies *The Alphabet*'s effort to name bad feelings as a way of also producing collectivity and survival" (15). I have taken this small detour because I perceive my own attempts at tracing a more positive, hopeful connotation in the meaning(s) of *being anxious* to be similar to Cvetkovich and Michalski's project of rescuing terms for 'feeling bad' from connotations of despair or pathological implications. On an epistemological level, the abecediary demonstrates usefully how the terms mentioned in it are understood as *tools* that assign a context-specific and negotiable meaning to emotion words rather than as an attempt to fixate meaning.

In the introduction to *Cultural Politics of Emotions*, Sara Ahmed also addresses the relationship of emotions to their representation through linguistic sings. In particular, she claims that "words that name a specific emotion do not have to be used for texts to be readable in terms of that emotion" because "[t]he 'publicness' of emotions means that we learn to recognise their signs, which can include actions, gestures, intonation" (19). With regard to my examination of structures of anxious feelings in urban fantasies, this necessitates not looking for anxiety or anxiousness as such but for textual performances of other emotions that I deem anxious in the ambivalent sense theorised above. In this respect, Ahmed allocates special importance to figures of speech for tracing such emotional vocabularies in textual performance: "my argument will suggest that 'figures of speech' are crucial to the emotionality of texts" (12). In a model fashion, which I intend to follow, she proposes examining "how different 'figures' get stuck together, and

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[26] The *OED* entries for *anxious* and *anxiousness*, respectively, reflect these two meanings and refer in their etymology to the root word *anxiety*. I have therefore refrained from performing the same semantic exercise thrice.

how sticking is dependent on past histories of association that often 'work' through concealment" (13).[27]

I argue that what Ahmed means by histories of association can be linked to the semantic opening of words, as I have done above with regard to *being anxious*, and thus provide different readings of established figures of speech. In terms of the texts' emotionality, I further argue that the quality of being anxious in its ambivalent meanings diffuses to, slides into, and gets stuck to other emotion states, thus indicating larger affective patterns, which is why I speak of structures of anxious feelings in the plural form. In particular, I deem these to be nostalgia, haunting, and (in)security. While these three emotion states form nexuses around each of which one of the following analytical chapters crystallises, there are of course overlaps and coincidences between them. Hence, I want to reject any sense of unhelpful neat compartmentalisation from the start. Where these overlaps and coincidences occur, I will point them out to allow for synergies to be drawn between my individual readings. Moreover, since each chapter has received its own theoretical frame, which address the structures of anxious feeling foregrounded in the respective chapter in its spatial dimension, I will limit myself to a few words as to how I perceive nostalgia, haunting, and (in)security to be anxious feelings for the remainder of this chapter, which will foreground a temporal parameter to accompany the focus on space in the analyses.

Nostalgia is a feeling pattern which is characterised in its temporal sense by looking at the future and deeming it insufficient if measured against the perception of the past. Whatever parameter is employed as the comparative basis for this judgement does not really matter for the concept as such. I say *perception* of the past, because nostalgia does not measure the anticipation of the future against the past as it really was – there is no such thing – but rather against a distorted image of what that past was *felt* to be like. Inevitably, this leads to a romanticisation of previous states of being, as negative experiences recede into the background. The past is idealised as having had a better quality of life than either the present or the anticipated future. As a result, the nostalgic person seeks to re-create the past as best as they can to avoid a progression towards what that person perceives to be an unsatisfying future. In this sense, nostalgia is oriented towards the past and the future simultaneously but values the perceived past over the future. The anticipation of the undesired future allows for nostalgia to be characterised as an anxious emotion, as the threat of an ostensibly decreasing state of being inculcates in the individual a feeling of dread – thus anxiousness

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[27] The concept of 'stickiness' is developed in *The Cultural Politics of Emotions* (11–13, 89–92). What Ahmed terms "sticky relation between signs and bodies" is inextricably bound up with the "'doing' of emotions" (191), that is, their efficacy. In this "model of 'sticky signs'", language plays a crucial role, particularly in form of "the metonymic proximity between signs" as "a form of power in which emotions align some bodies with others, as well as stick different figures together, by the way they move us" (194–95). Ahmed draws on the example of hearing the word *Paki* repeatedly as an insult to demonstrate how "signs become sticky through repetition" (91). The particular usage of the word again and again results in the insulting use to become intrinsic to the sign itself. The insult sticks.

in a sense that is closer to the dominant negative meaning of anxiety – which motivates the turn towards a putatively better past. Nostalgic structures of feeling in London urban fantasy will be more closely examined in chapter 4.

Haunting describes an emotion which in its temporal sense collapses past and future into the present. The haunted individual perceives traces of both past and future in the present, which destabilise a progressive experience of time. In terms of its anxious character, haunting can take two dominating forms, which again cannot be entirely separated in a clear manner. I wish to think of this concept more as a scale than two neatly distinguished states. On the one hand, haunting can take a form of anxiousness that is again closer to the meaning of anxiety as inculcating dread. The collapse of time itself can feel threatening, as time is one fundamental anchor for humans' perception of their own ontological state. Moreover, the intrusion of the past into the present can threaten the individual with its return into a sphere in which it does not belong. This notion is connected to the cultural construction of the past as being firmly behind us. If the past resurfaces in the present, it is out of place there, and therefore threatening. Finally, from the vantage point of the present many futures seem possible, each depending on a course of action the individual might take. However, if one 'path' to any one future is chosen, this will inevitably terminate other futures. This idea should not be thought of as a conscious choice with full knowledge of what lies ahead in any case, but rather as the latent awareness that some courses of action will entail certain outcomes while preventing others. This awareness may result in a state of anxious inertia in which the individual is paralysed by the possibilities of choices. However, on the other hand, the awareness of one's own choice for one's own future can be empowering and provide an impetus for action. The latter is a conceptualisation of haunting as anxious feeling which ventures closer to my proposition to construe anxiousness not entirely in negative terms but to be also aware of the quality of anticipation as an enabling emotion. With regard to the resurfacing of the past, this state of anxiousness foregrounds the acknowledgement that the past is not inaccessibly behind us, which can likewise be experienced as threatening or empowering, usually depending on the exact nature of the returning past. The implications of construing haunting as a structure of anxious feeling are the focus of chapter 5.

The term *(in)security* is chosen in this form to highlight the entanglement of feeling insecure and feeling secure. These feelings constitute two sides of the same coin and also cannot be neatly separated, as one does not make sense without the other. In temporal terms, (in)security is almost entirely oriented towards the future and judges the individual's state of being against its anticipated future. If the future is perceived as threatening, the result is a feeling of insecurity. If the future is perceived as safe, the resulting feeling is security. The ambivalence of anxiousness is not hard to see here: in the first case, insecurity is an anxious emotion by dint of the perception of the future

as threatening. In the latter case, the anxious quality is one of excited anticipation. (In)Security can give rise to discourses of control, as human's value feeling secure over feeling insecure and are thus motivated to bring about a state of certainty by their own actions, which then affords the feeling of safety and security. A lack of control, vice versa, gives rise to feelings of insecurity. (In)Security as a structure of anxious feeling in London urban fantasy will be investigated in chapter 6. Before fully turning to the analytical chapters of this dissertation, however, a few notes on methodology are in order.

3.3 Methodological Implications

I have written before that it is my conviction that a certain period of time cannot be reduced to one structure of feeling that ostensibly characterises this period entirely. How, then, could I presume to name one emotion – anxiousness – as the label for such a characteristic structure of feeling? Alas, I cannot. And yet, the previous chapter proposes anxiousness as the glue that sticks different feelings together. I do not mean this as purporting that we do live, in fact, in an 'Age of Anxiety'. Rather, I propose identifying the structures of feeling which dominate contemporary sense-making processes, and which are also identifiable in the texts I examine, *as anxious*. This is not so much a process of relating something that is already there to a preconceived classification category, but instead an activity rooted in acknowledging that "naming emotions involves different orientations towards the objects they construct" (Ahmed, *Politics* 14). Since "emotions may not have a referent, but naming an emotion has effects that we can describe as referential" (Ahmed, *Politics* 14), my act of identification entails that to a certain extend I am constructing the texts in my corpus as anxious rather than they being anxious by themselves or simply 'displaying' a sense of anxiousness. However, this is also not to say that the structures of anxious feelings I claim to excavate are solely a production of my own gaze or performative techniques but rather acknowledges what Britta Timm Knudsen and Carsten Stage have termed with reference to Donna Haraway the "situated specificity" of my analysis. In doing so, I seek to admit my intertwinement with the knowledge I produce but still retain dimensions of the object of study which are outside my control. I thus perceive myself as being in conversation with the texts rather than creating them entirely through reading. Employing again that favourite phrase in affect studies, I recognise that I am affecting and am affected by the research process and material, placing myself "in front of the text" (Felski 12) rather than behind it and endorsing it as a cofactor in making meaning rather than trying to unravel any ostensibly prefabricated meaning on my own.[28]

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[28] One strand of research concerned with literature and emotion(s) focuses on the affective movement of the reader by literature, which has drawn on reader-response criticism (see e.g. Hogan 96–131). Other than acknowledging myself as a researcher who is also a reader, I am not concerned with exploring this aspect of the texts in my corpus but rather intend to retrace the tracks left behind by structures of anxious feelings in terms of their representation in content and form. Rita Felski has taken the argument about academic critique as "orientations towards the world

In this conceptualisation of the research material, the texts thus offer themselves as an imaginary equivalent to the bodily sensation of human emotions, which draws attention to their representational quality. Martin von Koppenfels and Cornelia Zumbusch put it like this:

> A literary theory of emotions worthy of the name would have to take into account the fascinating transience of human emotions through words and writing. It should be able to describe how emotions are transmitted and warded off, preserved and dissipated, muted and amplified, rhythmised and repeated, shifted and transformed, mixed and dispersed through the seemingly disembodied signs of literary texts. (20; my translation)

This entails that "these aesthetic-emotional features are also shaped by, and in turn shape, the emotional discourses and practices particular to their own place and time", as Louise D'Arcens observes, "yet with an awareness of how they continue to participate in a longer and larger history of human emotion" (124). Andrew Lynch has drawn attention to this methodological conundrum as well:

> to say that literature simply 'represents,' 'elicits,' or 'moves' emotions would be misleading, since readers . . . are crucial to that process. There is no 'pure,' unmediated reading of emotion in literature; it always happens in the context of a particular historical situation. How a text 'feels,' like what it 'says,' will depend on the reader, who is also a historically contingent emotional agent, bringing a host of variable life influences into play. (100)

There is, in other words, awareness needed that my interpretation of the texts at hand will inevitably be limited to hermeneutic-reflexive extrapolations from my reading only, which I therefore need to make transparent as best as I can in order to achieve the greatest possible intersubjectivity. As Wolfgang Hallet notes: "one of the essential factors for any method of cultural analysis is an awareness of and permanent critical reflection on the provisional nature of its assumptions and on the constructedness of its interpretative categories as well as its objects of investigation" (223). Nonetheless, such emphasis on the mediation of emotions through language – linguistic sings – conforms to my belief that it is more fruitful to ask what happens if we read literary texts in a certain way rather than assuming they simply *are* something in an elusive, pre-constructed sense to which we as readers do not have access, if it exists at all. The latter view, I contend, runs risk of either personifying the text in the sense of 'having' an emotional quality itself or being left with no other choice than assuming traces of its emotionality to be there by dint of its author, neither of which I take to be fruitful avenues of exploration. Asking what texts *do* when read in a certain way,

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that are infused with a certain attitude or suspicion" (4) one step further in *The Limits of Critique*. Her scrutinising consideration of literary and cultural criticism opens up scholarship "to embrace a wider range of affective styles and modes of argument" (3) beyond the established assumption that "whatever is *not* critical must therefore be *un*critical" (2; original emphasis). While she does not condemn critique as such, she does question and challenge its tendency to exclude other methodological possibilities. After all, "[i]nterpretation", she points out, "just refers to the many possible ways of trying to figure out what something means and why it matters" (10). Engagement with Felski's observations thus prompts the realisation that my own "ethos of argument" (4) is implicated in a specific tradition of literary criticism as critique, but that one must view it "as one possible path rather than the manifest destiny of literary studies" (9).

and not what they are, is thus an epistemological endeavour to understand social continuities and structures rather than an ontological one, despite all the theoretical and methodological caveats I have explicated so far.

My understanding of literary texts, in summary, is one grounded in the conviction that literature does not exist in a productive vacuum but is inextricably entangled with the sociohistorical conditions of its production. In other words, literary texts are cultural practices which interact with their historical and material conditions. This position is close to the new historicist claim that "the work of art is the product of a negotiation between a creator or class of creators, equipped with a complex, communally shared repertoire of conventions, and the institutions and practices of society" (Greenblatt 12). Literary texts then constitute, so to speak, a thread in culture's "webs of significance he [man] himself has spun" (Geertz 5), that is, the texts provide instances in which culture as a whole can be examined, and their analysis yields insights into "the degree to which its meaning varies according to the pattern of life by which it is informed" (14). They are sites at which societies observe themselves and where they constitute and negotiate meaning – especially in genres that are often considered trivial. Because of this symbolic-cultural coding of all reality, of ways of thinking, and of social practices, the literary text itself can be seen as contributing to the symbolic constitution of cultural meanings.

In terms of meaning-making processes, new historicist methods have often been criticised for their "propensity to see all events as contributions to the survival of the existing social order" and thus allowing "no space for dissent" (Belsey 29). New historicist readings of cultural codes thus largely see them as confirming the presence of the hegemonic. With regard to my approach, this poses the risk of indeed oversimplifying a particular hegemonic collective structure of anxious feeling into a simplistic homogenisation of society. As I hope to demonstrate during my individual readings of the urban fantasy texts under scrutiny, they often do different things at the same time and thus take account of Williams's identification of structures of feeling as dependant on dominant, residual, and emergent social formations (*Marxism* 121–27).[29] Constructing meanings is always a polysemic activity, and although I do attempt to structure my findings for the benefit of analytical clarity, any undue monolithisation of collective emotions must be circumvented.

Awareness of such problems came primarily from those practicing cultural materialism in the burgeoning field of what was to become (British) Cultural Studies, such as Raymond Williams and later Catherine Belsey. While both approaches share similarities and "[c]ultural materialists agree that literary texts will at first sight seem supportive of the dominant ideology of their time",

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[29] Essentially, residual refers to formations which used to be dominant but are not any longer, and emergent refers to those formations which strive to become dominant. The conceptual triad allows for hegemonic and counterhegemonic structures of feeling to be present simultaneously and reflect that society rests on a "compromise equilibrium" (Piskurek 62).

they also "see that ideology as less pervasive than their new historicist colleagues do" (Bertens 137) and allow for readings that foreground subversive and resistant meanings. Since culture is conceived of as "the signifying system through which necessarily … a social order is communicated, reproduced, experienced and explored" (Williams, *Sociology* 12), a cultural materialist analysis is therefore aware that, on the one hand, literary "texts function as instruments of a dominant socio-cultural order" (137). On the other "they also show how the apparent coherence of that order is threatened from the inside, by inner contradictions and by tensions that it seeks to hide" (137).[30] Both instances are true at the same time, and texts are capable of negotiating and retaining sometimes contradictory meanings, as I will also demonstrate during my analyses.[31]

What is decisive about this confluence of cultural and literary studies is that the cultural dimension of textual meanings is not located outside the text and is not modelled in a text-context opposition which runs risk of presenting both as monolithic, but that it is construed as an indissoluble component of the textual signs themselves. Such an approach has a methodological penchant for plot analyses on the one hand and selective close readings on the other. While plot analysis is a means of reading more widely for narrative patterns which are meaning-constitutive, reading closely enables the explication and analytical opening up of the cultural dimension of a literary text by tracing cultural and textual references and connections in their aesthetic structures and variety of meanings (Nünning and Nünning 293–95).[32] Hence, an interpretation that combines cultural and literary studies

> reconstructs and describes the relationship between the literary text and non-literary reality and the role or function of a literary text in the midst of a multitude of other expressions. In doing so, it also and especially emphasises the special cultural significance of the aesthetic experience and imagination made possible by a literary text, which makes literature a culturally constitutive form of knowledge. (Nünning and Nünning 300; my translation)

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[30] This idea, which lead to the development of his holistic approach to culture as a whole way of life, is already present in Williams's first major publication, *Culture and Society 1780–1950* (1958), where he writes that "the arts, while ultimately dependent, with everything else, on the real economic structure, operate in part to reflect this structure and its consequent reality, and in part, by affecting attitudes towards reality, to help *or hinder* the constant business of changing it" (293; original emphasis).

[31] Christian Huck has usefully pointed out with regard to the term *negotiation* that it not only refers to the relationship between dominant and resisting meanings but to the formation of culture *as such*: "In this approach, culture does exist only in the form of *practices* that are linked to both *representations* and lived *experiences*. Every representation of culture shows it in a specific, selective way; it is never identical to a culture as a whole way of life. A whole way of life, on the other hand, only comes into existence *as a culture* in the process of (self-)reflection and through the recognition of difference: for this, it needs representations. Consequently, we find culture neither here nor there, but only in the processes of *negotiation*" (*Cultural*; original emphasis).

[32] Since the close reading of texts yields results only insofar as "the meaning of even the smallest elements of a literary text can ultimately only be deduced from its discursive interrelatedness with other utterances and meanings in discourses related to the literary text" (Hallet 200), the methodology of reading closely must necessarily be paired with reading widely.

These references and connections are, of course, never free-floating but articulations of a specific conjuncture. The term *conjuncture* denotes the specific historical and social conditions in which cultural practices take place and in which representations are embedded. As a result, any conjunctural analysis must be historically and contextually specific. *Articulation* means, in Stuart Hall's words, "the form of the connection that *can* make a unity of two different elements, under certain conditions. It is a linkage which is not necessary, determined, absolute and essential for all time" (qtd. in Grossberg, "Postmodernism" 53; original emphasis) but historically contingent. Articulation is thus what holds the elements of a conjuncture together through power. Articulation reflects that elements hold together, not through some essentialist connection, but because the connection is produced through power relations that *appear* natural but are not. "*Articulations*", thus, "require hard work to persist, and a *conjunctural analysis* has to replicate this work to uncover the material, structural, agentic and conflictual conditions of persistence" (Huck, "How" 93; original emphasis). On these grounds, Jeremy Gilbert broadly defines a conjunctural analysis as "the analysis of convergent and divergent tendencies shaping the totality of power relations within a given social field during a particular period of time" (6).

All these methodological implications result in my adoption of a British Cultural Studies approach. As a discipline informed by inter- and transdisciplinarity from the start, British Cultural Studies are uniquely suited to bringing "explanations from various disciplines into a meaningful dialogue" (Rostek and Zwierlein 3). Gilbert observes that the particular kind of cultural studies which works in this tradition puts "analytical emphasis on the study of semiotic practices and [has] a heavy bias towards qualitative modes of analysis" in order to "map power relations of all kinds in a given social field, with particular attention to the ways in which those relations are changing at a given moment" (6).

As this chapter has argued, Raymond Williams' concept of structures of feeling constitutes a productive tool to perform on signifying practices the critical task of recapturing "the emotions different categories of subjects are permitted to experience and express at any historical juncture" in order to examine "how both individuals and collectives are brought into being through specific articulations of emotion" (Harding and Pribram 13). This work allows make apparent the relationships of structures of anxious feelings to "the many elements in the social formation that, together, create a particular culture's whole way of life" (2), that is, "to chart how emotional subjectivities and social identities are reciprocally constituted" (13). As a cultural studies project, the conceptual aim of this dissertation is therefore to investigate how the world is socially constructed and represented in literature in meaningful ways in a specific historical context. The following chapters will put some flesh on the bones of criticism and work towards a conjunctural analysis of urban fantasy informed by premises developed in literary urban studies and the history

of emotions.[33] In doing so, I enquire which concrete signifying practices provide the onto-formative power for the specific articulation – literary London in the fantastic mode – of a specific conjuncture – Britain in the twenty-first century. In the subsequent discussion of Jonathan Stroud's *Bartimaeus* trilogy, Ben Aaronovitch's *Rivers of London* series, Benedict Jacka's *Alex Verus* series, Kate Griffin's *Matthew Swift* series, and Paul Cornell's *Shadow Police* series, the underlying ideas and terminology of structures of anxious feelings are used for analysing how Londonness – as a distinctive emotional and cultural quality of being in London – is articulated in contemporary urban fantasy. In this process, I attempt to demonstrate how nostalgia, haunting, and (in)security provide the structural scaffolding for thinking about how London feels in the fantastic urban imaginary of the twenty-first century.

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[33] As I have already indicated in the introduction, since a full conjunctural analysis would involve looking at indeed all aspects of social life which constitute a cultural formation, such a bold ambition cannot be fulfilled by a single dissertation. I am therefore understanding my study as a contribution *towards* a conjunctural analysis rather than being one in and of itself.

4 Cartographies of Nostalgia: London and the Countryside

In *Retrotopia* (2017), Zygmunt Bauman diagnoses the current historical moment as "the Age of Nostalgia" (1). While this claim illustrates the temptation to subsume entire historical periods under the homogenising label of 'age of X', to which I do not subscribe, Bauman's argument nonetheless highlights the heightened attention that has been given to nostalgia as a dominant structure of feeling, particularly in the United Kingdom.[1] In line with my arguments in the last chapter, I conceive of nostalgia as a structure of anxious feeling, as the following brief theoretical overview will demonstrate.

The concept of nostalgia has transformed from a medical term to an emotion over the course of roughly three centuries. A compound of the Greek words νόστος (*nóstos*, "returning home") and ἄλγος *(álgos*, "pain"), the physician Johannes Hofer invented the concept in 1688 effectively as a medical translation of the German word *Heimweh* to describe the pathological, at times even lethal, consequences of a particular type of homesickness following prolonged absences from home. Over the course of the next two centuries, "nostalgia became semantically unmoored from its medical basis" (Pickering and Keightley 922) to describe a yearning for a lost past rather than a lost home. There is, thus, a semantic shift "from a spatial displacement to a temporal displacement of the nostalgic subject" (Henneböhl 22), which has allowed the word to be taken as denoting a particular structure of feeling (Baake-Hansen 118; Grainge 21; Tannock 454).[2] In this sense, "[o]ne can almost summarise the by now elongated and changeable history of nostalgia in the following way: nostalgia was born as a pathology or medical condition and later matured into an emotion" (7), as Michael Hviid Jacobsen puts it succinctly.

Paul Grainge offers the distinction between nostalgia as a mood and as a mode. Whereas the nostalgic mode "articulates a concept of style, a representational effect with implications for our cultural experience of the past", nostalgia as a mood can be aptly conceptualised as a structure of feeling in Raymond Williams's sense, because "[t]he nostalgia mood articulates a concept of experience" (21). As Grainge further explains,

> [t]heoretically, nostalgia is understood as a sociocultural response to forms of discontinuity, claiming a vision of stability and authenticity in some conceptual 'golden age.' This

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[1] The impression can be solidified by looking at the plethora of books published in recent years which are concerned with nostalgia. In addition to Bauman's book, Peter Mitchell's *Imperial Nostalgia: How the British Conquered Themselves* (Manchester UP, 2021) and Hannah Rose Woods's *Rule Nostalgia: A Backwards History of Britain* (WH Allen, 2022) are but two examples which specifically diagnose contemporary British society with nostalgia. These popular science books are backed up by academic studies, to many of which I will subsequently refer. The publication of three comprehensive handbooks in the last four years may be taken as a primary indicator that 'nostalgia studies' are on the rise as an academic field. These handbooks include *Nostalgia Now: Cross-disciplinary Perspectives on the Past in the Present* (Routledge, 2020) and *Intimations of Nostalgia: Multidisciplinary Explorations of an Enduring Emotion* (Bristol UP, 2022), each edited by Michael Hviid Jacobsen, as well as most recently Tobias Becker and Dylan Trigg's *The Routledge Handbook of Nostalgia* (Routledge, 2024).

[2] For a much more extensive etymological survey of the word, please be referred to Tobias Becker's article "The Meanings of Nostalgia: Genealogy and Critique" and Dennis Henneböhl's dissertation (esp. 22–30).

approximates the conventional sense of nostalgia as a yearning. Critics who examine nostalgia in this way are invariably concerned with the question of what is chosen from the past and why – with how, and in whose interest, the past is made to relate to the present. (21)

He sees the nostalgia mood "principally defined in relation to a concept of *loss*", as "[n]otions of authenticity and time – endemic to the experience and rhetoric of nostalgia – are structured around a principle of absence and longing" (21; original emphasis).[3] The idea of loss has already been articulated by Fred Davies in his seminal publication *Yearning for Yesterday: A Sociology of Nostalgia* (1979) by drawing attention to the fact that "what occasions us to feel nostalgia must also reside in the present, regardless of how much the ensuing nostalgic experience may draw its sustenance from our memory of the past" (9).[4] Nostalgia thus evokes "a past imbued with special qualities, which, moreover, acquires its significance from the particular way we juxtapose it to certain features of our present lives" (13). More explicitly, Davis argues that

> nostalgia's special relationship to the past has to do with the relatively sharp contrast that the experience casts on present circumstances and conditions, which, compared to the past, are invariably felt to be, and often reasoned to be as well, more bleak, grim, wretched, ugly, deprivational, unfulfilling, frightening, and so forth. (15)

Stuart Tannock summarises Davis's argument succinctly by observing that as a structure of feeling, nostalgia "invokes a positively evaluated past world in response to a deficient present world" (454). "The nostalgic subject turns to the past", he argues, to "construct sources of identity, agency, or community, that are felt to be lacking, blocked, subverted, or threatened in the present" (454). Thus, the past is evaluated positively and is essentially "approached as a source for something now perceived to be missing", although Tannock cautions that this idealised past "need not be thought of as a time of general happiness, peacefulness, stability, or freedom" (454). Nonetheless, in this periodising sense, nostalgia strictly differentiates between what is now and what was then. In this divisive rhetoric, Tannock identifies three distinctive characteristics of nostalgia: firstly, the invocation of a prelapsarian world, which is, secondly, cut off from the present by a lapse, that is, "a cut, a Catastrophe, a separation or sundering, the Fall" (456). Thirdly, the present is thus constructed as postlapsarian, "a world felt in some way to be lacking, deficient, or oppressive" (456). The dynamic temporal relation between past and present in nostalgia has led Niklas Salmose to understand it as an experience with two distinct phases: "First, there is the motivational phase where something triggers our nostalgia" (3) which is directed elsewhere, either temporally or spatially or both. This is then followed by the recognition that this elsewhere is inaccessible to us

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[3] While Grainge's approach is not without problems, it has significantly influenced the theoretical debate around nostalgia. For criticism, see Pickering and Keightley (esp. 932–33).

[4] Writing after Davis but before Grainge, Bryan S. Turner also offers what he calls "four major dimensions" of the "nostalgic paradigm", which all centre around a sense of loss (150–51).

"due to some physical restraints on time and matter" (3). "The result", Salmose notes, "of the nostalgic experience is thus one of a combination of the conflicting emotions happiness and sadness: bittersweet" (3).[5]

In recent years, the bittersweet ambivalence of the nostalgic experience has led critics to emphasise that the concept is not exclusively negative, in contrast to its dominant everyday usage. Tannock notes that "[h]ostility towards nostalgia is fuelled in particular by the recurrent cooption of nostalgia by conservative, reactionary politics", in which nostalgic invocation of concepts such as heritage functions "as an 'elitist, escapist perspective' that palliates present inequities and sanctifies traditional privileges" (455). He strongly advocates that rather "[n]ostalgia responds to a diversity of personal needs and political desires" and that "[n]ostalgic narratives may embody any number of different visions, values, and ideals" (454). Thus, only "[o]nce such heterogeneity is recognized, critique can then focus on both the openings and the limitations that nostalgia, as a general structure of feeling, may create for effective historical interpretation and action" (454). A critical reading of the nostalgic structure of rhetoric according to Tannock therefore focuses "on the construction of a prelapsarian world, but also on the continuity asserted, and the discontinuity posited, between a prelapsarian past and a postlapsarian present" (457). The discontinuities command the critic to ask which elements of the past are excluded from nostalgic invocation in the present. Looking for continuities, in contrast, means to inquire whether elements from the past are retrieved or whether the invocation of the past is one of retreat from the present. In the latter, Tannock locates the dangerous political potential of reactionary conservatism which fails to confront "the anxieties, fears, and frustrations to which nostalgia is a response" (458). In the former, he sees the utopian potential for change in the sense of retrieving "the sources of identity, community, agency which are found/constructed by the nostalgic vision in the past . . . as supports for community and identity-building projects in the present" (457).

Tannock's concepts of retreat and retrieval are close to the taxonomy of reflective and restorative nostalgia which Svetlana Boym offers in *The Future of Nostalgia* (2001). Working from the concept's etymological roots, Boym argues that reflective nostalgia "dwells in *algia*, in longing and loss" and manifests "in the dreams of another place and time" (41; original emphasis). Nonetheless, reflective nostalgia "suggests new flexibility" because the focus is on "the meditation on history and passage of time" (49). Similarly to Tannock's argument about nostalgia's utopian impulses, Boym ascribes to reflective nostalgia the potential for critical thinking by stipulating historical consciousness (49). Restorative nostalgia, in contrast, focuses on *nóstos* in that it "proposes to rebuild the lost home" (41) and "signifies a return to the original stasis" (49). In doing

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5   Salmose's observation exemplifies another point I have made in the previous chapter, namely that when talking about emotions meaning tends to slide. Here, the emotional experience of nostalgia is explained by sliding into the emotions of happiness and sadness which, in Sara Ahmed's sense, stick to nostalgia.

so, "[r]estorative nostalgia evokes national past and future" and "ends up reconstructing emblems and rituals of home and homeland in an attempt to conquer and spatialize time" (49). Thus, restorative nostalgia lacks critical introspection and tends to "take[] itself dead seriously" (49). This notion is closer to Tannock's idea of retreat, although Boym foregrounds the attempt to restore a past status quo in the present which is judged as lacking whatever positive quality the past is deemed to possess.

At this point, I want to briefly return to what I have said about nostalgia as relating to anxiousness in the last chapter. From what I have examined so far, nostalgia emerges as a structure of feeling defined by its temporal focus: from a present perceived as deficient, it looks to the future and deems it equally lacking when compared to a perceived version of the past. I must say 'perceived past' because as has become clear nostalgia does not compare future expectations with any historical accuracy but rather with a distorted memory of how the past felt. This inevitably leads to romanticising previous experiences, as negative aspects fade into the background – Tannock draws attention to the exclusions and omissions of the nostalgic experience. The past becomes idealised as a time of better quality of life than both the present and the imagined future. Consequently, in reflective variants the nostalgic individual turns to the past from the present, either to avoid confronting anxieties about the future or to retrieve impulses for improvement. In nostalgia's restorative variant, the nostalgic individual strives to recreate that past to avoid progressing towards what they view as an unsatisfactory future. In this way, nostalgia is simultaneously oriented towards the past and future but assigns greater value to the perceived past. The anticipation of an undesirable future frames nostalgia as an anxious emotion, where the expectation of a declining state of being induces a sense of fear, which drives the longing for a supposedly better past. On a cultural level, these nostalgic impulses can be construed as a transsubjective structure of feeling in a historic formation, which inscribes itself into signifying practices as specific emotional articulations.

I argue that contemporary London urban fantasy constitutes a site in which nostalgia as a structure of anxious feeling is articulated. Moreover, I contend that the specific variant of nostalgia at play in these fantasy novels shifts the semantics of nostalgia back from time to space. I mean by this that the aspect of *nóstos* is emphasised over the aspect of *álgos*. The spatial opposition which assumes nostalgic significance in London urban fantasy is the dichotomy between the British capital and the countryside. As the following two chapter will demonstrate, the representation of these spatial domains is nostalgically inflected. Chapter 4.1 examines how London is juxtaposed to a nostalgically romanticised countryside. Whereas Benedict Jacka's *Alex Verus* series implicitly privileges a pastoral idyll of quiet village life over the dangers of the city, Ben Aaronovitch's *Rivers of London* series does not indulge in these nostalgic sentiments but rather valorises the equally

nostalgic notion of London as a multicultural hotspot. These two readings posit that the nostalgic longing for a bucolic countryside resembles Svetlana Boym's category of reflective nostalgia, although both series notably lack the critical insight Boym allocates as a possibility to this variant. Chapter 4.2 will then turn to restorative nostalgia as a political project. Jonathan Stroud's *Bartimaeus* trilogy contrasts the morally corrupted city *ex negativo* to the countryside as a place of virtue and narrates the downfall of the city to the point of its destruction. Aaronovitch's *Rivers of London* novels again provide the foil for such a reading insofar as the destruction of the city in favour of a supposedly more virtuous country life is prevented in the series. In the wake of the 2016 referendum on the United Kingdom's European Union membership, my reading turns explicitly political here, as Grant's adversary in the series can be linked to arguments put forth by the Leave campaign before the referendum. While the series rightly criticises the nationalist aspirations that often cling to a nostalgic reimagining of a supposedly 'better' Britain if it were not for London, the enthusiasm with which life in the capital is represented is nostalgic and distorting in its own way and, as I hope to demonstrate, eventually implicated in a perpetuation of the simplistic narrative that Brexit was caused by rural 'left behinds'. Before I proceed with the analytical readings, however, it is necessary to briefly survey the opposition between city and country as a cultural and literary topos, to which nostalgia sticks as a structure of anxious feeling.[6]

In his seminal study *The Country and the City* (1973), Raymond Williams investigates the contrast between country and city as a system of representation from Ancient Greek poetry onwards, in which images of Arcadia and the Golden Age prefigure what is to become pastoral, to the late twentieth century. He notes that both country and city have been imbued with persistent but generalised associations and feelings but claimed that the respective structures of feeling

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[6] At this point, it would be remiss not to draw attention to the difference between the city-country dichotomy as a literary topos and the divide as a faultline outside of literary representation. *The Guardian*'s economics editor Larry Elliot observes that "[s]uch has been the growth divide between London and the rest of the country that the UK has some of the highest regional inequalities of any advanced country, bigger even than between east and west Germany or between the north and south of Italy". The UK produces more than half of its GDP in urban areas, with London accounting for a quarter of the total figure (Social Mobility Commission 8). Similarly, the city-country dichotomy is discussed in terms of 'race', with commentators for example asking, "Why is our countryside 98% white?" (BBC, "Racism"; cf. also Chakraborti), although the phenomenon discussed under the label 'white flight', the decline of the White British population in inner city Britain, "appears to have halted" (Policy Exchange). The property company Assets for Life, for instance, also posits the capital against the rest in stating on their website in a blog post on property investment that "houses in London are sold at an average of £541,720 making it the priciest location in the country based on the latest UK House Pricing Index by the Land Registry Office", whereas "the regions with the lowest price points are Yorkshire and the Humber where properties only average £214,036". At the same time, there is a "growing chorus advocating against simplistic urban-rural dichotomies in urban research, for instance pointing out that "within the 40-plus U.K. population, more urban residents experience the lowest and most unequal levels of well-being, social satisfaction, and economic satisfaction" (Finnemann et al. 6). In addition, comparable debates are being held around the so-called American 'heartland' and the 'Urban Archipelago' in online articles which feature voting maps similar to those I will discuss below with regard to the 2016 EU referendum in the UK (Savat; The Stranger), thus suggesting that the city-country dichotomy is to some extend a transnational phenomenon. In summary, however, while there is a discussion around real-world economic disparities and social inequalities in the UK, this is nonetheless also often framed in terms of London versus the rest of the country and heavily influenced by literary myths (P. Butler).

negotiated by this representational system primarily oscillate between constructing the country and the city as sentimentally desirable or undesirable. Positively, the country is perceived as a place of "a natural way of life: of peace, innocence, and simple virtue" and the city as "an achieved centre: of learning, communication, light". Negative associations with the city are "noise, worldliness and ambition", whereas the country is "a place of backwardness, ignorance, limitation" (1). However, Williams argues that the images of the city as violent and corrupt and of the country as backwards and underdeveloped were largely construed through an ideological lens in order to legitimate economic modes of production and specific ways of life at the expense of others.

On the one hand, Williams argues that novelists like Thomas Hardy or Jane Austen and poets like John Clare and Oliver Goldsmith portrayed rural life as a moral and spiritual retreat from the corruption of the city, which he dismisses as deeply ideological, reflecting as it does the interests of the landed gentry and the aristocracy (9–13, 108–19; cf. also Miles 1–20). The idealized vision of the countryside often comes from the perspective of the landowning classes, who had a vested interest in maintaining social hierarchies and land ownership patterns. These depictions present the rural landscape as a place of natural order and continuity, in contrast to the chaotic, rapidly changing urban environment. The bucolic and idyllic countryside presented in literature thus often ignores the harsh realities of rural life, particularly for the working class, who were frequently subjected to poverty, exploitation, and displacement. He contends that this image serves to obscure the economic relations of land ownership, rural labour, and the shifts effected by industrial capitalism. Similarly, the city is often depicted in literature as the space of the rising bourgeoisie, with its own class interests and values. In the urban novel in particular, the city becomes a site of individual ambition, competition, and social mobility, reflecting the values of capitalist society, but also, like in the works of Charles Dickens, a place of exploitation and class conflict (Williams, *Country* 142–64). It is important to note that Williams does not ascribe these ideological portrayals to wilfully manipulative political projects of the respective writers whom he examines, but attributes them to dominant structures of feeling. That his argument about the dichotomy of city and country as one of the sustained faultlines in British culture still has a hold on contemporary nostalgic structures of feeling becomes evident in the final pages of Williams's book when he argues that "[t]he common idea of a lost rural world is then not only an abstraction of this or that stage in a continuing history . . . [but it] is one of the most striking deformations of industrial capitalism" (300) and its representational forces.

To date, *The Country and the City* remains a key text for the development of literary urban studies, because Williams's literature-based methodology "deeply changed the way we think about the countryside, town/country relations and social characteristics of the urban" (Dirksmeier 884–

85).[7] The merit of his study lies in elucidating how the urban and rural as two opposing, yet interconnected aspects of society are bound by an exploitative economic relationship and the observation that the literary representation of these categories is intricately tied to the social conditions that shape such writing. By focusing on different structures of feeling, Williams thus foregrounds the mediatory aspects of macrosocial change in society "without claiming the totality of this process" (Dirksmeier 885). Criticism levelled at the city-country divide has often been that it is too reductive and too binary, without acknowledging that in literary representation the very construction of such a binary is precisely the point. No matter how devoted to realist representation of extradiegetic reality, no literary product can be absolved entirely of simplification. The symbolic potential of literary spaces has further contributed to simplified representations of both city life and the countryside. As Peter Dirksmeier points out, "in the epistemological view country/city is on the one hand a binary opposition of two distinct categories", but "[o]n the other hand these binaries are infected by power . . ., which turns the relationship into a hierarchy" (891). For examining this process Williams's taxonomy of desirable/undesirable remains a useful framework, which I suggest approaching by connecting desirability to nostalgia as an affective response to such an asymmetrical representational hierarchisation. To be precise, when Williams argues that country life is positively evaluated as being quieter, slower, rustically communal and more peaceful than life in a fast-paced, morally corrupted city devoid of community, this binary is one inflected with nostalgic longing for a particular way of life. Vice versa, when people in the countryside are constructed as being stuck in time, traditional, and conservative in comparison to future-oriented, progressive, and tolerant urbanites, then this is also a nostalgic distortion of reality whose very binary oppositionality is the motivation for the construction in the first place. Any criticism that such a construction does not accurately capture reality is therefore missing the point, as it is more prudent to ask why such a nostalgic representation is offered in the first place, as the representations of both city and country are dialectically contingent upon each other. This sense of contingency, in turn, allows to go beyond the binary in analytical terms: "What Williams figured as

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[7] Dirksmeier's article also includes a graphic representation of the influence of Williams's study, which is based on a comprehensive literature review with the help of searchable databases. This section of the article builds a convincing case for the impact *The Country and the City* had on urban theory since its publication in 1973, although Dirksmeier concedes that "it should be read as a classic", that is, "the study can no longer respond . . . directly" (894) to problems it may help raise. He further points out that particularly "[t]he intersection of environmental issues and Marxist inspired critique of social conditions offered in *The Country and the City* seems to be one main reason why the book is still obviously worth reading today" (888). Moreover, Gerald MacLean, Donna Landry, and Joseph P. Ward comment in their introduction to the edited volume *The Country and the City Revisited: England and the Politics of Culture, 1550–1850* that "[t]he rise of interdisciplinary work in history, geography, literature, and art history, combined with the broadening of the English literary canon, make a project like Williams's largely unthinkable today", since it "was itself formulated exclusively within the parameters of literary history, and more specifically within the Cambridge English curriculum" (3). Their edited collection may serve as a starting point for re-visiting roughly the same literary period on which Williams focused from a less canonical and more interdisciplinary understanding of literature, substituting "many interrelated short stories" (4) for a grand narrative.

an analytical dichotomy can be more satisfactorily grasped as a series of permeable boundaries" (MacLean, Landry, and Ward 4). In doing so, the argument focuses on the motivation behind nostalgic representations of the city and the country. In particular, they can be about nostalgia as a structure of feeling aimed at retrieving a loss of identity, a lack of agency, or an absence of community from an imagined past, or at least retreating into a past when such values were taken to be not lost, or both (Tannock 454).

Williams asserts that "Old England, settlement, rural virtues" as well as differentiated images of the city "mean different things at different times, and quite different values are being brought to question" (12). The following readings take their cue from this claim and investigate how the city-country topos features as a spatial rendition of nostalgia as a structure of anxious feeling in contemporary London urban fantasy. In asking which image of London the novels evoke by contrasting the capital to the countryside, I demonstrate that the particular dichotomy is inflected by a nostalgic longing for nonurban space in Benedict Jacka's *Alex Verus* series and Jonathan Stroud's *Bartimaeus* trilogy. In Jacka's series, this takes the form of yearning for an idyllic nature as opposed to the city, which connects to pastoral and Romantic traditions of writing the countryside. In Stroud's novels, the countryside is less explicitly featured in the narrative and serves more as an implicit foil to a morally corrupted city governed by a politically degenerate elite. In contrast to both of these series respectively, I read Ben Aaronovitch's *Rivers of London* series as addressing these stereotypical representations of city and country. While the series evokes these stereotypes itself in the first four novels in order to construct a nostalgically distorted sense of Londonness that is characterised by the multicultural progressiveness of the 'Cool Britannia' era, the fifth instalment *Foxglove Summer* engages more nuancedly with representations of city and country. Through the development of the central protagonist in particular, Aaronovitch's novel questions its own indulgence in a heavily stereotypical image of rustic nature in the countryside without, however, being able to overcome its own nostalgia entirely. The series subsequently politicises its own engagement with these representational strategies by having its main antagonist pursuing a political project that valorises supposedly morally superior country values over a corrupted city.

4.1   Contrasting London with Nostalgic Longing for the Pastoral Countryside

In this chapter I put forth the argument that both Benedict Jacka's *Alex Verus* series and Ben Aaronovitch's *Rivers of London* series engage with nostalgic longing for a pastoral version of the British countryside. Crucially, in both series the nostalgically imagined space is not located in the past but in the present. This places specific emphasis on the etymological aspect of *nóstos* in nostalgia, the home as a spatial location. However, the characteristics with which the countryside

is endowed in the narrative present can also be identified as originating in an imagined past, particularly with artistic mediations of nature from the Romantic period (White 77). Williams devotes an entire chapter in *The Country and the City* to the argument that "[t]he apparent resting places, the successive Old Englands to which we are confidently referred . . . then start to move and recede" (12). The particularly Romantic version of the countryside to which I subsequently refer is thus always already inflicted with a nostalgic longing in itself for a supposed 'Golden Age' that came before. However, Williams also notes that these "successive Old Englands", as he calls them, "have some actual significance, when they are looked at in their own terms" and that "[w]e shall need precise analysis of each kind of retrospect, as it comes" (12). As I hope to demonstrate, the urban fantasies I examine draw their version of Old England – even though in the case of the *Alex Verus* series we are also speaking about Wales – from Romantic nature poetry.

In both series, an idealised version of the British countryside is evoked in order to say something about London, since the country and the city are always treated as each other's foil. In the *Alex Verus* series, the protagonist frequently retreats to spaces in the countryside, or to spaces within the city which are assigned connotations of nature, in order to heal from wounds suffered in the city. The countryside thus works as a signifier of nature, which in turn is endowed with attributes of health and well-being. In contrast to Verus's claims that he is at home in the city (*Hidden* 30), London features in the narrative predominantly as a dangerous and morally corrupt space. This dichotomy taps into those currents of the urban imagination that emphasise the downsides of urban life and contrasts a wretched capital with a romanticised, pastoral countryside. The sources of those currents can be found in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, when London's rapid industrialisation and urbanisation was reflected in the literary imagination by castings of the city as monstrous and dehumanising. Famously, William Blake's poem "And Did Those Feet in Ancient Times", published in the preface to *Milton* in 1808, spoke of "England's mountains green" and "pleasant pastures" under threat from the Industrial Revolution's "dark Satanic Mills" (109–10).[8] According to Raymond Williams, this trajectory, "in which the transition from a rural to an industrial society is seen as a kind of fall", has "become an element of that very powerful myth of modern England" (*Country* 96). In the late eighteenth century, the commencing economic shift from a predominantly agricultural, feudalist society towards industrialised urban centres of political and economic power, among which London is the most prominent, formed

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[8] Since Sir Hubert Parry set the poem to music in 1916, it is better known as the hymn "Jerusalem". In the Norton Critical Edition to *Blake's Poetry and Designs* (2008), Mary Lynn Johnson and John E. Grant point out that, although *mills* probably "evoked windmills, watermills, and . . . treadmills driven by animals or men" rather than "steam-driven factories", the poet "associated mills with mechanistic systems generally" (147). The phrase has assumed a life of its own and is frequently evoked as a shorthand for the onset of the Industrial Revolution and the concomitant transformation of city- and countryscapes. On the poetry of the period, particularly of the pastoral kind, as a source for modern nostalgic tropes, see Santesso (27–55).

"the basis of an ideology, in which an innocent and traditional order [the rural] was being invaded and destroyed by a new and more ruthless order [the urban]" (Williams, *Country* 49).[9] Moreover, in the *Alex Verus* series, the spatial dichotomy of the perilous city and nurturing nature is inflected with a gendered dynamic, which reflects the protagonists nostalgic longing for a safe and secure home in which he is cared for by female characters.

The idea of London as the centre of moral corruption and the countryside as a safe space which provides care and nurture thus corresponds to Boym's reflective nostalgia in the sense of being about the individual. As Boym writes, nostalgia of this type "is more oriented toward an individual narrative that savors details and memorial signs, perpetually deferring homecoming itself" (49). Although Verus's nostalgic longing for a safe home is motivated by the political conflict between an oppressive government and an authoritarian movement seeking to assume power, the spatialisation of city and country is not politicised in itself beyond the display of rather antiquated gender norms. The construction of London as dangerous and morally corrupt vis-à-vis a seemingly innocent, pastoral countryside is narratively exploited, as the powers of the city encroach upon Verus's safe spaces one after the other. In other words, the narration draws on well-established patterns of an idyllic countryside and a degraded city as narrative shortcuts for its protagonist-driven series. The destruction of Verus's homes located in natural environments thus does not lend itself for an, for instance, ecocritical reading about the dangerous growth of urban environments, but aims primarily at eliciting sympathy in the reader for the plight of the protagonist.

In contrast to Jacka's series, Ben Aaronovitch's *Rivers of London* novels draw on the city-country dichotomy as a longstanding literary topos in more nuanced ways. While the political implications of this binary are examined in chapter 4.2.2, my contrastive reading to the *Alex Verus* series focuses on how the representation of the countryside and London provides the construction of different identities for contemporary Britain. More precisely, the spatial dichotomy is narrated in the first instalment of the series as an intergenerational conflict between Mama and Father Thames, two river deities who stand for a diverse metropolitan London on the one hand and a traditional rustic rural identity on the other. The novel thus personifies two competing identities of contemporary Britain tied to different spaces, the city and the country. In resolving the conflict, the first novel presents an argument for reconciling these different identities instead of letting conflict fester, which sets up the series' political arguments I examine more closely later.

Although I argue that overall Aaronovitch's novels engage more nuancedly with different representations of London and the countryside than Jacka's, *Rivers of London* also falls into its own nostalgia trap by presenting an idealised version of London. The novels invoke but also debunk

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9 As I have explained in chapter 2.3.2, the topos of the city as a corrupted, morally degenerate space is frequently employed in Urban Gothic. This reading can thus be usefully complemented with my hauntological analysis of necropolitan London in chapter 5.1.2.

the idealised, pastoral version of the countryside as a cultural myth, but ultimately fail to do so also with regard to the city. In particular, the central protagonist, Peter Grant, espouses a perspective on the city which is firmly grounded in the narrative of a diverse, multicultural London, as it was advertised under the 'Cool Britannia' campaign at the beginning of the 2000s.

4.1.1   London as a Perilous City in the *Alex Verus* Series

In Benedict Jacka's *Alex Verus* series, the eponymous protagonist characterises himself as "an urban person at heart" who "like[s] nature" but feels most comfortable "deep in the city" (*Hidden* 30). However, while Verus indeed displays a certain affection for and navigational knowledge of London, he has strong, emotionally charged ties to the countryside, which figures as a means to seclude himself from the mortal dangers of the capital. The countryside is evoked by three different spaces in the series, which are all characterised as natural by their distinctive opposition to London and their connotations of homeliness and security for Verus. These three spaces are a safe house somewhere in Wales, the exact location of which is never specified, a cavern under a tree at Hampstead Heath in London, and a fantastical otherworld, a shadow realm called 'The Hollow', which can be accessed through an unspecified location in the Chiltern Hills and provides a space for Verus and his friends to recover from their numerous perilous endeavours.[10]

All three spaces are inflected with a gendered dynamic. Verus not seldom retreats from London suffering severe injuries and can use these locations to recover from the taxing fights in the city. The notion of recovery is strengthened by the presence of Verus's girlfriend Anne Walker in both the safe house and The Hollow as well as the occupation of the cavern by the female mentor figure Arachne, which imbues these sheltering natural spaces with a gendered element of nourishment for the male protagonist that links to the traditional notion of nature as mothering in contrast to the largely hostile environment of London.[11] In addition, the shadow realm was originally created by Karyos, a female hamadryade with whom Verus and Walker enter into a kind of nurturing parental relationship.[12] However, in keeping with the increasingly bleak tone of the

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[10] On his blog, Jacka gives the explanation for a shadow realm as follows: "A shadow realm is an image, or 'shadow', of a particular place in conventional reality. . . . a shadow realm exists in the same space and time as the location it mirrors, but the process of creation shifts the two locations slightly out of phase: they share positions, but can't interact with one another" ("Encyclopaedia Arcana #37"). A shadow realm might thus be thought of as existing in a pocket of the known world.

[11] Arachne is a tarantula the size of a minivan who doubles as the common fantasy archetypes of ostracised magical creature and mentor figure for Verus, and the cavern under Hampstead Heath is her lair. The choice of a gigantic spider as archetypal mentor figure is certainly unusual, as spiders in fantasy usually assume a malevolent role – Shelob in *The Lord of the Rings* or Aragog in *Harry Potter* come to mind, though Aragog is also a rather misunderstood creature. While the mentoring aspect of her role is quite clearly attributed to her tremendous age in the series (*Fated* 95), the fact that Verus befriended a gigantic spider can be ascibed to his characterisation as the leader of a motley group of outsiders. All of Verus's friends are not part of the magical establishment in the series and this contributes to his role as an underdog for whom the reader can root.

[12] Originating from Greek mythology, a hamadryade is a tree spirit. Hamadryades are born bonded to a certain tree on which their life depends.

series, all three spaces are eventually invaded by the London-based government, thereby employing the city-country dichotomy to invoke the notion of aggressively expansive urban powers and reflect the political realities tied to the capital.

Until its invasion by government forces, Verus's house in Wales becomes the shelter for him and his friends where they can rest and forge plans. The house only ever becomes a location of the story when Verus, either alone or with his friends, escapes to Wales from a dangerous situation in London, as for instance when the house is introduced for the first time in the series in the third instalment, *Taken*. Verus and Walker use a gatestone, a magical device that allows instantaneous transportation to a location to which it has been keyed, to flee to Wales from a life-threatening situation. As a result of attempting to rescue Walker, Verus's energies are drained, he becomes unconscious, and Walker gates them to the house. When Verus wakes up, he notes the "bright sunlight . . . streaming through the window" and "the quiet" indicating that he "wasn't in London anymore" (*Taken* 59). Both the warm sunlight and the lack of "background hum" apart from "the sound of the river" (59) already hint at the countryside's pastoral attributes in contrast to a modern urbanism characterised by business, density, and noise. Immediately after having woken up, Verus is served breakfast by Walker, which already foreshadows her role as nourisher which she holds throughout the series (*Bound* 40). The notions of homeliness and safety are primarily conveyed through rest and food and, as it is generally Walker who prepares the food, the house thereby acquires the distinctively female notions of nourishment and care. Thus, right from its very introduction in the series, the house in the Welsh countryside is represented as a natural space of rest and care. Accordingly, security is coded spatially in the novels, with the (safe) Welsh countryside and (dangerous) London as two opposite domains.

The house is further described by virtue of its remote location, whereas civilisation remains closely associated with London and its dangers in keeping with the series' wariness of a politicised and aggressive urbanism. Located in a valley, the building is "fifteen miles from the nearest village [and] there aren't any phone lines" (*Taken* 69). Arguably, the location of the house in Wales rather than England is one that is motivated by the connotation of remoteness and not by any concern for Welsh regionalism. Welsh particularities are never addressed in the series and the location of the house remains unspecified throughout. The connotations that the house is supposed to evoke are, as I have said, remoteness, but also the idyll of a pastoral nature untouched by the corruptive influence of London's urbanism.

I have said at the beginning of this chapter that Verus characterises himself as an "an urban person at heart" who "like[s] nature" (*Hidden* 30). However, the way in which natural spaces are represented in the series, particularly in contrast to the dangers of the city, imply that Verus is rather a person who valorises nature and hates the city for the damage it inflicts on him, but would not

admit to this. The focalisation betrays to the reader Verus's unconscious valorisation of the countryside contrary to his statements about his preference of the city, which becomes evident for instance in the description of the valley in which the house is located:

> The end of the valley was cold and had a desolate look. Thistles sprouted between the rocks and grass, patches of nettles grew around the outbuildings, and there were bramble thickets under the bare trees. But the air was clear and the hills rose green around us and the place had its own kind of quiet beauty, even if few would come to see it. (*Taken* 71)

This passage indicates the ambivalence which characterises Verus's attitude towards nature, resulting both from his self-assessment as an urban person and his evident valorisation of nature. On the one hand, the valley is cold and desolate, full of unwelcoming plants like nettles and prickling thistles. On the other, this passage indicates the beauty of the countryside, which is communicated by two means. Firstly, the desolation is turned into an emphasis on the lack of people, which immediately invokes the density and crowdedness of London as its opposite. Secondly, the praise of natural elements such as trees and thickets, clear air, and green hills is reminiscent of nineteenth-century pastoral poetry in the tradition of the retirement motif, which saw the "natural home of poetry . . . [in] the rural environment" (Ellis 543). As Markman Ellis explains,

> [t]his argument derived from a particular view of history, which claimed that the first employment of mankind had been that of the shepherd, and concluded that the song of the shepherds, the pastoral, was the original of poetry – hence the implication that 'retirement' to rural life, with its capacity for leisure and reflection, was conducive to poetic genius. (543)[13]

Consequently, praise of England's green pastures, its lakes and rivers, and its forests is ubiquitous in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century poetry and has become a literary topos.[14] Even where the city, predominantly London, is described positively, it is often beheld "at its *most* natural and *least* city-like" (Stelzig 182; original emphasis) moments, as perhaps best illustrated by Wordsworth's poem "Composed Upon Westminster Bridge, September 3, 1802".

These poetic praises of nature's beauty are a recurring feature in the description of the house's location throughout Jacka's *Alex Verus* series, for which the following quotation may suffice as further demonstration:

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[13] At this point it would be remiss not to include Ellis's observation that the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century pastoral remained inextricably linked to the city: precisely because it could only be constructed against the foil of an allegedly deplorable city life in the first place, and, "much though it cultivated a careful disdain for urban life" (546), because the poet depended economically on urban print culture.

[14] Terry Gifford distinguishes between three kinds of pastoral: the historical form deriving from Greek and Roman poems about the life of shepherds, descriptions of the country delighting in the natural with an explicit contrast to the urban, and the critical use of the term which recognises the comfortable complacency of the pastoral vision as a simplified idealisation (1–2). When I speak of pastoral here, my meaning is somewhere between the second and the third function Gifford delineates. Whereas the *Alex Verus* novels offer up descriptions of the countryside as a contrast to the city, my own reading demasks them as pastoral in the critical sense.

> We were standing on a steep hillside, trees rising up all around us, the morning sun sending shafts of light through the leaves. The weather was cool but pleasant, just warming up from the long night, and through the trees we could see the bright blue of a beautiful lake, with white-capped mountains rising up over it. . . . the air was fresh and clean. Above, puffy white clouds floated in a cerulean sky.
>
> Anne was looking around, smiling. . . . "You didn't tell me it was this beautiful." (*Burned* 343)

The semantic emphasis on pleasure and beauty strengthens my previous point that descriptions of the countryside in Jacka's series are not about the regional particularities of these landscapes as such, but meant to invoke connotations of the allure of nature. Significantly, this passage stems from a point in the series when Verus and Walker have been declared enemies of the state and are forced to flee from government forces. They escape to the house in Wales but decide that it is too dangerous to stay too long in one place. The quotation above marks their departure from Wales, emphasising that spaces of natural beauty are equivalent to safe spaces in the series, whereas their subsequent flight route has them being chased through ever "[m]ore countries, more *cities*" (*Burned* 345; emphasis added). Although Verus returns to his house in Wales, the continuous attacks from government forces and other enemies he has made force him to recognise eventually that "[t]he location just wasn't defensible . . . It had been meant as a place to hide, but I'd been using it for too long and now too many people knew how to find it" (*Bound* 149). While the reclusiveness in and remoteness of the Welsh countryside offers some protection to Verus, the forces operating out of London are ultimately able to expand their reach sufficiently enough to make him abandon the one place he sees as a home. This fate also befalls another natural space of home, Arachne's lair at Hampstead Heath.

Located in the borough of Camden, Hampstead Heath is the biggest green space in Inner London and noted for its wildlife habitats. Its representation in the *Alex Verus* series emphasises this aspect of wilderness over the undeniable fact that green spaces within metropolitan areas are hardly natural, regardless of how much they so appear. The Heath's *semblance* of wilderness, however, allows it to be construed as a natural space that invokes the English countryside within the confines of the capital. In the series, it is described as "wild while still being in the city", and even "wild enough to be interesting" (*Fated* 83). Moreover, Verus states that, in his opinion, Hampstead Heath is "the most beautiful" park in Inner London, whereas Regent's Park, while "probably more famous", is "a bit too cultivated" (*Fated* 83) for him, thereby alluding directly to the constructed character of parks in general. However, the dichotomy of wild and cultivated spaces which is produced here by positioning the two parks as opposites evokes the notion of a romanticised, beautiful countryside represented by Hampstead Heath in contrast to Regent's Park whose appearance too closely resembles the modern, cultured city to the taste of the protagonist.

The allegedly natural character of parks is derived *ex negativo* from their opposition to the urban environment in which they are situated. This argument can be traced back to early accounts of urban planning and efforts to preserve green spaces in cities. For example, in "Public Parks and the Enlargement of Towns", an address to the American Social Science Association in 1870, the landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted argues for the necessity to include parks in plans for the enlargement of Boston in order to counteract "every evil to which men are specially liable when living in towns" (309), such as jealousy, irritation, and corruption. Basing his argument on scientific observations of better air quality in the countryside, Olmsted advocates passionately for a ground which, on account of its naturalness, provides "the greatest possible contrast with the restraining and confining conditions of the town" (312). Parks of this character, he concludes, must necessarily be large enough to allow urbanites to "find the city put far away from them", that is, "seeing, hearing and feeling nothing of the bustle and jar of the streets" (312). Olmsted's address indicates that in the urban imagination parks retain notions of nature and naturalness, regardless of the fact that they are generally as much a part of the city that encloses them as the rest of the urban environment.

Indeed, the Heath in the *Alex Verus* series is repeatedly represented as being sealed-off from the city, which contributes to its role as a signifier of nature. At night, it is dark where the city is illuminated (e.g. *Cursed* 18; *Veiled* 235), it is deserted where the city is still busy (e.g. *Fated* 83; *Cursed* 18; *Veiled* 235), and it is silent where London is loud (e.g. *Fated* 83; *Cursed* 18, 304–05). As I have already demonstrated with the example of Verus's safe house in Wales, where the first thing he notices after waking up from unconsciousness is "the [missing] background noise from the city" (*Taken* 59), it is particularly the city's soundscape that is an unmistakable signifier for urbanity. The phrase "the sounds of the city" features in almost all of the novels, but an exemplary quote can be found in *Taken*:

> I could hear the sounds of the city all around us; the whistling of the wind on the rooftops, the creak of stone and metal from the buildings nearby, the low steady growl of traffic. Voices echoed up from the streets around, a train rumbled along one of the railway bridges in the middle distance, and far overhead an airliner drew a clear contrail of white across the blue sky. Millions of people, millions of stories, all blending into the sounds of London. (315)

The purpose of the constant presence of sounds which characterises urbanity in this passage is not to convey any notions of the menacing urbanism. Apart from the use of the word *growl*, the soundscape does not appear to be particularly threatening; rather, it is precisely the "background noise" (*Taken* 59) which Verus finds missing in Wales. The fact that he characterises Hampstead Heath by the same absence of sounds aligns the park with the Welsh countryside as a space which evokes connotations of *nature* as opposed to *the city*, despite its physical location within the confines

of the urban environment. The novels turn Hampstead Heath into a signifier of nature in London by setting it apart from the city surrounding it, predominantly by marking the park as acoustically different.[15]

As the plot in the novels progresses, Hampstead Heath becomes synonymous with Arachne's cavern located in a ravine in the park and, as a result, obtains the same connotations of homeliness for Verus that he associates with the spider's lair in a *totum pro parte* fashion. At the beginning of the series, the giant spider is his only friend and mentor, providing him with guidance and counsel as well as with magical items that help him on his quest. Her cavern under a tree at Hampstead Heath is characterised numerous times as "home" or "the safest place to be", not seldom in direct contrast to his own flat and shop in Camden Town (*Fated* 85–91; *Chosen* 262; *Veiled* 235; *Burned* 37; *Fallen* 101; *Forged* 36), thus representing homeliness and safety for Verus.[16] As he acquires more friends, Arachne's lair becomes one of the group's central meeting-points and is thus transformed into a quasi-headquarter and a refuge to which they can return after their various operations. The motherly, caring role that Arachne takes on for the group in general, but Verus in particular, emphasises the series' equation of natural spaces with female nourishment. Jointly, the notions of friendship, solidarity, refuge, and care that culminate in the cavern, and by extension in the representation of Hampstead Heath, result in the park as being one of the few places that Verus calls home throughout the novels.

How closely the respective association of sounds with the city and silence with the supposedly natural Heath is tied to the park's fantastical inhabitant becomes evident when Arachne's lair is invaded by government forces who seek to apprehend Verus for alleged treason.

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[15] The use of sounds as a spatial marker here recalls William Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. In act III, scene II Caliban tells Stephano and Trinculo when they hear mysterious music played by Ariel that "the isle is full of noises, // Sounds and sweet airs, that give delight, and hurt not. // Sometimes a thousand twangling instruments // Will hum about mine ears; and sometime voices, // That, if I then had waked after long sleep, // Will make me sleep again" (136–41). Michel Neill points out that in Early Modern English, *noise* could well denote "a pleasant or melodious sound" (54) and draws attention to Caliban's explication of the "soothing effect" (53) of this island music. Famously, Caliban appeals to Stephano and Trinculo that they "Be not afeard" (136) when Ariel starts playing. John P. Cutts argues that music in the plays serves to communicate the island as "a type of golden-age island, where no ill is ultimately allowed, where strife and friction are allayed and everything is to be wrapped in a serene air of celestial harmony" (347). In this sense, Mary Thomas Crane argues that "Caliban's attentiveness to the mysterious music of the island" suggests "his closeness to nature" (188). Where in Shakespeare's times harmonious music has been used to identify nature sonically, the ubiquitous cacophony of the urban soundscape in the *Alex Verus* series necessitates a complete lack of sound as its natural counterpart.

[16] Arachne's cavern can also be contrasted to another underground space in the series, the Council headquarters beneath central Westminster. This area is described as "the heart of the City" (*Veiled* 208); a notion which I will investigate more fully in chapter 5.1.1. Like Arachne's lair, the Council headquarters are a network of tunnels, but these are not natural caves but brightly lit stone corridors with twenty-feet-high ceilings. As a result, where Arachne's cavern is a retreat for Verus where he can form personal connections, the headquarters are described as being "filled with people, men and women hurrying back and forth" and feeling "brisk and impersonal" (*Veiled* 210). This difference in describing two underground spaces in London reinforces the different connotations and values the series affords to natural and urban domains. Located in a park, Arachne's cavern is imbued with notions of natural homeliness and personal connections, whereas the Council headquarters are associated with politics and emotional distance.

During the confrontation, Arachne is forced to flee. As her lair is abandoned the Heath subsequently loses its notions of homeliness and security. Conveyed via sound is the impression that the city has encroached on the Heath and has transformed it irrevocably: "Hampstead Heath was warm in the afternoon sun. Carried on the wind, I could hear the sounds of people talking, children playing, the barking of dogs. It felt like a different world" (*Fallen* 342). Although the sun is shining warmly on the scenery, the metaphorical warmth of nourishment and protection that the Heath previously afforded to Verus is now absent. The park feels differently, not least because the city's soundscape – people talking, children playing, dogs barking – has taken over the previously silent space. All that is left for Verus is the nostalgic longing for the place that the Heath once was to him but no longer is, which manifests in a sense of loss of home. After the house in Wales, Arachne's cavern at the Heath is thus the second space in the series that has been characterised as a safe haven on account of its naturalness and 'un-Londonness', but both are eventually invaded by the city.[17]

The third natural space in the series that offers refuge to Verus and his friends is the shadow realm called 'the Hollow'. As with the description of the Welsh countryside, the introduction of the space in the series emphasises its beauty on account of its naturalness, framed authoritatively by Verus as the narrating voice:

> I hadn't been prepared for how beautiful it was.
> We'd stepped out onto a grassy clearing in the middle of light woodland. Most of the trees were the same green, thicket-like ones we'd seen on the hilltop on the Chilterns, but they seemed bigger and stronger, more real somehow, their leaves more bright, the branches more thick. Pathways of packed dirt wound through the trees, roots showing through the earth, and flowered bushes formed clumps on the grass.
> To our right was blue sky. And to the left was orange sky, and ahead was green sky, and behind was violet sky. (*Bound* 181)

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[17] A very similar and yet slightly contrastive passage can be found in Kate Griffin's *The Midnight Mayor*. Matthew Swift travels by Tube through central London to the Hackney Marshes. The stream-of-consciousness-like enumeration of various Tube stations firmly links the Marshes to the city and yet "this was a place with a history humanity had not fully managed to tame" (466). The description offered by Swift foregrounds the naturalness of the marshes: "The place had once been a swamp or marsh, and still looked it. The Lee Valley might have been tamed, the river diverted to a more useful course than through valuable real estate on its way down to the Thames, but the drooping, green-brown grass and thick, razor-stemmed reeds still told you, if the spongy ground didn't, that this . . . was not by any means a public park – since that implied benches, bins, children's play areas, flower gardens, ordered hedges and tactfully planted trees. Hackney Marshes had none of these things, and was all the purer for it" (466). Where Alex Verus acknowledges the constructedness of Hampstead Heath as a park but still values its for its *ostensible* wilderness, Matthew Swift sets up the Hackney Marshes as the real thing, a place of nature in the city. Nonetheless, expansive urbanism is afoot in Griffin's series as well and threatens the existence of the marshes, which elicits the same sense of loss in Swift as the conquest of Arachne's lair has for Alex Verus: "Hackney Marshes - get them while you can. A few more years, and they might have been mown away to make place for a running track, a tennis field, a sports ground, a swimming pool, something, where the world can come and celebrate this strangeness that mortals seem to find so fascinating - Olympic games" (*Mayor* 465). The redevelopment of the London East End for the 2012 Olympics is reinterpreted here by Matthew Swift into an instance of urban expansion to the detriment of natural spaces, to which his affective response is that of nostalgia.

The defining feature of this description is one of excess. The Hollow is anchored in the English countryside, the Chilterns, but its natural features, above all the trees and the sky, are enhanced by virtue of the magic that helped create the shadow realm, as the use of the adverbial *more* three times in a short span indicates. Verus and his friends quickly set up camp in the Hollow after they have made clear to the original creator, the hamadryad Karyos, that their intentions are friendly and not hostile towards her, and they start referring to the Hollow as "home" (*Marked* 40; cf. also *Bound* 225).

In line with natural spaces acquiring connotations of care, the relationship between Verus, his girlfriend Anne Walker, and Karyos is framed as one of parents and their child. When entering the Hollow, the group wins the upper hand over the hamadryad in a short battle and could have killed her but did not. Consequently, Verus and Walker nurse Karyos back to health and even start referring to themselves as her parents:

> I looked at Anne, slender and thoughtful, gazing down at the cocoon, and had to smile.
> Anne looked at me curiously. "What's so funny?"
> "I was just imagining her coming out of her cocoon and calling you 'mama.'"
> Anne smiled. "Would that make you her father?" (*Fallen* 80)

Clearly, as she had in the safe house in Wales, Walker assumes the same role of the stereotypical 'angel of the house' in the Hollow, taking care of Karyos and stocking up supplies while Verus is at work (*Forged* 37). After the loss of the safe house and Arachne's cavern, then, the Hollow acquires the notion of perfect domesticity for Verus. The nostalgic sentiments with which the natural spaces of home are narrated in the series become not only spatial but also temporal in this aspect. The longing for a home is equated with the (re-)establishment of traditional gender roles. In London, the dynamics between Verus and Walker are different. Both live in separate apartments in different parts of the city – Verus in Camden, Walker in Honor Oak – and Walker is presented as being quite capable of leading her own independent life. The Hollow thus becomes a place which Verus identifies with notions of homeliness and security by dint not only of its natural characteristics but also because here the traditional gender roles of male protection and work and female domesticity are restored.

When, for reasons unimportant in the context of this particular argument, Walker ends their relationship and leaves the shadow realm, Verus shows the same feelings of loss and regret that were already displayed when his former homes were invaded: "I was . . . opening my eyes to see the ceiling of my cottage in the Hollow. Anne's side of the bed was empty and I was alone" (*Fallen* 302). Reinforcing the idea of traditional marriage life and domesticity that characterises the Hollow, Walker later remarks that she is "losing all the kids in the divorce" (*Forged* 290) when she returns to the shadow realm to recruit Karyos for her own purposes but the hamadryad refuses. On the level of the story, Walker's departure also marks the point when the Hollow begins to

become increasingly precarious for Verus and his remaining friends. While they secured the shadow realm with magical wards, other mages start breaching them and enter the Hollow uninvited (*Forged* 308). Consequently, Verus is then forced to abandon the Hollow as well, as it has become unsafe without Walker's presence as the caring female figure. The feeling of nostalgic longing for better times is expressed explicitly on the narrative level when Verus departs for London to start preparing for the final confrontation of the series and tells the reader that "I took a last look at the beauty of the Hollow, then walked away" (*Risen* 109). At its final appearance in the series, the Hollow is one last time designated as being aesthetically beautiful due to its natural characteristics. At the same time, the loss of Walker as a partner denies Verus the possibility of dwelling in this space, thus causing the sentimental regret which is indicative of nostalgia. All of this suggests to me the inextricable link between a caring female figure and the notions of security and homeliness of natural spaces that the series invokes throughout.

In conclusion, Verus's attitude towards both the city and the countryside does not really conform to his self-characterisation as "an urban person at heart" (*Hidden* 30). Instead, the pastoral romanticisation of nature and the flagrant ambivalence with which he regards London conform more to nineteenth-century anti-urbanist sentiments which denigrated cities as centres of moral corruption. These sentiments come much closer to the representation of London in the series, as the capital houses a corrupt magical government with whom Verus is constantly at odds to the point of mortal danger (e.g. *Chosen* 258; *Veiled* 230). More explicitly, Verus's valorisation of his safe house in the actual countryside, Hampstead Heath as nature's surrogate within London, and the fantastic space of the Hollow as 'safe' and 'home' as well as the mourning of losing all three spaces echo what Williams has identified as "a Romantic structure of feeling" that builds on "the assertion of nature" (*Country* 79) but evokes feelings of retrospect by emphasising regret. Similarly, Svetlana Boym has identified the notion of loss to be at the centre of reflective nostalgia, that is, the same feeling of mournfully looking back to an ostensibly simpler, more stable time. As Larry H. Peer points out, while "Romanticism clearly represents a desire for identification with the elemental natural world" (1), "it is the *tension* between city and country, and the possibility of an *ideal* urban space that powers much of the metaphorical positioning of Romantic art" (2; original emphasis). At the same time, I have argued, the novels depict nostalgic structures of feeling in the spatial sense of the word in Verus's constant yearning for a home. As I have shown, the *Alex Verus* series links these feelings explicitly to natural spaces, and thus to the countryside, in contrast to the perilous environment of London which can never be a home to Verus in the sense of offering stability, security, and care. By juxtaposing a pastoral representation of nature, either in form of the (Welsh) countryside, Hampstead Heath, or the Hollow, to London, the novels constantly evoke the Romantic idea that the 'natural' countryside is "ethically and aesthetically superior" (Finch,

"Modern" 29). In stark contrast, as the centre of a corrupt and defective political system, London fails to fulfil any kind of urban ideal but becomes a perilous space in which the hero can assert his violent masculinity. As a character-driven series, the most immediate effect of this failure in *Alex Verus* is that the main character turns his back on the capital and, despite reaffirming that "London is my home" (*Bound* 156), seeks refuge in seemingly natural environments.

It adds to my argument that the incredibly saccharine epilogue of the series, set after the end of the political conflict and focalised from the point of view of Verus's former apprentice and close friend Luna Mancuso, has her visiting Verus and Walker again living the life of peaceful domesticity in an undisclosed location in the countryside, though this time for real and lastingly. Significantly, Mancuso also remarks that "I've always lived in cities, but I like how peaceful the countryside is" (*Risen* 375), thus setting herself up as Verus's successor in focalising the narrative. In doing so, the series comes full circle in the epilogue and openly acknowledges through the switch of perspective what Verus's own narration has tried to mask from the beginning, namely that the countryside is preferable to London. In this reading, the narrative pattern that the natural spaces are constantly evaded by London and the politics of the city acquires a nostalgic sense of regret that speaks to the ubiquity of an ever-expansive London in the contemporary fantastic imagination. These notions, that is, both the feeling of regretful retrospect in connection to a romanticised countryside and the aggressiveness of London's expansionism, are more prominently addressed in chapter 4.2. Before, however, I want to offer a reading of Ben Aaronovitch's *Rivers of London* novels as engaging more nuancedly and less explicitly for the purpose of narrative with the dichotomy between the city and the country.

4.1.2   London as a Progressive City in the *Rivers of London* Series

Ben Aaronovitch's *Rivers of London* series displays life in London much more positively than Jacka's and hence takes a different perspective with regard to the countryside as well. The focalised point of view in the novels is that of the arrogant urbanite who sees everything outside of the capital as backwards 'hinterlands', since they are narrated by Peter Grant, a newly appointed Police Constable and Londoner through and through. This chapter begins its line of arguments by focusing on Grant as a character who embodies the values of London in contrast to his superior, DCI Thomas Nightingale, who is 'a man of the countryside' despite his professional career in the city. I will then turn to selected readings of general representations of the countryside in the series before proceeding with an examination of two concrete country spaces contrasted with London: an unlocalised setting in the countryside where the river spirit Father Thames resides and Herefordshire where Grant is sent for an investigation in the fifth instalment. I argue that in the *Rivers of London* series, the countryside is perpetually used as a pastoral foil to the city on the one hand in order to legitimate a particularly progressive image of London until the protagonist actually

travels to the countryside in *Foxglove Summer*. This dichotomy of city and country is foregrounded in the plot conflict in the first instalment, whose resolution can be read as an argument for reconciling the two disparate imaginary versions of England represented by the different domains.[18] On the other hand, the actual engagement with a particular rural region, Herefordshire, in *Foxglove Summer* denies any sentimentalising notions of quiet village life and thus undermines the use of the countryside as the city's 'Other'. Throughout the series, however, the novels present a nostalgically distorted image of life in London, which valorises the capital's progressiveness during the 'Cool Britannia' era but ignores that this marketing campaign does not accurately capture the status quo in the extradiegetic world.

Grant's valorisation of London is epitomised by his opinion that "[i]t's a sad fact of modern life that if you drive long enough, sooner or later you must leave London behind" (*Moon* 1), openly admitting that, to him, the civilised world is effectively encircled by the M25 and the rest of Britain is "what Londoner's like to think of as 'everywhere else'" (*Foxglove* 8). Consequently, his expertise lies in decoding the city: reading the signs of London's streets is one of the assets he brings to the Folly, Scotland Yard's Special Assessment Unit (SAU) responsible for fighting supernatural crime, that consisted of DCI Thomas Nightingale alone prior to Grant's joining. Magic prolonging his life, Nightingale was born in 1900 and thus his area of expertise is not decoding the signs of modern London but rather being finely attuned to the nuances of a British national identity that is rooted in the countryside.[19]

Their difference in character is explicitly coded in terms of the dichotomy between London and the surrounding countryside. While Grant grew up in Kentish Town, Nightingale was raised at a boarding school in Buckinghamshire, which equipped them with different knowledges about the world. Nightingale is aghast that Grant "can know five types of brick bond" but "can't identify the most common of trees", to which the latter drily comments that, "[a]ctually, I knew about twenty-three types of brick bond if you counted Tudor and the other early modern styles" (*Homes* 18). Knowledge of trees and bricks respectively stands in as a communicator for disparate ways of viewing the world. Nightingale, who was raised in a rural area – Buckinghamshire – learned how

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[18] In general, Aaronovitch's series disregards the other three of the four British nations and is concerned with negotiations of Englishness rather than Britishness, which my discussion of the novels will reflect.

[19] The novels frequently tie Nightingale's characterisation to signifiers of the British Empire. Nightingale is described as being upper-class, having "a proper RP accent, like an English villain in a Hollywood movie" (*Rivers* 28), and not knowing his way around modern technology. Nightingale's characterisation as an anachronistic relict from the imperial past is justified at the level of the story by his upbringing in the Edwardian Era and serves to communicate the notion that prior to Grant's arrival the Folly was an archaic institution with no place in the contemporary world, being "held together with spit and sealing wax and the old boy network" as "a typical British mash-up" (*Rivers* 239). In this respect, Nightingale occasionally displays his own nostalgia for the times in which he knew all the tricks and indulges in reminiscing about the time when "[t]he world was different before the war [and . . .] we still dreamt of secret caves in the Mountains of the Moon, and tiger hunting in the Punjab" (*Moon* 112). The latter remark is commented on in the narration focalised through Grant as being about a time "[w]hen all the map was pink" (*Moon* 112), thus explicating the link to the Empire.

to distinguish trees from each other, whereas Grant learned about bricks, because he grew up in the city. By extension, Nightingale views the world as someone who has internalised other values and systems of knowledge than Grant. Londonness, the novels seem to suggest here, amounts to a specific way of seeing the world that is fundamentally different from a countryside mentality.[20]

That being a Londoner is tantamount to viewing the world in a particular way instead of actually being born in London becomes clear when Grant quotes his father at length on what it takes to become a Londoner:

> My dad says being a Londoner has nothing to do with where you're born. He says that there are people who get off a jumbo jet at Heathrow, go through immigration waving any kind of passport, hop on the tube and by the time the train's pulled into Piccadilly Circus, they've become a Londoner. He said there were others, some of whom were born within the sound of the Bow Bells, who spend their whole life dreaming of an escape.[21] (*Moon* 224)

Londonness, Grant agrees with his father, is not tied to the place of residence or the birthplace, but to the mentality of Londoners and thus equivalent to seeing the world in a particular way. The complementary contrast to a London-specific mentality is provided by the countryside, which is not only demonstrated by Nightingale's suggestive admonishment that "[t]here's more to life than London" (*Moon* 110), but also in the way the above quotation continues. According to Grant, people who dream of escaping London, that is, those who are not 'true Londoners' "almost always move to Norfolk, where the skies are big, the land is flat and the demographics are full of creamy white goodness" (*Moon* 224). This last part of the quotation betrays Grant's derogatory arrogance towards the countryside, both in terms of the landscape and the resident population. Norfolk's "big skies" and "flat land" suggest a vastness and emptiness that stands in stark opposition to the interspersion of the narrative with Grant's extensive historical and architectural knowledge of London (e.g. *Rivers* 17; *Moon* 25; *Whispers* 31–32; *Homes* 86). The contrast with the countryside, for which Norfolk stands in in exemplary function, sketches a different mentality along the lines of both the actual landscape and the population, which conforms to Raymond Williams's inventory of derogatory associations of the countryside with backwardness and ignorance in contrast to the city's notions of progressiveness and civilisation. It goes without saying that these associations are stereotypical distortions. The signifier in the example above is the dense architecture of the city which is contrasted with a supposed vastness in the countryside and, by extension, connotes the intermingling of different people in the city which allegedly leads to more tolerance and openness

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[20] For a detailed study on London mentality, see Nora Pleßke's *The Intelligible Metropolis: Urban Mentality in Contemporary London Novels* (transcript, 2014).

[21] Bow Bells refers to St Mary-le-Bow, one of London's oldest and most famous churches, which is located near St Paul's Cathedral. In the Middle Ages, St Mary-le-Bow was the home of the 'curfew' bells which rung from the site in the middle of London's central street to indicate the city gates closing for the night. So, if you could hear the Bow Bells, you must be a true Londoner.

towards others, whereas in the countryside one simply does not encounter so many people and thus one remains more limited in one's social network.

This opposition is used on the level of the narrative to set up Grant as a character who feels most comfortable in London, whereas when he has to leave the city to drive "out in the sticks", he does not "know what [is] normal" (*Foxglove* 60). In order to navigate countryside terrain such as the "wilds of Essex" he needs "a trusty native guide by my side" (*Homes* 280); a role that is performed by his Essex-born colleague Lesley May in *Broken Homes* and the local PC Dominic Croft in *Foxglove Summer*. Together with the previous quotation, the use of vocabulary here is striking. Having the mixed-'race' Grant narrate the countryside in such a rhetoric bears distinctly colonial undertones and constructs it as spatial Other to London. Words and phrases such as "the sticks", "wilds", and the necessity for a "native guide" construct regions outside of London as wilderness. This evocation echoes the established stereotype of the countryside as backwards and implies the equation of the capital with civilisation. Moreover, the notion that in Norfolk, "the demographics are full of creamy white goodness" suggests that not only the landscape, but the people, too, are different outside of London by harking back to the idea of London as a multicultural melting pot, in opposition to the 'rest' of England, which is – at least in public perception – much less diverse in terms of ethnicity. The idea is repeated, again with regard to Essex, when Grant refers to the location of a farm where they suspect criminals to be hiding as being located not only "in the middle of nowhere" (*Homes* 279), but in the "dark heart of Essex" (280). The choice of words recalls Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899), in which the sailor Charles Marlow tells his listeners the story of his assignment as steamer captain for a Belgian company sailing up the Congo River.[22] For the mixed-'race' Grant, multicultural London is the locus of civilisation, whereas the English countryside with its overwhelmingly white population takes the role of the 'Other'.[23]

In addition to this colonial rhetoric, the series uses the vernacular of the fantastic to imbue the countryside with notions of quintessential Englishness by constantly alluding to J.R.R. Tolkien's

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[22] In postcolonial criticism, *Heart of Darkness* has been variously praised for its critique of imperialism and attacked as perpetuating "the image of Africa as 'the other world,' the antithesis of Europe and therefore of civilisation" (Achebe 3). This is not the place to recount this debate, and I point interested readers instead to Terry Collits' *Postcolonial Conrad: Paradoxes of Empire* (Routledge, 2005) as a starting point. In any case, *Rivers of London* employs the expression as a coded reference to imperialism and does not engage with the subtleties of the critical reception of Joseph Conrad's opus.

[23] It must be noted, however, that for all the series's valorisation of the capital's multiculturalism, Grant notes that he stands out in London in certain situations as well, most prominently when riding the tube. "[S]lightly ethnic as I was" (*Rivers* 337), he gets more room than other passengers, and he occasionally plays through scenarios in his head what other passengers might think of him in a state of hyper-awareness: "What if that suavely handsome yet ethnic young man asks me for money? . . . If he's been hurt in a fight does he need help? If I help him will I find myself drawn into a threatening situation, or an adventure, or a wild interracial romance? . . . If he opens his jacket and yells 'God is great', will I make it down the other end of the carriage in time?" (*Rivers* 244). These moments of introspection on his ethnic identity in direct connection to London as a multicultural city are sparse, however, and far outweighed by Grant's positive evaluation of life in London.

The Lord of the Rings, which has become associated in the popular imagination with a sense of Anglo-Saxon Englishness.[24] For instance, as Grant is on his way to Herefordshire in *Foxglove Summer*, he describes the roads as "twisting through a country so photogenically rural that I half expected to meet Bilbo Baggins around the next corner" (10). These references imply another level of meaning that attaches itself to the city-country dichotomy: that of a specific sense of nostalgia. The type of pastoral nostalgia evoked by Tolkien's descriptions of the Shire in particular, which is called up in *Rivers of London* as an intertextual foil, clashes with the imagination of London.[25] The series perpetually constructs a type of countryside as the London's 'Other' that is then dismissed as not existing in actuality, as the reference to a literary construction of the countryside in form of *The Lord of the Rings* elucidates pointedly. On the one hand, the novels go at lengths to conjure up the image of a beautiful countryside of the kind that Tolkien evokes in his depiction of the Shire in *The Lord of the Rings*, ostensibly populated by people who might as well still be Tolkien's contemporary readership for all their backwardness.[26] On the other hand, this image is then dismissed for its stereotypical invocations in order to construct London as the exact imaginary other, thus lending the city the – equally stereotypically simplistic – notions of progressiveness and tolerance, albeit without the critical reflection directed at the constructions of the countryside.

The point of view of the arrogant urbanite is reiterated from a different narrative perspective in the companion novella *What Abigail Did that Summer*. The novella focalises through Grant's thirteen-year-old cousin, Abigail Kamara, much in the same way as the main novels do through Grant. In addition, the two characters are extremely similar, to an extent that Kamara sometimes feels like a younger, female version of Grant. The plot of the novella revolves around Kamara's investigation of a series of cases where children have gone missing on the Heath. In contrast to Jacka's *Alex Verus* series, the park is never set up as a natural space within an urban environment but always viewed as part of the city. While Kamara briefly refers to the possibility of

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[24] For pastoral readings of Tolkien's legendarium, most prominently *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit*, please be referred to Anne B. Koch's doctoral thesis *Of Loss and Longing: Nostalgia, Utopian Vision, and the Pastoral in J.R.R. Tolkien's* The Lord of the Rings *and* The Hobbit (Universität Trier, 2017). Shorter forays into the topic are provided by Julian Eilmann's discussion of "Romantische Landschaften in Tolkiens Werk" (*Hither Shore: Interdisciplinary Journal on Modern Fantasy Literature*, vol. 11, 2014, pp. 64–79) and in Maria Sachiko Cecire's *Re-Enchanted: The Rise of Children's Fantasy Literature in the Twentieth Century* (U of Minnesota P, 2019).

[25] Due to its pastoral character, the *Lord of the Rings* is treated as a coded reference to the motif of yearning for an "unlocalised 'Old England'" (Williams 10). In chapter 4.2.2 on *Rivers of London*, I argue that this particular type of nostalgia is given a decidedly nationalist twist in the series in the context of the 2016 EU referendum.

[26] In addition to the example that I gave in the main text, *Rivers of London*'s aligns Tolkienian fantasy on two other occasions with a sense of misguided nostalgia. Firstly, the novels depict the main villain, Martin Chorley, on whom I will concentrate in more detail later, as an enormous Tolkien nerd. Chorley's fanatic vision of magically returning Britain to the times of King Arthur in order to improve everything he thinks is wrong with the country is thus attributed to a certain degree to his reading of Tolkien and taking the novels as inspiration for how Britain should be like. Secondly, when Grant is captured and imprisoned by Chorley in *Lies Sleeping*, the only reading that he finds in his cell is Tolkien's *The Silmarillion*. Throughout the two chapters during which Grant is imprisoned, the narrative is interspersed with his critique of Tolkien's writing, which he finds boring and uninstructive. As a final signal of his criticism, the book is employed as a vital part of his final escape, but only as a *material* book and not as a literary work (*Lies* 293–327).

invoking the park as nature, which is then extended to the countryside as another 'natural' space, she is aware of the fact that a park is decidedly not nature, nor a space that invokes the countryside, and that thus any connotations of the country are better placed elsewhere.

In the *Rivers of London* storyworld, the eponymous London rivers have embodiments in the form of deities. Thus, because "Hampstead Heath lies in the arms of two branches of the River Fleet" (65), the park is Fleet's domain. Like the rest of London, Hampstead Heath is portrayed as a liminal place where the fantastical and the mundane intersect, sometimes to the point of indistinction, as Kamara's following comment makes clear:

> I am sitting right in the middle of the Summer Court of the Goddess of the River Fleet. Or I am sitting down to a picnic with a bunch of women in the sunbathing meadow of the Kenwood Ladies' Bathing Pond. Maybe I'm doing both – sometimes it's hard to tell. (75)

The location of the Heath within Fleet's domain locates it as part of the city, since the river deities have no power outside the city's boundaries and Fleet could not hold court there. Like in the *Alex Verus* series, the park is then noted for its lack of urban soundscape: "It's hushed and quiet and you could be in a forest for all that you can hear the outside world" (96). However, the illusion is quickly broken and the Heath firmly linked to the city by way of its *genius locus*. Through the magical aura in the form of sensory expressions that all river deities radiate, Fleet is explicitly connected to the modern technology of the city that was established along her course rather than to the ostensibly natural environment of her headwaters. When she speaks, Kamara hears beneath Fleet's voice "the roar of the printing press and the crackle of telegraph wires" (72) and reports that "her words draw me closer with promises of secrets and gossip, of witty conversation and smoky after-hours clubs" (73). The references here are to the printing industry that set up court along the Fleet Street, whose very name indicates that in its place was once a river. In this example, Kamara's sensory experiences construct and semanticise the Heath as urban space. The fantastic is used here to signal the park's belonging to the urban environment, which is equally characterised by the simultaneous existence of the mundane and the supernatural throughout the series. As a result, Kamara does not mistake the Heath for anything else but a part of the metropolis. When exploring the park, she explicitly states that "[f]ortunately we're not in the real countryside so there's lots of paths and no chance of being eaten by yokels" (11). She does know her way around the Heath and has no need for "a trusty native guide by my side" (*Homes* 280) of the kind her cousin sarcastically demands for trips to the countryside. Kamara is aware of the park only pretending to be a natural space but regards it as element of the metropolis. The real countryside, to her, is elsewhere, as the use of the derogatory "yokels" for country people implies.[27] This point of view portrays the

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[27] The *Oxford English Dictionary* gives the explanation of the term as signifying "an uneducated and unsophisticated person from the countryside; a rustic, a country bumpkin" ("Yokel") and explicitly designates its use as derogatory.

countryside as London's hinterland and is very much that of the arrogant urbanite, which likens Abigail Kamara to her cousin Peter Grant.

The perpetuation of a simplistically stereotypical image of the city and the country also lies at the centre of the plot conflict in the first instalment of the series, which is also titled *Rivers of London*. The initial murder investigation in the novel draws Grant into a territorial dispute between the two deities of the River Thames. Together with her tributaries, the eponymous rivers of London in the form of *genii locorum* form an extended family in the series, with each family member representing one of the rivers. The deities are split into a traveller-styled male group around Father Thames, who represent the Thames' tributaries inland from Teddington Lock, and a female group modelled on Nigerian women around Mama Thames, who are the tutelary deities of the tributaries downstream of the lock. Located in the Borough of Richmond, Teddington Lock marks the point at which the River Thames becomes tidal. As Grant and Nightingale discuss, the fact that Teddington Lock marks the river's tidal limit and constitutes the boundary between the legal powers of the Port of London Authority and the Environmental Agency explains why the territorial border for the deities' respective sphere of influence is located there on the level of the story (*Rivers* 188–89). However, as Father Thames's domain used to stretch all the way to London in the narrative's past, his offspring seek to reclaim the capital as their territory, but Grant is eventually able to broker a peace between the two factions before the situation escalates.

Genii locorum are, in the strictest sense of the word, spirits of a certain place. In the series' storyworld, the term most commonly refers to river gods and goddesses, though trees and buildings seem also to be able to acquire *genii locorum*.[28] They also have tremendous magical power, as Grant experiences first-hand when he visits Mama Thames for the first time:

> As I stepped closer I could smell salt water and coffee, diesel and bananas, chocolate and fish guts. I didn't need Nightingale to tell me I was sensing something supernatural, a glamour so strong it was like being washed away by the tide. In her presence I found nothing strange in the fact that the Goddess of the River was Nigerian. (*Rivers* 110)

The olfactory impressions described here firmly link together the two different domains that are embodied by Mama Thames. Salt water, diesel, and fish guts relate to quintessential Englishness and foreground the self-identification of the English as a seafaring and trading folk.[29] Coffee, bananas, and chocolate express the exoticism of the former imperial colonies, for whose colonisation the English dominance on the oceans was a prerequisite. Together, the Nigerian-born

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[28] As far as it is explained in the series, *genii locorum* can both arise from a human being melting their life with a place and be born to existing ones (*Rivers* 114; *Foxglove* 232–34).

[29] A little more obscure than the references to salt water and fish guts, the mention of diesel in this line of signifiers is read as connoting ship engines and thus contributing to the overall semantic impression of a harbour and the sea.

Mama Thames thus stands for London's cosmopolitan 'melting pot' fusion of immigrant culture and a sense of traditional Englishness.[30]

The sensual impressions Grant experiences when he feels Father Thames's powers stand in direct contrast to this invocation of multiculturalism: "I felt the force of his personality drag at me: beer and skittles it promised, the smell of horse manure and walking home from the pub by moonlight, a warm fireside and uncomplicated women" (*Rivers* 180). The signifiers employed for Father Thames echo earlier descriptions of the river god, as they occur for instance in Alexander Pope's "Windsor Forest" (1713). The poem also draws the connection between Father Thames and the moonlight: "Old Father *Thames* advanc'd his rev'rend Head. // His Tresses dropt with Dews, and o'er the Stream // His shining Horns diffus'd a golden Gleam: // Grav'd on his Urn appear'd the Moon, that guides // His swelling Waters, and alternate Tydes" (Pope 14; original emphasis).[31] The overall impression the description in *Rivers of London* invokes is that of Father Thames representing a different aspect of traditional Englishness than Mama Thames. His version does not concentrate on the sea-borders of England, which suggest openness and outward expansion, but is grounded in the countryside. Beer and skittles refer to pub culture and traditional games; horse manure and warm firelight are obvious signifiers of the stereotypical quiet village life that Raymond Williams also identified as positive stereotypes of peace, innocence, and simple virtue (*Country* 1).

Grant directly considers the different implications of, or sources for, Father and Mama Thames's personalities: "They both have genuine power . . . But it feels different. Hers is definitely from the sea, from the port and all that. His is all from the earth and the weather and leprechauns and crystals, for all I know" (*Rivers* 188). In this sense, the god and goddess of the river represent several binaries at once: land and sea, past and present, masculinity and femininity, country and city, and, perhaps most significantly, traditional Englishness and cosmopolitan Britishness, and they are positioned to be in tension with one another; a tension that is emplotted in their war for territory in the novel.

Over the course of the novel, Grant learns in investigating the sources of the war that the supernatural conflict is tied to historical developments in London.[32] While Father Thames originally

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[30] It must be acknowledged that such a reading ignores entirely the extremely problematic repercussions of colonialism and imperialism. This is not due to any oversight on my part, but because the text does not foreground these aspects. The olfactory invocation of colonial exoticism is instrumentalised by the aspiration to present Mama Thames as blending two different identities, both of whom are treated as English by the text, however. Through its mixed-'race' protagonist, the series does problematise questions of ethnicity, for instance in a discussion around the problematic implications of the term *black magician* (*Moon* 105–13), but it does not in this exemplary passage. In good favour, one could argue that the syntactic co-ordination normalises the immigrant experience in the sense of being as English as the traditional seafaring.

[31] For a reading of "Windsor Forest" as deliberately employing nostalgia for the politics of Pope's own time, see Santesso (45).

[32] As I have pointed out in chapter 2.2, this narrative blend of real-world history with supernatural elements is typical for the urban fantasy genre.

occupied the entire river as his territory, after the Great Stink of 1858 and after the pollution of the rivers had killed the *genii locorum* that manifested as his sons, he had left the part downstream of Teddington Lock to itself and become a peripatetic spirit of the River Valley. As Mama Thames complains: "He never came back, not even after Bazalgette put the sewers in. Not even for the Blitz, not even when the city was burning" (*Rivers* 115). With Father Thames having abandoned the city, the position of Thames deity in the tideway part of the river was vacated and then filled by Mama Thames roughly one century later, around 1960. Having come from Nigeria to London in 1957 to train as a nurse, she failed her exams, suffered romantic disappointment, and eventually decided to kill herself by jumping off London Bridge, which is how she ended up in the river and becoming its goddess (*Rivers* 114).

In addition to the mere significance for the story in *Rivers of London*, the tale of Mama Thames's transformation into the goddess of the river can be read against London's history as an erstwhile imperial capital. The fictional character of Mama Thames is here representative of extradiegetic immigrants who came to Britain during the 1950s and 1960s and to whom the old Empire and its capital promised happiness, prosperity, and an extensive family. But while some achieved these dreams, many were faced with hardship and racism in Britain. On the level of the story, Mama Thames personifies London as an old man in her account of the origins of the conflict with Father Thames. London becomes a person "with a long, exciting life, full of stories and memories", which "terrified that [it] was going to be old and frail with no one to look after [it]" (*Rivers* 115), searched for a new postimperial national identity and tended to cling to old ways.[33] London, so the story goes, eventually came more or less to terms with the bygone imperial past and experienced a prosperous period of economic upswing, which Mama Thames attributes directly to her influence: "'I have been here ever since,' she said. 'This is the cleanest industrial river in Europe. Do you think that happened by accident? Swinging London, Cool Britannia, the Thames Barrier; do you think that all happened by accident?'" (*Rivers* 115). Mama Thames makes a valid point here, namely that from the perspective of the early 2010s, when *Rivers of London* was written,

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[33] For its internal logic to work, the novel combines several rhetorical instances of *pars pro toto*, which complicates the understanding. Somewhat simplistically, Mama Thames stands in for all the extradiegetic immigrants who moved from the former colonies to the United Kingdom in the 1950s and 1960s. The most famous example of the increase of immigration is the so-called 'Windrush generation', named after the group of 800 predominantly Afro-Carribbean migrant who arrived with the *Empire Windrush* at the port of Tilbury near London on 22 June 1948. Immigration from African countries, such as Nigeria, also increased in this period, which makes Mama Thames a credible representation with regard to extradiegetic history. Equally simplistically, in her account London then comes to represent all of Britain and the British Empire at large. The decline of the Empire is rendered as the personification of London as an old man. In doing so, this paragraph demonstrates again the intersections between the city-country dichotomy and London as a (post)imperial metropolis, which tends to take the form of the city-as-body metaphor, as illustrated here by the "old man". I have nonetheless decided to retain third person neutral pronouns for London and not partake in the personification myself. The city-as-body metaphor will be examined in chapter 5, but since the historical context of immigration and London cosmopolitanism is relevant for the discussion of the city-country binary that opens up between Mama and Father Thames, the information is included here.

the postimperial capital has done fairly well for itself.[34] What is more, she suggests that it was the influence of Commonwealth immigrants like herself that fuelled this development to the better. However, she deliberately glosses over the gloomier and more austere periods of London's recent past, which is indicative of the overall representation of London in the series, as I will further argue below.

Perhaps no period of London's recent past epitomises this positive attitude to immigration and multiculturalism and the capital's model representation of a renewed Britain better than the 'Cool Britannia' period Mama Thames mentions, which commenced in the mid-1990s and is closely associated with Tony Blair's New Labour governments (1997–2007). Stryker McGuire's article "Why London Rules" in a 1996 edition of the US magazine *Newsweek* is generally credited with having started the hype about the British capital, although the article itself did not use the phrase 'Cool Britannia' (McGuire). However, the pun on the famous *Rule, Britannia!* hymn took off and came to denote generally "the prosperity and laissez-faire gumption that cascaded across the country", and "London was the centre of this revolution in British life" (McGuire). When Blair followed John Major in 1997, it was his government that "benefited from the changes that were sweeping through London and Britain" (McGuire), and the catch phrase remained attached to the relatively young, unstuffy Labour PM, who took over from a Conservative government whose members "had outstayed their welcome" (Kavanagh 5) after the Thatcher era. Blair, in contrast, promised to the country a 'New Britain' with a 'New Labour', which went well with the notions of coolness that were increasingly attributed to the British capital (McGuire). "The intention", Charlotte Werther claims, "was to represent Britain as new, young and creative, just as the Labour Party had been remodelled as *New* Labour" (3; original emphasis). As a consequence, around the turn of the millennium, "a thousand 'Cool Britannia' ships" (McGuire) sailed through aspects of cultural and artistic life in Britain, such as film, fashion, music, and literature. The 'British Boom' in fantasy, science fiction, and horror also coincided with the 'Cool Britannia' era and was, as Roger Luckhurst argues, "part product of an energetic cultural-political scene" ("Governance" 432), not least because many writers used the fantastical mode to advocate their own political views from their "default position . . . on the left" (A. Butler 381).[35] However, the new sentiment was not hailed unanimously throughout the country, as criticism revolved around the "emphasis on a trendy, modern and cutting-edge image of Britain" that partly failed to "resonate with the *internal or domestic*

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[34] The point made about economic and cultural prosperity is valid here for London in the extra- and intratextual world, which are linked by representation. The fact that Mama Thames contributed to this development is, of course, only plausible within the storyworld.

[35] A much more nuanced view on the complexities of Blairite Britain than I can give here is argued, among others, in Anthony Seldon's *Blair's Britain: 1997–2007* (Cambridge UP, 2007) and Merle Tönnies' *Britain under Blair* (Winter, 2003). For a more critical evaluation of the 'Cool Britannia' campaign, see Keith Dinnie's *Nation Branding: Concepts, Issues, Practice*, which acknowledges the "[c]oncerns . . . about the viability and desirability of rebranding something as complex as national identity, as if the nation were just another supermarket product" (30).

audience . . ., the British general public" (Werther 4; original emphasis). For many outside the capital, "Cool Britannia smacked too much of a narrow and essentially London-based Britain that felt remote and completely unrelated to their lives" (4). In the same vein, Ying Fan argues that "Cool Britannia failed exactly because it abandoned all those traditional images associated with the country in favour of hippy and trendy images" (10), primarily provided by London.

To which extent 'Cool Britannia' has altered Britain's and London's perception of itself became notably evident in the Opening Ceremony of the 2012 Olympics. Because Danny Boyle's staging of the show lends itself as the primary example to demonstrate a contemporary interpretation and construction of British national and cultural identity, it has since drawn considerable attention in the press and in academia. Stefan Karschay, for instance, comments that the Olympics "had appeared to perfectly encapsulate" an image of "modern Britain . . . frequently [being] cited as a role model for a working multicultural society" (59). The Opening Ceremony presented the spirit of multiculturalism as not just

> a fact of life but an integral part of Britain's national identity . . . by combining a strong sense of inclusiveness with an open-minded cosmopolitanism in which the British capital attempted nothing less than to 'welcome the world this summer' with a bravura display of Britain's rich cultural heritage. (59)

Similarly, Catherine Baker suggests reading the ceremony as posing "a successful radical challenge to the conservative, monolithic and exclusionary 'island story'" (412). With regard to its representation of urbanism, Greg Garrard points out that the show started with the depiction of a pastoral scene, a formidable tree on a greened hill and copious pastures. However, only

> [m]oments later the tree at the centre of the rural scene was physically uprooted as 'dark satanic mills' thrust upwards and the green carpets were rolled up and taken off. Having dispensed with the pastoral past, what followed was a loud, dynamic, largely celebratory depiction of the power of labour and technology to transform society. (Garrard 110)

As the pastures and fields of barley were taken off the stage, giving way to six colossal smoking chimneys, the commentator stated that "life changed, people came from the green and pleasant land to the cities" ("Opening Ceremony" 00:18:30–00:25:48). The "symbolic resonances" of this segment, Garrard claims, "were remarkably complex, encompassing the faery magic evoked by olde England [and] the terrible beauty of the coming Industrial Revolution" (111).[36] The Ceremony's endorsement of urbanity in general and London-centrism in particular is thus contingent on the destruction of pastoral England. Although the show evokes the nostalgic representations of quiet village life, this imagery is quite literally uprooted by industrial progress which spurred the growth

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[36] The commentator's and Garrard's choice of words reveal how pervasive eighteenth- and nineteenth-century literary representations of a pastoral countryside are in the British cultural imagination, as their comments quite obviously refer to "England's mountains green" and "pleasant pastures" under threat from the Industrial Revolution's "dark Satanic Mills" (109–10) in William Blake's poem "And Did Those Feet in Ancient Times".

of London into the metropolis it is now. Boyle's ceremony, in this sense, told a progressive story of a "One Nation British cultural nationalism" (Garrard 111), in which disparate British regional identities are forged into a coherent narrative.[37]

To return from this excursion to the *Rivers of London* series, I contend that Mama and Father Thames can be read as personifications of these two connected, but distinctive senses of identity that London and the British countryside seemed to have develop in the early 2000s. Aaronovitch's series attempts to depart in this sense from the notion of British identity Danny Boyle presents in the Olympic Opening Ceremony. Whereas Boyle orders the images of a pastoral English countryside and an industrialised cityscape into a temporal narrative, where the latter is contingent on the former, *Rivers of London* insists on their simultaneity by way of the characters of Mama and Father Thames. However, their territorial dispute about the river is the means by which these different regional versions of Englishness are narrated as being in conflict with each other and the narrative solution to the conflict betrays the novels' nostalgic imagining of London which is not dissimilar from the homogenising narrative put forth in the Olympic Opening Ceremony after all.

Equipped with insight into both indigenous English and immigrant culture due to his own mixed-'race' background, Grant is perfectly situated to broker a peace that hinges on the exchange of cultural emissaries. One of Mama Thames's daughters, Beverley Brook, joins Father Thames in the Thames Valley while one of his sons, Ash, accompanies Grant to the city. Grant thinks of his idea as "a typically English compromise", that is, "a suitably medieval solution designed to appeal to two people who definitely still believed in divine rights" (*Rivers* 387), and his attempt to reconcile the two different representations of Englishness works as planned. The resolution of the conflict has already been exhaustively analysed as the series' celebration of "cooperative diversity" (Lethbridge 236) or "conviviality" (Borowska-Szerszun 2) respectively. And indeed, by the time narrated in *Broken Homes*, Mama and Father Thames are holding a joint, convivial Spring Court in the Bernie Spain Gardens on the South Bank (*Homes* 114). "Previously an industrial and forgotten part of the capital", the South Bank is now "one of the most popular and diverse areas of London to visit", as the South Bank's website's 'About us' section advertises, and thus ideally suited to celebrate the renewed ties between the previously warring factions, thus overcoming the rift that has existed for one and a half centuries but has given way to a blissfully united supernatural Britain.

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[37] Garrard uses the analysis of the Olympic Opening Ceremony as a starting point for an ecocritical analysis of Brexit Literature and argues that, however appealing in 2012, such a narrative has to be evaluated differently after the 2016 referendum and the success of a Brexit campaign that was run on "the rejection of globalisation and multiculturalism" (111). "The very fact that such notions are bubbling up in this moment", Garrard claims, "suggests that there is transformative cultural potential as well as political anxiety in it" (123). I will return to the argument about the proliferation of nostalgically inflected visions of a pastoral England as a nationalist response to London's proclaimed multiculturalism in chapter 4.2.2.

In Grant's minute description of the deities' arrival at the Gardens by boat, which is worth quoting in full, one can detect allusions to the staging of the equally celebratory Olympics Opening Ceremony, which also left rifts in the UK's contemporary social fabric unacknowledged:[38]

> The forces of them rolled in like a wave and a confusion of images and smells. Coal smoke and brick dust, cardamom and ginger, damp straw and warm hops, pub piano, wet cotton and sloe gin, tonic water and rose petals, sweat and blood. The waiting onlookers went down on their knees around us, the showmen slowly with respect, the tourists with looks of utter surprise. . . .
>
> No wonder the showmen were kneeling in respect. PT Barnum would have banged his head twice on the ground in admiration.
>
> Lady Ty emerged from the mist first. By her side was a wiry man with a thin face and a shock of brown hair – Oxley, the Old Man of the River's cunning right hand.
>
> They stopped at the point where the pier met the embankment and Oxley threw back his head and shouted something that sounded like Welsh but was probably much, much older.
>
> 'The Queen and King of the River stand at your gates,' bellowed Lady Ty in her best *Dragon's Den* minion-cowing voice.
>
> Oxley shouted, or chanted, it's hard to tell with these Celtic languages, another phrase and again Lady Ty translated.
>
> 'The Queen and King of the River stand at your gates – come forward to receive them.' (*Homes* 119–20)

The bilingualism, the sensory impressions, and the references to monarchy in this episode reinforce my previous argument that the two river deities not only represent but embody a wide stratum of Englishness. Thus, on the one hand their peaceful coexistence and growing relationship after the agreement reached at the end of the first novel illustrates the series' claim for cooperation and conviviality over confrontation, which other critics have already observed (Lethbridge; Borowska-Szerszun). On the other, however, the semantic emphasis on the *staging* of the Spring Court leads me to argue that this passage is a show which can be usefully read alongside the Olympic Opening Ceremony as a deliberate, ideologically inflected enactment of identity. In the extradiegetic reality, the celebration of a multicultural, inclusive, and united society in the Olympic Opening Ceremony has been demonstrably undermined by the result of the 2016 EU referendum and the Brexiteers' success at capitalising on anxieties over migration and change in conservative strata, infamously condensed into the 'Take back control' slogan. As *Broken Homes* was written and published in

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[38] These rifts refer to increasing inequality and rising nationalist sentiments in the UK at least since the banking crisis of 2008. Stefan Karschay cautions in his article that the Opening Ceremony "should not be taken as an index to a widespread atmosphere of multicultural conviviality", as "the near-complete absence of Britain's imperial history" in the show "ignored those confrontations with other nations and ethnicities that would engender forms of nationalism, racism and general xenophobia" (69). Consequently, Karschay argues that "this upbeat celebration of national identity" merely "smoothed over the cracks of Britain's imperial past" and makes one realise that "even the most well-intentioned celebration of conviviality and inclusiveness can harbour the kernels of prejudice and division" (69). These political developments in the twenty-first century and *Rivers of London*'s engagement with them will be the focus of my later discussion of the series.

2013, that is, before the EU referendum, the fictional reinforcement of London's and Britain's "commonplace diversity" (Wessendorf 11) that the neat from-conflict-to-resolution paradigm of the river deities' territory war initially suggests becomes a nostalgic anticipation of a future that could have been but never was.

Moreover, the reconciliation of two different English identities, which are embodied by two deities whose characterisation invokes decidedly urban and rural characteristics, thus rests on two nostalgically distorted ideas about what constitutes these identities in the first place. On the one hand, the series consciously calls up pastoral imagery of a stereotypically rustic Englishness which it ties spatially to the countryside. On the other, this notion of rural Englishness is used as a contrastive foil for the representation of London as multicultural and progressive.[39] What the novels fail to register, however, is that this idea of London falls prey to the same nostalgic distortions as the stereotypically rustic representation of the countryside. Not only does such a spatial dichotomy reinscribe the traditional city-country binary which Raymond Williams has already demasked as an ideologically motivated representational system, but the either-or logic to which it adheres blatantly ignores a much more complex ambiguity.

As the series central protagonist, Grant both represents the dichotomy of London and the countryside and perpetuates it by his ignorance of life outside of the capital. However, by the publication of the fifth instalment in the series, *Foxglove Summer*, the series' stereotypical homogenisation of city and country is slightly remedied. In the instalment, Grant is called away from London to rural Herefordshire in order to assist with the investigation of a missing child's case, which is suspected to have supernatural causes. Over the course of the novel, Grant slowly alters his perception of rural villages and the countryside from the established derision of the arrogant urbanite towards appreciating Herefordshire in its own right.

At the beginning of his time in the countryside, though, both people and the landscape conform to his expectations. Upon meeting his assigned contacts, Detective Seargeant Allison Cole and Detective Constable Dominic Croft, Grant is undeliberately racially insulted twice in a span of a few sentences (*Foxglove* 42), which confirms Grant's anticipation of country people as less diverse and, if not necessarily less tolerant, then less educated about political correctness. The local village, Rushpool, is introduced in a stereotypically rural fashion, as the narration focalised through Grant emphasises its remoteness from the next city, the picturesque location in a valley along a stream, and the winding B-roads through forests and between hedgerows with lots of blind corners

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[39] The journalist Afua Hirsch notes in this respect that "Englishness is not an identity that many English people feel is open to immigrants" (266). She discusses this with respect to Brexit voter patterns, as two-thirds of the people identifying as English, not British, voted Leave in the EU Referendum. The specific context of English nationalism and Brexit for Aaronovitch's series will be discussed in more detail in chapter 4.2.2.

(*Foxglove* 50–59).[40] Grant stresses that in such a setting his usual speciality of decoding urban signifiers is rendered useless. Even though he remembers "my Country Code lessons from school trips", he realises that "that out here in the sticks I didn't know what was normal" (*Foxglove* 60). The inherent difference of the setting to the novels' usual focus on London is coupled with an initial lack of supernatural traces on anything connected with the case Grant is sent to investigate. *Foxglove Summer* being the fifth instalment, the narrative trajectory of all the novels in the series, which they borrow from crime fiction, is well established at this point. Cases begin by Grant being called to the scene of the crime and finding traces of magic, so-called *vestigia*, which makes this a case for the Folly. However, when Grant does his *vestigia* sweep in the countryside, he comes up empty, because "[f]lora, your actual growing things, retain *vestigia* really badly and this makes the countryside, leaving aside poetry, not a very magical place" (*Foxglove* 64). The side comment on Romantic poetry serves a double function here.[41] On the one hand, the reference adds to the construction of the countryside location as 'Other' to London. This is where no magic is, and thus such a place is celebrated in literature by those who are known for their rejection of London: Romantic poets. On the other hand, the reference foreshadows a realisation which manifests over the course of the novel, namely that magic simply works differently in the countryside than in the city. Whereas Isaac Newton's fictitious *Third Principia* provides the framework for magic in the city in the series, John Polidori's theory on *potentia naturalis* becomes the key to understanding the magic of the countryside. Although this conceptualisation still differentiates the country from the city, this difference is now no longer constructed in the form of a deficiency. The countryside is not *without* magic, magic simply works differently there.[42] As Grant comes to understand this, he also realises that the countryside and its people are not lacking anything that sets London apart, but that life in the country works differently from London; a differentiation on an equal level instead of a hierarchisation.

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[40] In keeping with the series' use of popular culture references, Grant remarks that "[a]ll it needed was a murdered heiress and Hercule Poirot would have felt right at home" (*Foxglove* 53). The reference to Agatha Christie's cosy murder mysteries strengthens the impression of the location as being stereotypically rural.

[41] The quotation continues: "This caused a great deal of consternation to the more Romantic practitioners of the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century. Particularly Polidori, who spent a great deal of time trying to prove that natural things in their wild and untamed state were inherently magical" (*Foxglove* 64–65). Thus, the connection to Romantic poetry in particular is explicated on the level of the story.

[42] For instance, the goddess of the local river, Miss Teveyddyadd, has a Welsh name and speaks with a Welsh accent (*Foxglove* 108). She tells Grant that "[w]here you are now is not London – it's not even England . . . Only in a political sense" (*Foxglove* 115). The implication here is that the magic of the countryside precedes the political order of the contemporary United Kingdom. As with Father Thames, Wales becomes the signifier here for a Celtic magic that is deeply rooted in the land, that is, the kind of druidic magic that survives in folktales. It is, in effect, decidedly 'Other' than London. This implication is also reinforced when later in the novel, Grant discovers that the missing child's case is part of a fairy ploy to deposit a changeling in the human world. Subsequently, Grant travels to fairyland, which is a separate dimension from the material storyworld. In contrast to London, where the supernatural and the mundane exist in the same world, in the countryside they are ontologically different. The novels map all of these ontological and epistemological differences of the supernatural onto the spatial dichotomy of the country and the city in order to suggest that they are, in fact, different domains.

This realisation is mirrored by the story with regard to its representation of settlements and people. As the novel progresses, the country people become less stereotypical and develop into a diverse set of characters. Exemplary in this regard is Dominic Croft, who becomes Grant's friend over the story and does not conform to any stereotype of the backward, narrow-minded country resident. Croft is in a same-sex relationship with his long-term boyfriend, which becomes a signifier for progressiveness, and claims the same status as an urbanite as Grant:[43]

> "It's just I'm not that fond of the great outdoors," said Dominic.
> "But I thought you were a country boy," I said. "You grew up in a small village."
> "Yeah, and as soon as I was old enough I moved to the city." (*Foxglove* 183)

In this exchange, Grant and Croft negotiate Croft's status in Grant's and his own eyes. To Grant, Croft is a country boy by dint of his upbringing. Whatever he might think about Londonness being not about where one was born, in terms of the countryside Grant seems to resort to a sense of essentialism. Thus, he is surprised that Croft does not, in fact, like being outdoors very much, because this clashes with Grant's stereotypical idea about what a country boy has to be like. As his final comment makes clear, however, Croft sees himself as much more of a city boy. But as this dialogue occurs halfway through the novel, Grant is not yet ready to concede that London and Hereford are indeed on the same level and denies Croft the recognition: "'You moved to Hereford,' I said. 'That's not quite the same thing'". Nonetheless, Croft insists on the validity of his argument and contradicts Grant: "'Yes it is. We've got a cathedral *and* an Anne Summers,' said Dominic. 'That makes us a city'" (*Foxglove* 183; original emphasis). Croft resorts here to the same argumentative strategy that Grant previously employed with reference to his father about what constitutes Londonness, namely that urbanity is not tied to size. Hereford, Croft argues, also has an architectural marker, just like the dozens of buildings in London to which Grant constantly points in his narrative discourse. Anne Summers, a retailer company specialising in sex toys and lingerie, alludes to the notion of depravity with which the city is stereotypically associated in the popular imagination, and which also features on Raymond Williams's list about stereotypical characteristics of the city (*Country* 1). The fact that Croft is given the last word in this exchange signals that his argument is the more compelling one, though Grant is not ready to concede that yet.[44]

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[43] In using Croft's sexual orientation as a signifier on the city-country divide, the novels both critique and solidify the stereotypical construction of city and country. On the one hand, Croft's residence in a rural region suggests that the novels attempt to demonstrate that diversity is not an exclusively urban characteristic and that it would be wrong to assume country people were all the same and conform to a stereotypical image. On the other hand, Croft's sexual orientation is used as a signifier for urbanity, and the notions of tolerance and progressiveness stereotypically associated with it, and so do in fact conform the equally stereotypical notion of country people as being mainly conservative and traditional. Otherwise, it would be unnecessary to narratively single out Croft in the manner that *Foxglove Summer* does.

[44] In the extradiegetic world, Hereford has been granted city status by a charter by Richard I in 1189. The status was confirmed by Royal Charter in 1973 and re-confirmed in 2000. However, the argument between Grant and Croft is not about charters but a certain way of life.

Later in the novel, however, the change in Grant's perception of village towns and their status is subtly signalled by the way in which Bromyard is introduced as a setting for one chapter of the novel. With a population of 4,700 people, Bromyard is significantly smaller than Hereford (53,000), yet Grant refers to it as "the mighty metropolis of Bromyard" (*Foxglove* 271). The irony is hard to miss, though it signals that Grant is ready to depart from his outright denial that anything outside of London can, in fact, be even remotely regarded as urban. The narration directly confirms this move towards acceptance, for Grant then describes the town almost entirely unironically as being not unlike parts of London:

> With towns like Bromyard you can tell when you reach the historic section because suddenly the houses are all crowding onto narrow pavements and they assume the squeezed frontage that is typical of a planned medieval town. Apart from that, and some startlingly well preserved sixteenth- and seventeenth-century buildings, it looked like a large suburb with all the exciting connotations that implies. (*Foxglove* 271–72)

For all its looks, Bromyard might as well have been a London suburb. Although Grant cannot refrain from ending the description with the ironic phrase that such a place inspires "exciting connotations" – suggesting that he does not find these connotations exciting at all – this comment does not take away from Bromyard any notion of (sub)urbanity but only indicates that Grant might not personally feel inclined to reside in this *particular part* of the city.

Overall, *Foxglove Summer* is the only novel in the series set outside of London. As Grant is thus confronted with his stereotypical conception of the countryside and the people residing there, the novel provides a turning point in the series in terms of their representation of city and country. On the one hand, *Foxglove Summer* deliberately calls up these stereotypes, predominantly through the focalisation of Grant, and attempts to deconstruct at least some of them. Croft is a character who espouses almost the same London-specific mentality as Grant does and the villages in which the story is set eventually deny all implications of a stereotypical quiet country life. On the other hand, partly deconstructed though it may be, the binary distinction between London and the country is never entirely dissolved. The constant evocation of stereotypical signifiers builds on the signifying power that they possess in the first place and thus reinforces this power. Moreover, the positive evaluation of Croft as an urban character only works when the notion is retained that there are also country people who are somehow 'Other'. What the novel does achieve, however, is a construction of this sense of 'Otherness' on a horizontal rather than a vertical level. This reordering employs the supernatural, since Grant's discovery that the is no lack of magic in the country, but that it rather conforms to different principles than the ones he learned about the urban magic in London, opens the way for the deconstruction of the evaluated hierarchisation of city and country.

They are, indeed, different but this difference is accepted by Grant as the narrative authority of the novels without the previous sense of unabashed superiority.[45]

In summary, I have argued that especially the first four novels in the *Rivers of London* series make use of a stereotypically pastoral image of the English countryside in order to provide a foil for the city. This comparison between country and city is predominantly constructed along the established tropes of the country as a traditional, rustic, backward, and conservative space, which lends London notions of progressiveness, tolerance, and modernity. These stereotypes stem from a nostalgically laden idea about the countryside and an equally nostalgically laden image of London as a multicultural city in the early 2000s. Particularly the first novel in the series, *Rivers of London*, employs this binary as the cause for its central conflict, the territorial dispute between Mama and Father Thames. Beyond the textual level, the conflict can be read as being applicable to the confrontation of two distinct ideas about Englishness: one traditional and conservative, one modern and liberal. As chapter 4.2.2 will argue, these differences have broken free in the EU referendum campaign in 2016. In the first four *Rivers of London* novels, however, which were written and published at least three years before the referendum, these existing rifts are reconciled in an imaginary future, as the novels narrate the two river deities as embodiments of different types of Englishness who are able to overcome their conflict.

The series' fifth instalment, *Foxglove Summer*, is the only novel which is indeed set in a rural location. As Grant travels to Herefordshire to assist a missing child's case, he gradually discovers that his stereotypical assumptions about what the countryside and its residents are like are too simplistic. He meets people who espouse a mentality not unlike his own, which is allegedly 'urban', he moves in villages which look and feel like London suburbs, and even the narrative pattern is the same as in all the other instalments, following the established crime fiction plotline of moving from mystery to solution. However, *Foxglove Summer* still narrates the countryside as being different from London, but this difference is not retained as an evaluating hierarchy which places London above "everywhere else" (*Foxglove* 8), still evident at the novel's beginning but acknowledged as difference without evaluation at its end. Consequently, the following instalments employ noticeably less frequently a stereotypical version of the English countryside in order to explicate their understanding of urbanity. In doing so, the series starts to deconstruct its own nostalgia, though much more with regard to a nostalgically distorted image of the countryside than with regard to London. Quite the contrary, as I will argue below, the engagement with extradiegetic politics in form of the Brexit referendum reinforces the series' nostalgic longing for a particular version of London.

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[45] I will build on this argument when I examine the confrontation between Grant and the series' main villain, Martin Chorley, who also evaluates the city and the country differently but is not as accepting of difference without hierarchisation.

4.2   Nostalgic Longing for a Country Without London

In the previous chapter I have argued that both Benedict Jacka's *Alex Verus* series and Ben Aaronovitch's *Rivers of London* series engage with nostalgic longing for a pastoral version of the British, or specifically English, countryside. However, in both series the nostalgically imagined space is not located in the past but in the present, although it draws its characteristics from the past, and I have linked this temporal dynamic to Svetlana Boym's notion of reflective nostalgia. Boym's analytical counterpart, restorative nostalgia, now forms the critical framework for my examination of Jonathan Stroud's *Bartimaeus* trilogy and the politicised conflict with the main antagonist in Aaronovitch's *Rivers of London* series. Where reflective nostalgia invokes the nostalgically remembered past in the present for the purpose of retreat, as Stuart Tannock points out (457–58), restorative nostalgia invokes the nostalgic image of the past and attempts to restore it. This aspect is etymologically present in the sense of *nóstos* as the *return* home. Restorative nostalgia signifies an attempt to return to a different place or past that is imagined as being better than the present and the anticipated future. Restorative nostalgia thus follows the paradigm of constructing the past as prelapsarian and the present as postlapsarian but locates in the moment of lapse the motivation to overcome the ostensibly deficient present.

The belief in a supposedly 'better' past has been identified by Zygmunt Bauman as a recent paradigmatic shift in "the rather extended family of affectionate relationship with an 'elsewhere'" (*Retrotopia* 3) towards what he terms "retrotopia" (8), of which he sees Boym's concept of restorative nostalgia to be but one part. Rather, he argues, these retrotopias are "visions located in the lost/stolen/abandoned but undead past" (5). In contrast to the Morean utopian imagination, these visions turn away from "the uncertain and ever-too-obviously un-trustworthy future" to "the vaguely remembered past, valued for its assumed stability and so trustworthiness" (6).[46] Bauman sees this paradigmatic shift characterised by three objectives: the "rehabilitation of the tribal model of community", the "return to the concept of a primordial/pristine self predetermined by non-cultural and culture-immune factors, and all in all a retreat from the presently held . . . view of the essential, presumably non-negotiable and sine qua non features of the 'civilized order'" (9). In this sense, the desired restoration of a nostalgically imagined past is political by providing "almost a perfect tool for any kind of political ideology or movement trying to pave its way through the burning barricades and accumulated debris of contemporary social uncertainty and turmoil" (Jacobsen 15).

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[46] Bauman refers here to the specific type of utopian writing that is exemplified by Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516). Utopias of these kind tend to narrate an imagined parallel reality which improves conditions we know from our material existence and implies that this utopian otherworld may become our reality's future.

In this chapter, I argue that both the *Bartimaeus* trilogy and the story arc centred on Martin Chorley as the central antagonist for the instalments two to seven in the *Rivers of London* series narrate attempts to return to a better past. In both series, this desire is tied to the destruction of London as a corrupted centre of politics, which signifies the return to a time when this was not the case. Equally in both series, this desire is spatialised by presenting a nostalgically distorted image of the countryside and the supposedly more communal values which are lived there as the desirable 'Other' to a corrupted London. However, the countryside only ever functions as an unspecified counterpart and is never precisely localised in neither series.[47]

In Stroud's *Bartimaeus* trilogy, the condemnation of London is not motivated by partisan politics, but generally anti-urbanist. The motif of a destroyed or corrupted London runs through Stroud's entire fantastical opus. Beyond the *Bartimaeus* trilogy, the pentalogy *Lockwood & Co.* (2014–2017) is set in an effectively uninhabitable version of London where adult residents are attacked by ghosts and the setting of *The Outlaws Scarlett and Browne* series (2021–) is a postapocalyptic Britain, in which London is completely inundated.[48] The *Bartimaeus* trilogy's alternative history setting depicts London as the political centre of the still-existing British Empire at a point of decline, which entails that the capital houses a morally corrupt, magocratic government.[49] Over the course of the three novels, the reader follows the government's indoctrination of Nathaniel, the adolescent protagonist, who wholeheartedly subscribes to a false account of the magicians' benevolence for kin and country. The first instalment, *The Amulet of Samarkand*, offers up a brief nostalgic description of an idyllic pastoral countryside, which is identified with positive notions of peacefulness and innocence, as a spatial foil to the corrupted and corruptive city.

This part of the first instalment acquires larger significance in the overall context of the trilogy, as it both motivates its ending and provides a political commentary on the extradiegetic world. Eventually, both the oppressed nonmagical population and the enslaved spirits rebel against the ruling magicians in London, which is destroyed during the climactic battle in the third

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[47] In this respect, the country-city dichotomy acquires the notion of a centre-periphery relationship, which is more closely associated with imperialist topographies. This implies a logic of extraction, which both the *Bartimaeus* trilogy and the *Rivers of London* series implement by representing this version of urbanism as parasitic. Since the concrete special relationship is between the city and the countryside, however, and since the version of the countryside which features as one element in this binary distinction is constructed along the lines of a nostalgic imaginary, I have included the discussion in this chapter. The conceptual overlap to an imperial figure of thought proves the point that any analytical compartmentalisation, in which a dissertation must necessarily engage, has its own limitations. I will focus in more detail on urban fantasy's relationship to London's imperial history in chapter 5.1.

[48] *The Outlaws Scarlett and Browne* series may offer an example of what Caroline Edwards has termed "pastoral post-apocalypticism", that is, "*fictions of the not yet*" which foreground "the beauty of this depopulated pastoral post-apocalyptic world" (160–61; original emphasis). Edwards argues that these fictions "*are able to imagine alternative historical trajectories* in which our relationship with the natural environment is fundamentally altered" (163; original emphasis). However, the pursuit of this argument in detail would lead me too far afield here.

[49] I offer the term *magogratic* for this type of government, which is a compound of *mage* and the suffix *-cracy*, from the Greek μάγος (mágos, "magician") and κράτος (krátos, "power, rule"); literally "the rule of magicians".

instalment, *Ptolemy's Gate*. The revolutionary violence is justified on the grounds of a nostalgic evocation of a space free of the magicians' corruptive influence. However, through the destruction of London the novels do not so much imagine the reactionary restoration of a mythical past in which things were supposedly better, as Svetlana Boym understands her concept of restorative nostalgia, but retrieve from it the utopian impulse for urban regeneration in a way that is closer to Stuart Tannock's understanding of the productive capabilities of nostalgia.[50]

In comparison, Ben Aaronovitch's *Rivers of London* series is more outrightly political in a partisan sense. In chapter 4.2.1, I have examined how the earlier instalments of series evoke stereotypical notions of a rustic, pastoral countryside in order to provide contours to its understanding of Londonness as particularly progressive and how *Foxglove Summer* constitutes a turning point towards a more nuanced representation of the countryside – or at least the cessation of stereotypical references. In chapter 4.2.2 I argue that the story arc centring on the manhunt for Martin Chorley is imbued with political meaning in the context of the 2016 EU referendum. Chorley is introduced as the then unknown Faceless Man in the second instalment, *Moon Over Soho*, and is the series' main antagonist until the seventh instalment, *Lies Sleeping*. The six novels across which the story arc stretches were published between 2011 and 2018, and I contend that it is no coincidence that Corley's political motivation becomes much more pronounced in *The Hanging Tree* and *Lies Sleeping*, which were published after the referendum, as the series attempts to engage with real-world developments.[51]

In these two novels in particular, Chorley is increasingly depicted as a racist white nationalist who takes issue with the model multicultural society as which the United Kingdom attempted to represent itself at the beginning of the twenty-first century in marketing campaigns such as 'Cool Britannia' or the Opening Ceremony of the Olympic Games 2012.[52] Chorley imagines himself as the voice for the economically and socially disadvantaged and blames the rift in the nation's social

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[50] The notion of destroying a city characterised by corruption, or sin in more theologically oriented narratives, in order to facilitate a fresh start goes back to the tale of Sodom and Gomorrah in the *Bible*'s Book of Genesis. The idea of the city as centre of corruption has since become a well-established transnational topos in contemporary fantastical fiction and can be found in *Batman*, *Star Wars*, *The Hunger Games*, or *The Song of Ice and Fire*, to name but a few examples. On urban devastation as accelerator of urban regeneration, see also Graham ("Strategic Sites" 41). A notable example of a novel which revolves around London's destruction and reclamation by nature is Richard Jefferies's *After London* (1885).

[51] Chorley's identity is revealed only in *The Hanging Tree*. Before, he was always featured as the anonymous Faceless Man, whose intentions and plans were kept in the dark. To me, the explanation seems logical that Aaronovitch, whose interviews and Twitter feed imply that he is politically situated on the left, was inspired by the real-world political developments in order to give this placeholder villain a back story and making the anonymous Faceless Man into Martin Chorley the white nationalist. While in this aspect, my reading conforms to what can be taken as authorial intent, I go beyond such a simplistic suggestion and demonstrate that the *Rivers of London* novels thereby re-construct a nostalgic version of London pre-Brexit.

[52] Both of these campaigns have already been examined with the regard to their relevance for the series in the previous chapter. Neither event is mentioned in the novels explicitly, but it becomes clear from context that apart from the inclusion of supernatural events and its characters the London of the storyworld is to be understood as identical to the London in the real world, which includes these events, campaigns, and political developments. Brian Attebery refers to this narrative strategy as "the principle of minimal departure" (*Strategies* 131–32).

fabric solely on London's hubristic self-image as a multicultural city. In doing so, the novels re-create their own version of the concept of the 'divided nation' that was quick at hand after the decision to leave the EU in the 2016 referendum.[53] The concept rests on the simplistic myth that there exists a part of the population who look back nostalgically to a 'glorious past', often linked to signifiers of the Empire, and a part who are oriented towards the future in order to shape what they think of as a truly modern Britain.[54] Those who belong to the first group are taken to have predominantly voted to leave the EU in 2016, while those belonging to the latter group have predominantly voted for remaining. This myth invites a reading of Brexit "at root to be a *cri-de-coeur* from left behind people" (Boyle, Paddison, and Shirlow 105).[55] Out of clustering the voters of the referendum in spatial terms the truism has emerged that the Remainers are to be found primarily in London, Scotland, and Northern Ireland, whereas the rest of the country voted Leave.[56] *Rivers of London* adopts and thus perpetuates such a simplistic reduction of a complicated political development like Brexit to a spatialised binary by ideologically linking Chorley's attempt to restore Britain magically to the age of King Arthur to the Brexiteer campaign. On the one hand, the series' firm rejection of Chorley's nostalgic longing for the past and his authoritarian and misanthropic ideology provides a commendable blueprint for real-world engagement with such issues. On the other, Chorley's defeat and the prevention of his nefarious plans coming to fruition is tantamount to constructing a version of multicultural London, which is in equal manner nostalgically distorted

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[53] For a nuanced discussion of the 'divided nation' topos, see Joanna Rostek and Anne-Julia Zwierlein's introduction to the *Journal for the Study of British Culture*'s issue on "Brexit and the Divided United Kingdom" (vol. 26, no. 1, 2019, pp. 3–16).

[54] In *After Empire: Melancholia or Convivial Culture?*, Paul Gilroy diagnoses his fellow citizens with "an inability even to face, never mind actually mourn, the profound change in circumstances and moods that followed the end of the Empire and consequent loss of imperial prestige", which he sees intertwined, among other factors, "with the shock and anxiety that followed from a loss of any sense that the national collective was bound by a coherent and distinctive culture" (98). This diagnosis Gilroy terms "'postimperial melancholia' in order simultaneously to underline this syndrome's link with the past and its pathological character" (98). However, due to its inclusion in the proto-psychological four temperaments theory I find that *melancholia* retains much stronger pathological connotations than *nostalgia* implies. Therefore, I have opted for *nostalgia* as the term to frame my following analysis. However, it cannot be denied that there is a certain conceptual overlap between the two. For a discussion of the many facets of imperial nostalgia in connection to Brexit, see Stuart Ward and Astrid Rasch's edited collection *Embers of Empire in Brexit Britain* (Bloomsbury, 2019) and Danny Dorling and Sally Tomlinson's *Rule Britannia: Brexit and the End of Empire* (Biteback, 2019). There are studies corroborating the claim that nostalgic yearning for the imperial past correlated with voting Leave in the 2016 EU referendum (e.g. Booth; British Election Study), but Henneböhl in my opinion rightly cautions against "making sweeping diagnoses of large groups of people or even the country as a whole" (1).

[55] Against this simplifying myth, Dane Kennedy warns that "[i]t's crucial . . . that we distinguish between the intent of those who voted to leave the EU and those who articulated the vision and crafted the policies designed to implement that decision" (169). For leading Brexiteers, she argues, regaining "some of the greatness they associated with [Britain's] imperial past" (170) was more important than for actual voters, who were more concerned about national sovereignty, frustration with Eu regulations, migration, and social and economic repercussions of the 2008 financial crisis. The term *left behinds* is meant as an umbrella term that is supposed to capture these variegated sentiments in a decidedly spatialised opposition to the political elites in London.

[56] Scotland (62,0%), London (59,9%), and Northern Ireland (55,8%) were, indeed, the only areas that voted to remain in the referendum. However, this observation, which has achieved widespread trajectory through visual representations of coloured maps showing the referendum results, is predicated on a logic that simply aggregates all votes in one region first-past-the-post. As Olivier Sykes rightly objects, "this both misses the point that the referendum was in fact a UK wide poll and the granularity of the voting patterns at lower spatial scales" (148).

as the past which Chorley sought to restore. Thus, in the storyworld the novels eventually realise what their protagonist purports to have averted and engage in their own kind of nostalgic reconstruction.

4.2.1   London as a Parasitic City in the *Bartimaeus* Trilogy

In Jonathan Stroud's *Bartimaeus* trilogy, London is perpetually represented as a centre of moral corruption. The magical government of the city and the empire that it commands is characterised as decadent and morally depraved. Although the novels are set almost exclusively in the city, *The Amulet of Samarkand* offers a brief description of London's surrounding countryside in contrast to its marked absence as a setting in the trilogy. I read this absence as indicating the sense of loss on which nostalgia rests so strongly, which is detectable especially in Bartimaeus's narration when he and Nathaniel are in the countryside and not in London. A close reading of this part of the novel thus helps understand how the country features as a virtuous foil against London's corruption in the overall trilogy.

The characterisation of the ruling magicians as morally corrupt is achieved primarily by highlighting that their power rests on the economic exploitation of both the nonmagical population and the spirits for their own purposes. While the nonmagical population – commoners, as they are called in the trilogy – occupy positions of wage labour, the spirits are magically enslaved and bound to the magicians' will.[57] With the help of the commoners' labour force and the spirits' abilities, British magicians have managed to build a global empire which impacts the spatial organisation of its capital.[58] The organisation of labour in spatial terms within London simultaneously reflects and inscribes the segregation of magicians and commoners into the city.

Due to the narrative organisation of the novels, the spatial segregation of different parts of the urban population is not evaluated in any way but presented as part of the everyday life of the protagonist. The novels focalise predominantly through the djinni Bartimaeus and the young magician Nathaniel, who occupy different positions in the larger social network of the trilogy. The immortal djinni serves as first-person focaliser and thus provides a higher narrative authority, which he uses to instruct the reader with his historical knowledge. Nathaniel, on the contrary, is young and naïve, and thus falls prey to the magicians' ideological indoctrination.[59] Thus, when Nathaniel

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[57] These two exploitative relationships invoke different historical modes of production with the intent to villainise the ruling magicians, namely the period of industrialisation in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Britain and the enslavement of Africans in the United States of America prior to the American Civil War. In doing so, however, the *Bartimaeus* trilogy suggests that these two distinctive modes of economic exploitation are in some way the same and thus reduces the historical idiosyncrasies, and especially the trauma of slavery, to the mere narrative effect of villainisation.

[58] The characterisation of London as an imperial metropolis in the novels will be subject to closer analysis in chapter 5.1.

[59] Nathaniel does mature over the course of the novels, as his character development is one of the central driving forces of the plot. However, especially in the first two instalments, his perspective is heavily coloured by naïveté and a lack of insight into the extent of political and moral corruption.

leaves his master's house for the centre of London for the first time and their car passes through commoner districts, these are presented to the reader through Nathaniel's eye as a feature of the cityscape whose organisation he does not question.

> Most of the houses seemed different from the ones in his master's street: much smaller, meaner, more tightly packed. Often they seemed to congregate around large, windowless buildings with flat roofs and tall chimneys, presumably factories where commoners assembled for dull purpose. As such they didn't really interest him. (*Amulet* 184)

When subject to closer inspection, this description of a commoners' part of London clearly indicates that habitation is organised in connection to labour. The commoners are groomed for "dull" factory work and live in "small" and "packed" boroughs which differ noticeably from the magicians' habitations. It is later confirmed from the perspective of Kitty Jones, a commoner girl and the third point-of-view character in the trilogy, that the magicians "kept themselves removed from . . . the ordinary commoner, remaining in the centre of the city and in the suburbs, where broad, leafy boulevards idled between secretive villas" (*Eye* 46).

This spatial organisation, which is observed here in the microcosmic organisation of residential areas, can be extrapolated to characterise London at large. The city's centre bespeaks of grandeur in terms of an architecture that reflects power. On the same car ride as before, Nathaniel and his master eventually enter the Whitehall borough. Nathaniel notes that "[n]ow [that] they were entering central London, . . . the buildings became even bigger and more grand, as befitted the capital of the Empire" (*Amulet* 185). Later in the series, Whitehall is described in the same vein as being "heavy with the odours of power", and "the architecture alone was enough to browbeat any casual observer into submission" (*Eye* 23).[60]

The evocation of the British Empire and the spatial segregation of the ruling and the working classes into different city districts lends the *Bartimaeus* trilogy an unmistakeable neo-Victorian tone in reviving Victorian moralistic notions about poverty and urban depravation.[61] In addition to the sheer architectural demonstration of power, the bleak description of commoner living- and workspaces is therefore particularly reminiscent of nineteenth-century accounts of increasing urbanisation, particularly Friedrich Engels' description that, in London, "individuals are crowded together, within a limited space" (80). Leaving to the commoners "what lay between . . . streets clogged with small shops, waste ground, the factories and brickworks" (*Eye* 46), the magicians occupy the spacious suburbs and the city's centre. In this sense, the spatial organisation of London both reflects and reinforces the economic imbalance of power that characterises this

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[60] Since the spatial organisation of London is mapped here along the lines of centre and periphery, thereby indicating a distinctive organisation of power, the architecture of central London in the *Bartimaeus* trilogy will be further examined in chapter 5.1.

[61] I have commented on the relationship between the neo-Victorian genre and urban fantasy as well as on the *Bartimaeus* trilogy's status in my corpus as the one series which was written before the genre fully solidified in chapters 2.3.2 and 2.4.1 respectively.

society. What is more, the impact of London's spatial organisation on the mentalities of its inhabitants becomes strikingly clear by Nathaniel's disinterest in both commoner parts of the cities and the parts of the population that occupy them. Spatiality, thus, is utterly political in the London of Stroud's novels.

Through Bartimaeus as focaliser, the reader is offered a different perspective from the ideology of the magicians' benign rule that supposedly serves London, all of its inhabitants, and the country and empire which is ruled from the city equally. Bartimaeus's perspective is informed by the more than two thousand years he has been enslaved by human magicians and thus counters Nathaniel's naïveté. In line with the trilogy's politicisation of space, Bartimaeus indicates that a world without cities might be more preferable, because cities are centres of power and thus inevitably attract magicians.[62] Nearing the climax of the plot in *The Amulet of Samarkand* in what is the only part of the novel which features a nonurban environment, Bartimaeus and Nathaniel travel to the traitor Simon Lovelace's country house. It must be made clear, however, that the literary representation is far removed from actual reality, mediated through the series' alternative history setting. In other words, what is described in the series as 'the countryside' is an entirely unspecified location which serves primarily as the spatial antithesis to the city and thus ideationally to the corruption and greed for power that so characterises the capital.

Nathaniel, who has spent his entire life up to this point in London, is disconcerted by "so much … *space*" (*Amulet* 364; original emphasis) outside of the city. The countryside's vastness, which so clearly contrasts with the description of both the tightly packed boroughs in which the commoners live and the imposing but oppressive architecture of Whitehall, terrifies Nathaniel (364). With this description, the novel reverses the stereotypical representation of the city as dangerous and the countryside as peaceful, as for Nathaniel, it is the exact way around. Not without amusement, Bartimaeus tells the reader that "[i]t was almost as if he expected the empty fields or winter bushes to rise like enemies and fall on him, and his head turned constantly against surprise attack" (364). The djinni, however, notes that "[n]o houses is good. It means no people. No magicians" (364). To him, the emptiness of the countryside is not terrifying but relaxing, "precisely *because* the countryside seemed wholly deserted" (364; original emphasis), which he equates explicitly with the absence of magicians. Consequently, as "[f]ields stretched away on all

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[62] There is a circular logic at display here, which is one of the organising principles of the storyworld. In the storyworld, history constantly repeats itself as what the characters call either "a wheel of hate and fear" (*Eye* 569) or "an endless circle of strife" (*Gate* 91). Both metaphors evoke same impression of cyclical and perpetual movement. The spirits' supernatural perspective on historical events, which spans several millennia, strongly conveys the notion that nothing ever truly changes, and the world adheres to the same political ideologies and organisation of labour predicated on exploitation. The notion of the social organisation of labour to erect and maintain an oppressive political system and the cyclicality of history gives the *Bartimaeus* trilogy a demonstrably Marxist quality, which culminates in the envisioning of a joint revolution of commoners and spirits against the magocratic government at the end of the trilogy.

sides", Bartimaeus tells the reader that "I perked up: it felt good to be free of the city's malignant clutches and surrounded by the natural contours of the trees and crops" (364). This entire passage makes the firm association between magicians and cities in the novels evident. In Bartimaeus's logic, urban environments are centres of power, and power inevitably attracts the power-hungry magicians. In support of his theory, the djinni relies on his vast historical knowledge and goes on to inform the reader that "[t]hroughout history, magicians have been resolutely urban creatures" (364).[63] Quite clearly, London is contrasted in this part of the novel with an unspecified location in England's countryside. Focalised through Bartimaeus, the narrative emphasis is on the lack of both buildings and people outside of the city, to which the urban magician Nathaniel responses with fear, whereas the spirit Bartimaeus is enlivened by the absence of magical powers.

How tightly the ruling denizens of the city are intertwined with its spatial organisation is ingrained in Bartimaeus' thoughts on magicians as "urban creatures" (*Amulet* 364). He claims that "they flourish in cities, multiplying like plague rats, running along thickly spun threads of gossip and intrigue like fat-bellied spiders" (364). Instead of depicting the magicians' influence on their urban environment as beneficial as they see themselves, they are associated with unwanted animals such as rats and spiders. The mention of the plague not only connects to the excessive number of rats that is invoked here, but also suggests a diseased, rather than a healthy urban body.[64] Rather than living symbiotically with London, Bartimaeus claims that "magicians are essentially parasitic", that is, "[i]n societies where they are dominant, they live well off the strivings of others" (*Amulet* 365). Far from perpetuating the magicians' propaganda of symbiotic benevolence, Bartimaeus asserts their parasitic effect on both the city in which they "flourish" (*Amulet* 364) and its denizens. Parasites are not indicators of a healthy body but drain its life force for their own benefit. As a result, the parasitic magicians become decadent, while the hosts – the commoners – have to labour relentlessly to make up for the loss of energy.[65]

The image of the unlocalised countryside that is offered here conforms to stereotypical notions of the pastoral. Although Nathaniel experiences the countryside as terrifyingly empty, his position is undermined by the focalisation of the narrative through Bartimaeus, who belittles these anxieties as amusing fancies of a person that is outside their 'natural habitat' for the first time. His

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[63] The continuous link between magicians and cities is only valid for the level of the story, of course. In popular culture, one does not have to look far to find associations between magicians and nature. For example, Merlin and Tolkien's Gandalf and Radagast spring most readily to mind. I will return to this intertwined relationship momentarily.

[64] That this example from Bartimaeus' characterisation of the magicians heavily employs a linguistic register that is associated with the body shows the interconnectedness between the systems of representation at work in the urban imaginary. The city-as-body metaphor will be more closely examined in chapter 5.

[65] As *pars pro toto*, the magicians' parasitic quality is extended to London as a whole. Within the *Bartimaeus* universe, the capital's immense need for energy can only be supplied by the empire it commands, thus demonstrating again that the different representational paradigms investigated in this thesis cannot be neatly delineated but rather form intersections.

own perspective is afforded more narrative authority through focalisation and the historical knowledge he displays. The countryside's soothing emptiness, a list of plants which constitutes the first mention of vegetation in the entire series, and the positive affective responses that the freedom of "the city's malignant clutches" (*Amulet* 364) elicits serve to construct the experience of the countryside as a positive one. The use of the countryside location in the novel therefore conforms to Terry Gifford's second kind of pastoral, that which "describes the country with an implicit or explicit contrast to the urban" (2).

In the case of *The Amulet of Samarkand*, the countryside is offered as a virtuous foil to the moral and political corruption of the magicians in the city. The conceptual London paradigm here is that of the corrupted city in opposition to the innocent country, which forms one of the dominant tropes of pastoral writing. Linking the pastoral movement of the eighteenth and nineteenth century to Greek pastoralism, Raymond Williams argues that this allowed "the peace of country life [to] be contrasted with the disturbance of war and civil war and the political chaos of the cities" (Williams 17). As David Lehan has pointed out, this was the period in which the idea of a "symbiotic relationship between the city and the country turned parasitic" (39).[66] The alienating and socially appalling effects of mass migration into the cities, particularly London, resulting from the transition from an agriculturally dominated mode of production to an industrialised society engendered both the corruption of rural innocence in or by the city as well as the imagination of London as "a monstrous site" (Stelzig 184). Metaphorically, Tim Fulford argues, "London was Babylon" in the cultural imagination, "a city whose existence indicated the Lord's displeasure, heralding a coming apocalypse in which it would be destroyed, and the world remade" (244), a city of sin. The decadence and debauchery of life in London was thus often scripted by Romantic poets along the lines of valorising the rural over the urban (Stelzig 181; cf. also Ellis 543).[67] The *Bartimaeus* trilogy, which constructs an early-twenty-first-century version of the British society from the industrialisation era onwards, draws on these literary tropes. It employs the traditional dichotomy between the city and the country as well as the connotations of London as a sinful city to subvert both Nathaniel's uncritical perspective on the capital's spatial layout and the oppressive political system that transformed the city according to the desires and demands of the powerful.

Eventually, the trilogy ends with the revolution of the union of the oppressed, the commoners and the spirits, against the exploitative magocratic rulership. On the level of the story, the depiction of the countryside in *The Amulet of Samarkand* as innocent, pastoral idyll due to the

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[66] Lehan makes his argument with regard to the emergence of the Gothic genre, which he sees characterised in the literary transformation of the country estate into a place corrupted by the city. As classic Gothic tropes, I will examine the use of degeneration and decline in urban fantasy more closely in chapter 5.

[67] Early eighteenth-century poetry, such as Alexander Popes "The Dunciad" (1728) and Samuel Johnson's "London" (1738) connected "the sustained condemnation of luxury" with "a corrupt political ascendancy" (Hammond 92).

absence of the magicians' corruptive influence legitimises revolutionary violence against the city. Since London is firmly identified as the political sphere of the magocratic authorities, the city's destruction is the only imaginable ending to the narrative and the justified response to a political system that allows and encourages London's drain on the resources of the country. In this sense, to make recourse to Boym's taxonomy, the trilogy's ending could be read as an articulation of restorative nostalgia which seeks to overthrow an oppressive political system distinctively tied to London's parasitic urbanism and restore a supposedly better past. However, I argue that the almost-apocalyptic ending of *Ptolemy's Gate* is not tied to a reactionary ideology, as Boym understands restorative nostalgia to be, but conforms much more to Stuart Tannock's understanding of nostalgia's productive capabilities through the notion of retrieval. The impulse of eradicating London is not motivated by a nostalgic yearning for a return to the past but seeks to excavate from a pre-industrial past some utopian impulses for building a better future. However, the novels' anti-urbanist character precludes such a future from being actualised in the narrative and although the story ends with a hopeful note that the overthrow of the magocratic government and the destruction of London may pave the way for a more communal society, as readers we never see it come to fruition.

Beyond the level of the story, I want to suggest that the *Bartimaeus* trilogy offers commentary to London's increasing detachment from the UK in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century through both its evocation of established paradigms of representing urbanism and its alternative history mode that favours revolution. As academic criticism has pointed out, London's transformation into one of, if not the most paradigmatic global city has caused it to be seen as being "in a league of its own" (Knebel-Doeberitz and Schneider 2) and "somewhat aloof of any ties to the nation" (5). Skyrocketing property prices and the hegemonic narrative of London's cosmopolitanism are only two indicators of "the notion that London is 'a first-class city attached to a second-class country'" (5) espoused especially by wealthy Londoners. It is this split between the country and the city, I contend, that comes under criticism by the *Bartimaeus* trilogy's scathing condemnation of London. In doing so, the novels align themselves with nineteenth-century accounts that equally construe the city as a sinful place, particularly through a valorisation of the countryside.

Although I argue that the imagined destruction of London in the novels is an articulation of restorative nostalgia, this is not to be confused with an evaluation of the trilogy's political project to be one of simply setting back the time to an ostensibly simpler age. Rather, the novels retrieve, in Stuart Tannock's terminology, from an imagined pastoral past the utopian impulse to overthrow an oppressive political system which maintains and propels an economic system build on the extraction of resources. On the one hand, as the spirits are rampant in the city and commoner

revolts are springing up everywhere, the destruction acquires an apocalyptic dimension, which is conveyed to the reader through the well-known template of London on fire:

> Whitehall was aflame. Above the rooftops the lowest clouds glowed pink and orange; fiery light drained between them into chasms of blackness, pricked with stars. […] A building to the north […] had a fire burning on an upper floor. Little flickering darts of redness waved from the windows like autumn leaves. Smoke rose to mingle with the clouds. Other blazes crackled in buildings opposite. It all had an unreal quality (*Gate* 451)

The narrative focalisation through Bartimaeus, Nathaniel, and Kitty Jones, however, makes it clear that the destruction of London is not the confirmation of the magicians' view that it is they who stand between order and the constant threat of slipping into chaos. Rather, it is their hubris and corruption that has ultimately brought about the destruction of the city. On the other hand, in the city's extradiegetic cultural memory such a description immediately calls up memories of the Great Fire of 1666 and the Blitz – both of which were periods in which London was faced with destruction on a greater scale. Nonetheless, both of these periods have also engendered a phase of urban regeneration born out of the destruction – the Great Fire stopped the Great Plague epidemic and Sir Chritopher Wren's plans for the rebuilding of London significantly altered the spatial, economic, cultural, and demographic layout of the city, while the Blitz not only generated a collective solidarity that is mythologised is the famous 'Blitz spirit' but also spurred a phase of postwar rebuilding. To be clear, I do not want to suggest that burning down or bombing London has been a good thing, but I want to point to how the prefix re- in regeneration, by definition, requires a previous, undesirable state. The burning city is ambivalent in that it can be perceived as threatening life and chattels, but it also signifies cleansing, as in the *Bartimaeus* trilogy. Here, the burning city is a promise of future happiness rather than catastrophe, but the ambivalence is never fully resolved. The spirit Bartimaeus indicates the utopian potential of the trilogy's *tabula rasa* ending by constantly referring to the cyclical pattern of history in which empires led by the magicians rise and fall, which does not make the restoration of a previous historical state a particularly desirable endeavour. Rather, this historical struggle can only be overcome by collective action. However, the trilogy's inherently anti-urbanist sentiments deny this possibility to be ultimately articulated for London – the novels end before the regenerative phase and leave open whether "the endless cycle of strive" (*Eye* 91) is actually broken.

In conclusion, the *Bartimaeus* trilogy employs a distinctively pastoral variant of the dichotomy between city and country, or more specifically between London and the generalised English countryside around it, in order to characterise the British capital as a space of corruption. Combining spatiality and politics, London is portrayed as the locus of moral corruption and oppressive governments, whereas an unlocalised countryside offers homeliness, freedom, and safety to Bartimaeus as the main narrator. The dichotomy between the two spaces legitimises the

violent revolutionary ending of the trilogy, during which London is destroyed. Rather than engaging in the nostalgic reconstruction of an ostensibly simpler and better past, however, London's destruction is represented as the result of the retrieval of a utopian impulse from the nostalgically imagined countryside-as-past. The realisation of a better world, however, is foregone in the novels, as the narration ends before an uncorrupted London can be built.

The *Rivers of London* series also features a story arc which aims at the destruction of London motivated by nostalgic, romanticised reimaginings of the countryside and the anti-urbanist criticism of London as parasitic. However, in the following chapter I will demonstrate how these sentiments are evaluated differently, as Aaronovitch's novels link them with English nationalism.

4.2.2   London as a Multicultural City in the *Rivers of London* Series

This chapter adds to the previous argument that Ben Aaronovitch's *Rivers of London* series intends to critique the nostalgic idealisation of quiet country life but imagines in an equally nostalgic manner the version of London it valorises in contrast. Whereas I have previously examined the actual representation of the countryside in the novels, in what follows I will focus on the politicisation of the city-country dichotomy in the series with respect to the story arc that revolves around the series' main antagonist, Martin Chorley. Chorley turns out to be a white nationalist who plans to destroy London by magical means, because he blames the city for everything that he thinks is wrong in the United Kingdom. In particular, he despises what I want to term here the 'London way of life' which, as has been examined, the series builds largely in connection to London's display of the 'Cool Britannia' spirit of multiculturalism and diversity. Thus, he exhibits what Svetlana Boym has theorised as restorative nostalgia. This type of nostalgia reconstructs "emblems and rituals of home and homeland" (Boym 49) in order to return to a halcyon, prelapsarian past due to a sense of discontent with the postlapsarian, invidious present. For Chorley, this retrotopian past to which he seeks to return is Anglo-Saxon England when London was nothing more than a Roman outpost. Beyond the nostalgic longing of the novels' main antagonist, I argue that the two instalments *The Hanging Tree* and *Lies Sleeping*, which were published in 2016 and 2018, engage with the extradiegetic political reality of Brexit. Chorley is representative of the nationalist and narcissistic rhetoric of leading Brexiteers, who proffered nostalgically distorted, vainglorious alternatives of Britain's past as its post-European future.[68]

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[68] For nostalgia as a cultural force in contemporary Britain, which the Brexiteers successfully mobilised for their political campaign, see Gaston and Hillhorst as well as Rubio. Rubio in particular links what he calls "the politics of nostalgia" to a newly emerging trend of pessimism as a symptomatic response to a sense of decline and argues that "new/revitalised parties and populist leaders . . . capitalize on pessimism and foster nostalgia for a halcyon past to gain support and transform the status quo". On pessimism as a form of philosophical and cultural expression, see also Mark Schmitt's *Spectres of Pessimism: A Cultural Logic of the Worst* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2023). For a social psychology analysis of the structures of feelings mobilised by Brexit, see John Cromby's "The Myth of Brexit" (*Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology*, vol. 29, no. 1, 2019, pp. 56–66).

For the first five instalments in the series, the main antagonist did not have an individualised identity but was only known to the protagonist Peter Grant and his colleagues as the anonymous Faceless Man.[69] Once his identity is revealed as one Martin Chorley in *The Hanging Tree*, the series starts building the antagonist's personality. Gradually, Chorley emerges as a person who is well-educated, an avid reader of J.R.R. Tolkien, and a racist and supremacist white nationalist. He increasingly exhibits a conservative nostalgia for an idealised past, in particular the Anglo-Saxon England for which Tolkien's novels and the King Arthur myth provide the imaginary templates.

Chorley is fuelled by a deep disdain of and hatred against London's display of multiculturalism and diversity. To him, the multicultural British capital represents what he calls the "intellectually bankrupt" notion of equality that runs counter to his hierarchical and racist ideology built on the conviction that "we're perfectly happy to exploit people" (*Moon* 350). While this ideological undercurrent to his plans is only hinted at in the earlier instalments of the series in his role as the Faceless Man, Chorley turns fully supremacist in the novels published after the EU referendum and routinely employs discursive strategies associated with the Leave campaign to argue his point of view.[70] These supremacist and nostalgic arguments for a 'Little England' are constantly juxtaposed with Grant's positive evaluation of London's multiculturalism, and the narrative's point of view clearly encourages the reader to side with Grant and share the protagonist's antipathy towards Chorley.[71] During the climactic confrontation between Grant and Chorley in *The Hanging Tree*, the latter's supremacist views are illustrated clearly for the first time in the series. When Grant asks his former colleague Lesley May why she defected to Chorley's side, Chorley states in her stead, "obviously irritated", that "she's properly English". "And I'm not?", Grant replies, which Chorley negates: "'No,' he said. 'Not that I blame you for that, you understand. Your mother was no doubt enticed over to fill some vacancy in the NHS or to drive a bus, or some other job that the working man was too feckless to do himself'" (*Tree* 358). As a member of the Oxbridge elite, Chorley displays here the doubly-supremacist sentiment that both immigrants and the working class have been complicit in the nation's demise. To his mind, apparently, the working class have forgotten their place in the social hierarchy and thus precipitated the need to encourage immigrants from the commonwealth to come over to Britain in order to do the low-paid jobs in

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[69] The nickname stems from Chorley's magical disguise, which did not allow the police to discern his face. The facelessness of course contributes to the notion that the series' villain did not have an individual identity before he is literally unmasked as Martin Chorley.

[70] It would be false and simplistic to suggest that all Leave voters were motivated by racist anxieties and/or supremacist nationalism. However, for a significant portion the control of what they perceived as 'foreign' migration was a central concern, as polls prior to the referendum indicate (Ipsos MORI; cf. also Boyle, Paddison, and Shirlow; Valluvan and Kalra; Korte and Mair).

[71] The *Oxford English Dictionary* lists the phrase *Little England* as having originally denoted "a place considered to resemble or epitomize England on a small scale" ("Little England"). However, since the late nineteenth century, the term has acquired a deprecative meaning in the sense of identifying "[t]he inward-looking England supposedly advocated by Little Englanders" ("Little England"). It is the latter meaning that has resurfaced in the discourse surrounding Brexit and is frequently applied to English nationalists.

the first place. Nonetheless, Chorley still regards the British working-class as 'proper' citizens, which becomes clear in his alliance with May, whom he identifies as such on the basis of her ethnic identity. She embodies "[t]hat wonderful blend of Romano-Celt and Anglo-Saxon with a flavouring of Dane and a pinch of Norman French. That happy breed that conquered the world and could again if all their children were kind and natural" (*Tree* 358–59). Beyond the nationalist conflation of Britain and England, Chorley clearly displays here the racist ideology of white English supremacism. The idea that the "happy breed" had been corrupted by miscegenation and produced 'unnatural' offspring uncomfortably echoes eugenic anxieties of racial impurity.

Significantly, it is the white, Essex-born Lesley May from a working-class background who joins the elitist Chorley on his crusade to "make Britain a better place" (*Lies* 289), thus providing a fictional example of a stereotypical Leave voter in the referendum who believed the lies of the campaign organisers. May was possessed by a spirit during the events of the first instalment and suffered severe facial damage from the incident. Subsequently, she becomes disillusioned with what she perceived as the police's inability to hold the supernatural culprit accountable and defects to Martin Chorley's side in *Broken Homes*. I just pointed out that May is from Essex in this context, because I hold this to be significant. As Tim Burrow writes in a *The Guardian* article about the county, "Essex has . . . become a place simultaneously embraced as home to the real, authentic England and scorned as the crudest, stupidest symbol of Englishness" and thus become a myth in the English imagination. "The invention of 'Essex'", as he calls it, "is, above all, a political story" because "[a]t a time when English identity – and the will of the 'real people' – is at the centre of our politics, the usefulness of these myths becomes clearer than ever". Burrows recognises the myth behind the invention of Essex as a political caricature but also points out that this myth has a persisting power in the public imagination. I propose to view the character Lesley May in Aaronovitch's series as personifying this myth.

Essex, Burrows explain, came to represent both Labour's and Thatcherism's failed economic promises of the twentieth century and left many of its inhabitants bitterly disillusioned by the political establishment:

> But before Essex was a punchline, it was a dream. A place that offered hope to working-class Londoners in the form of "new towns" such as Basildon and Harlow, which were built by the state to meet dire housing, sanitation and civic needs after the second world war. As the century progressed, however, parts of Essex came to represent the dismantling of this dream, as Thatcherism, the UK arm of the global new right movement that believed in lower taxes and lower public spending alongside deregulation and privatisation, became indelibly linked to the county.

Burrows attributes this stereotypical derision of Essex directly to the longstanding tradition of the city-country dichotomy: "Though only a few miles away from London, rural Essex folk have often

been seen as backward by their neighbours in the capital – poor, poorly educated, clinging to superstitions long discarded by their urban counterparts". What is more, the language that he uses in describing the history of Essex brims with notions of London's expansive urbanism: "Villages along the Thames were flattened to make way for towns that extended the logic of London as more and more people surged into Essex in the early 20th century. . . . Formerly bucolic outposts such as West Ham, East Ham, Ilford and Barking became bustling metropolitan centres".

Subsequently, he turns his analysis political and focuses on the creation of the stereotypical 'Essex Man' as a new social phenomenon and type of political voter. The Essex man is characterised as being "a young, industrious, mildly brutish and culturally barren worker in London's financial centre" with extremely right-wing political views, whom even "many Conservatives viewed . . . with a mixture of fear and horror" because "his rapid ascent, bypassing the traditional requirements of public school education and deference to hierarchy, seemed to threaten the very fabric of the establishment". These sentiments, Burrow claims, began to intermingle with equally right-wing views on 'race' and ethnicity in the public imagination. "Essex was also painted as a hotbed of bigotry, the place where white people moved to escape parts of London that were no longer white enough for them", writes Burrows, and so "came to represent 'white flight' in the UK".[72] Indeed, he asserts, "there is much evidence of xenophobia and racism in Essex", for which he cites the higher number of Essex residents who were members of the racist and neofascist British National Party in the early twenty-first century.[73] In the period of the late 1980s and 1990s, Essex, Burrows claims, has become "a shorthand for the way the whole country seemed to be changing, for the emergence of a brash and crass new individualism – and soon, it would become a shorthand for the discomfort with those changes, for a fear about what Essex man . . . threatened to reveal about the true nature of Englishness". These fears are put into the context of Brexit earlier in the article and directly link the stereotypical Essex man with a particular type of Leave voters in the 2016 referendum, that of the "gung-ho hard Brexiteer". Burrows closes the article by offering "the allure of an 'authentic' England" as an explanation for the persistence of the Essex myth, observing that "[t]hese days, the idea of 'Essex' is primarily deployed on behalf of an extreme rightwing ideological project, whose latest cause is hard Brexit".

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[72] The term *white flight* originates in the United States and describes the (perceived) phenomenon that white, often affluent residents 'flee' from city centres when numbers of nonwhite residents start rising there. Nissa Finney and Ludi Simpson debunk this myth of 'minority white cities' for the UK in *"Sleepwalking to Segregation"? Challenging Myths about Race and Migration* (141–60).

[73] Further in the article, Burrows engages in a bit of amateur psychoanalysis by claiming that "[m]any nations have an Essex: a much-mocked place that has grown up in the shadow of a major city to become the supposed spiritual homeland of the nouveau riche. As much as they are mocked, these places come to symbolise something quite fundamental to the country that named them. They are viewed as the nation's id, its rawest and truest essence, but also its deepest shame at being a bit *too much*" (original emphasis). While I am wary to follow this kind of 'kitchen sink psychology', Burrow's main point is clear: Essex has become the stereotypical antithesis to London, and as such it is used in Aaronovitch's novels.

As every myth, the Essex stereotyping says more about those perpetuating it than those it seeks to depict. In their study on conceptions of the political subject in the wake of what they call "the twin disturbances of the European Union referendum and the 2017 general election" (67), John Clarke and Janet Newman argue that campaigning for the referendum and the subsequent general election has "brought to the surface condensed and deep-seated fissures" which resulted in "new identifications" (68). Similarly, Sara B. Hobolt, Thomas J. Leeper, and James Tilley argue that the "affective polarization in the wake of the Brexit Referendum" (1476) has engendered new salient identities which transcend "traditional partisan divisions" (1477). I claim that Peter Grant on the one hand and Martin Chorley and Lesley May on the other represent such salient identities, which makes them identifiable political subjects in the novels and invoke political realities such as Brexit without discussing them explicitly.[74] In what follows, I will thus read them as representing different structures of nostalgia, whose fissures were brought to the fore by Brexit.

On the one hand, Grant embodies the stereotype of the progressive urbanite who maintains that "London is the pick 'n' mix cultural capital of the world" (*Rivers* 6). To Grant, London is the greatest city in the world, which frequently lets him disregard the social inequalities in the city despite his profession. As such, Grant embodies the stereotypical cosmopolitan Remainer. Lesley May is representative of the discontent ethnically white English working class, many of whom either reside or have roots in the English countryside. These rural regions have suffered from economic decline in the late twentieth century, particularly due the set of economic policies known as Thatcherism, which combined deregulation, privatisation of key national industries, maintenance of a flexible labour market, marginalising the trade unions, and centralising power from local authorities to central government. Overlooking the idiosyncrasies of England's rural regions, they are often lumped together in the Brexit voter debate as the stereotypical rural left behinds, who were duped by leading Brexiteers' rhetorical sleights of hand and used the referendum as an opportunity to voice their frustration, loss, and anger, and thereby get one over on the political establishment. Martin Chorley represents these Brexiteers who in the public imagination are usually depicted as (ultra-)conservative members of the political elite, often with a private school education and Oxbridge diplomas. According to the Brexit myth, these leading Brexiteers dreamt of

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[74] One could, in this sense, conceive of Aaronovitch's novels as being examples of what Kristian Shaw has called "Brexlit", that is, "fictions that either directly respond, or imaginatively allude, to Britain's exit from the EU, or engage with the subsequent sociocultural, economic, racial or cosmopolitical consequences of Britain's withdrawal" (4). Indeed, Chorley exhibits "the nostalgic appetite for (an admittedly false) national heritage, anxieties surrounding cultural infiltration and a mourning for the . . . past" (4) that Shaw regards as indicative of the genre and his plans confirm to the symptomatic plot pattern of "the English revolt" (59). However, since only two of the nine novels can be fruitfully read in the context of Brexit, I shy away from extending the label to the entire series. It must also be added that in the chronology of the storyworld, both *The Hanging Tree* and *Lies Sleeping* are set in 2014, that is, even if Brexit were included in the storyworld, it has not happened yet. However, my entire argument is based on the claim that both novels do not engage explicitly with Brexit but comment on the extradiegetic political realities in which the referendum has been held at the time both novels were published.

nostalgically restoring Britain to its supposedly rightful place as one of the leading nations on earth, which they saw as being impossible with Britain 'restrained' by the European Union.

Instead of multifaced individuals, the *Rivers of London* series offers its characters as one-dimensional political subjects. The representation is reductive, stereotypical even, and reflective of multiple binaries which are mapped onto each other and reinforce the supposed division of society, the DisUnited Kingdom. One binary that features in this amalgamation of distinction is the city-country binary, as Martin Chorley seeks to return the nation to a period in which what he thinks as the root of all evil, London, did not exist.[75] He clarifies to Grant that the period he has in mind is "a time when the monarchy meant something more than tea parties and sex scandals. . . . Before the Saxe-Coburgs or the Tudors or anyone else American TV has done a miniseries about" (*Tree* 359). By degrading it to tea parties and sex scandals, Chorley's indictment of the British monarchy reiterates the idea of demise and moral corruption with which he has previously diagnosed the general population based on racist ideals of blood purity. Instead, he longs for the pastoral England of the early Anglo-Saxon period as a halcyon, prelapsarian time, as Grant guesses correctly on the basis of Chorley's inclination for Tolkienian fantasy. It is then May who makes clear to Grant that their plans are not only supposed to return the country to former glory, but are also specifically directed against London:

> "I don't care if the whole fucking city falls into a hole. Nobody does. Not really. At least nobody outside the M25."
> "That's a bit harsh," I said. "What's the city ever done to you?"
> "You don't get it, Peter," she said. "London sucks."
> "Fuck off."
> "Fucking does – London sucks. Sucks the rest of the country dry. You want to get ahead, you have to go to London. You want to get away – go to fucking London. All the jobs, all the money goes to London. The rest of the country gets the leftovers, the bits that London doesn't want." (*Lies* 281)[76]

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[75] Olivier Sykes points to the emergence of "a potent spatial imaginary and lexicon" as "a striking feature of the UK's 2016 EU referendum and its aftermath" (137) but demonstrates aptly how the binary division into 'Brexitland' and 'Remainia' along the city-country binary fails to capture voting patterns accurately. Birte Heidemann claims that "representations of the rural and the urban in recent British fiction provide readers with rhetorical cues into a political imaginary that reveals the constructed nature of the divisions at hand" (677) and thus links Brexlit to the condition-of-England novel. However, her reading centres on Amanda Craig's *The Lie of the Land* (2018) and Ali Smith's *Autumn* (2016), two novels which have been widely critically examined through the lens of Brexlit, to argue that "they redress the rigid binaries of rural versus urban as poor versus rich, margin versus centre, colony versus metropole and Other versus Self to lay bare other structural and societal divisions" (678). In contrast, I suggest that the *Rivers of London* series upholds these stereotypical binaries to serve its liberal agenda of celebrating a distinctive, nostalgically inflected type of Londonness. For a pastoral reading of twenty-first-century realist fiction like Smith's focused on ecological concerns, please see Deborah Lilley's *The New Pastoral in Contemporary British Writing* (Routledge, 2020).

[76] The metaphorical expression of London 'sucking' the rest of the country dry parallels the concept of parasitic urbanism introduced in chapter 4.2.1. The idea is even older, however, as a similar phrase can already be found in Daniel Defoe's *A Tour Thro' the Whole Island of Great Britain* (1724). Defoe writes abouts London's parasitic and consuming influence: "But the neighbourhood of London, which sucks the Vitals of Trade in this Island to itself, is the chief Reason of any decay of Business in this Place; and I shall in the Course of these Observations,

The extent of emotional, offensive language in May's rant alone suffices to communicate the deep antipathy she feels towards the capital, and Grant's embodiment of Londoner's ignorance of and arrogance towards regions outside the city make him a suitable addressee. For all its celebration of the 'London way of life', the series briefly acknowledges here the actually existing power imbalance between the British capital and other parts of the UK but immediately villainises these sentiments for the conclusions that are drawn, for it is May and Chorley's view that London-centrism is emblematic for everything that has turned Britain into "the shithole it is now" (*Lies* 289). That Chorley's actual plans, much like the Brexiteers, remain rather hazy on the details as to how exactly make "Britain a better place" (*Lies* 289) is secondary as long as *something* is done about the status quo, as May 'explains' to Grant when he confronts her with precisely that question:

> "He's going to help us make Britain a better place."
> "Better how?"
> "Just better," she said, the corners of her mouth drawing downwards. "Nicer, cleaner, *better*!" She shouted the last word and then paused to get control. . . .
> "Something we can all be proud of," said Chorley, coming back into the room. (*Lies* 289; original emphasis)

Again, May's emotions are emphasised when it comes to London's position compared to the rest of the country and illustrate her stereotypical role as a member of the white, rural working-class, the portion of working-class Leave voters that have fallen for elitist campaign strategies that promised them a 'better' Britain after the referendum. It is consequential, thus, that it is May who eventually shoots Chorley, because he has failed to fulfil his promises to her (*Lies* 394), invoking the old sentiment that, eventually, political revolutions devour their own children and dealing out a kind of poetic justice to the villain which fulfils May's personal desire for retribution.

Overall, the glimpses readers get of Martin Chorley's ideology allow them to classify him as being motivated by what Caroline Koegler, Pavan Kumar Malreddy, and Marlena Tronicke have termed "narcissistic nationalism", which they define as "a potent blend of imperialism, narcissism, and exceptionalism" (587). Narcissistic nationalism grieves over "the perils of domination and perceived victimhood" and is "narcissistically invested in hierarchical, controlling relationships . . ., rather than more balanced, inclusive, and socially just models of cooperation" (587; cf. also Hirsch 268).[77] Chorley's ideological narcissism is reinforced on the personal level through several

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hint at it, where many good Sea-Ports and large Towns, tho' farther off than Ipswich, and as well fitted for Commerce, are yet swallow'd up by the immense Indraft of Trade to the City of London; and more decay'd beyond all Comparison, than Ipswich is suppos'd to be" (88).

[77] Ailsa Henderson and Richard Wyn Jones argue similarly that English nationalism is built on "a sense that England has been 'forgotten'" (4) in the twenty-first century. To the list of emotions motivating Martin Chorley one could also add anger. In *The Monarchy of Fear*, Martha Nussbaum suggests that the kind of anger that I contend Chorley to exhibit arises of a combination of narcissism and helplessness (82). The former denotes the sentiment that everything should go as the angry person wishes and the latter arises from the feeling of being a victim of a cruel world, which incontrovertibly does not conform to one's wishes.

renditions of the self-involved 'evil villain speech' trope, which Grant, as a well-versed popular culture 'nerd', is quick to point out. During their confrontation in *The Hanging Tree*, for instance, he realises that Chorley "had probably been waiting years for an audience" and uses the "strange need to confide in me" to his advantage: "while I let Martin Chorley monologue away, I laid my plans against him" (*Tree* 358–60). In *Lies*, again, Grant questions him extensively about his plans "because Chorley liked the sound of his voice and so did I – especially when I was playing for time" (377).

On the ideological level, Chorley's narcissistic nationalism is expressed in terms of pastoral nostalgia as opposed to the urban, specifically London, way of life. The capital, as I have demonstrated, is taken by Chorley and May to be emblematic for Britain's demise, and their vision is one of a pastoral England which is diametrically opposed to the urban centre that is London. Accordingly, Nightingale points out during the manhunt for Chorley in *Lies Sleeping* that "all his behaviour in the last year has centred around the City in one way or another" (241). In this sense, Chorley's vision is structured along the lines of the well-established city-country dichotomy. In *The Country and the City*, Raymond Williams reminds us that, although this yearning for an "unlocalised 'Old England'" (10) constitutes a recurring trope in the narration of city and country, it means "different things at different times" (12). For Chorley, I contend, the restorative pastoral nostalgia he displays constitutes primarily a narrative of an ostensibly simpler time, one without the complexities of global politics and immigration he so deplores. Although it was established by "that happy breed that conquered the world" (*Tree* 359), the British Empire consequently represents the beginning of the end for Chorley's supremacist ideals. As he makes clear, he believes in clearly ordered hierarchies, which he sees best established in the times of Alfred the Great. "You believe in law and order", he tells Grant, "and soon there will be a new order" (*Lies* 291). The pastoral nostalgia, thus, is a wish for reduced complexity and re-established order, which Chorley finds the present is lacking.[78] He yearns for a time where everyone knew their place in society and where the order of the day was dictated from top to bottom.

From this sentiment, the yearning for stability and order, arises Chorley's motivation to kill Mr Punch, London's revenant who represents "the manifestation of . . . crime and disorder . . . [t]he spirit of riot and rebellion" (*Rivers* 250) and can be understood as the supernatural representation of London's dark side. According to the lore of the series, Mr Punch was a Romanised Celt living in Londinium "back when . . . the place is still basically a muddy field with

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[78] The conjunction of pastoral nostalgia and racist nationalism can be observed not only in the intra- but also the extra-textual reality. One of the most infamous UKIP campaign posters prior to the referendum, "Breaking Point" depicted a queue of Middle Eastern immigrants against the green and copious hills of England, thereby clearly attempting to visually support Brexiteers' xenophobic anxieties about Britain being threatened by 'foreign' immigration due to the EU border deals with Turkey.

a bridge attached to one end" (*Lies* 196). He also "was a true believer in law and order", but was deeply disappointed in his belief in the security provided by the Roman army when his entire family was tortured and killed during an Iceni raid led by Boudica (*Lies* 196–97). The torture and slaughter of his family drove Mr Punch mad, and the amount of magical energy released by the deaths of many during the raid turned him into "the spirit of riot and rebellion" (*Rivers* 250) that he is during the time the novels take place: "So up he sprang. A thing full of hatred and mad laughter, capering through the ashes of the city. Because order did not save his children. Law did not save his wife" (Lies 198). Hence, Chorley plans to literally sacrifice the supernatural source of chaos in London to fuel his vision of "a new order" (*Lies* 291) represented by a retrotopian, pastoral Anglo-Saxonism.

In her study on the persistence of the Anglo-Saxon myth, Julia Wiedemann observes that "Anglo-Saxonism is mostly revived when there is a need to define a specific English way" (79). She further notes that, among other characteristics, Anglo-Saxonism emphasises the superiority of the Germanic heritage in the English nation. Similarly, Williams notices a "different reconstruction of a happier past, with a conscious appeal to morality in the present" in the tendency to idolise the Saxon period "as a free and equal rural community" (79). I want to suggest, hence, that Chorley's belief in a 'better' Britain which he seeks to fulfil by returning the country to the Anglo-Saxon period draws precisely on the perpetuation of the Anglo-Saxon myth that Wiedemann identifies in the idiosyncratic English nationalism tied to a romanticised, nostalgic vision of pastoralism as it was defined during the nineteenth century.[79] It is needless to say, perhaps, that this romanticising of the early medieval period has no foundation in historical facts. Far from being ordered and simple, this period saw its own fair share of turmoil and chaos. As Tim Fulford points out, this pastoral vision of "'English nature' . . . is a creation of the eighteenth century. It is a landscape, but it is also a way of feeling – of feeling about native soil, of feeling about the past, of feeling about Englishness itself" (109). Consequently, Fulford argues, "[p]atriotism and nationalism . . . are encoded in a symbolic view of a rural landscape and the way of life that is presumed to have flourished in that landscape" (109). Such "nostalgic yearnings for an idyll", however, tend to ignore that "[v]illagers . . . are not innocent shepherds. They are people, good and ill; their distress is real

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[79] Beyond the confines of fiction, the criticism and antipathy towards London as the embodiment of deplorable aspects of modernity as espoused by Chorley and May is also found as one of several strands that attempt to simplistically map the demographics of Brexit supporters. In conservative circles' rhetoric, pastoral nostalgia becomes the expression of the feeling "that something had not only been lost, but *taken away*" (Franklin 45; original emphasis), which fuels regretful and lamenting emotions that have found their outlet in the referendum. The longing for a mythical country, which is steeped in strongly nostalgic notions of rustic pastoralism, is also present in the myth of Deep England as ancestral country, which is prone to nationalist instrumentalisation in calls to defend the primordial home in England's green and pleasant land. On the myth of Deep England and its instrumentalisation in political discourse, see also Wright (81–87) and Calder (180–208).

and is exacerbated by . . . a neglect that, in practice, goes hand-in-hand with nostalgic yearnings for an idyll" (Fulford 123).[80]

Chorley seems to seek refuge not in scientific history but in myth and fantasy. After all, he does not plan to use magic to actually revive the historical figure of Alfred the Great but bring Merlin from the Arthurian legend into existence. Being an "enormous Tolkien nerd" (*Tree* 299), he also seems to have picked up significant parts of the nostalgically pastoral view of Anglo-Saxon England from *The Lord of the Rings*.[81] The pastoralism of Chorley's vision chimes with the double sacrifice that he intends, first sacrificing Mr Punch in order to generate the amount of magic needed to then sacrifice himself for bringing Merlin into existence. As Sarah Franklin argues with respect to the commemoration of Second World War soldiers in Britain, there is a "connection between narratives of wartime sacrifice and resurgent white ethnic nativisms" (51) in the United Kingdom, and this resurge is strongest in rural regions. The "logic of *sacrificial reproduction*", she claims, not only defines many Britons, but also "their national future" (51; original emphasis).[82] His own sacrifice, then, adheres precisely to that notion of "sacrificial reproduction" (Franklin 51) insofar as he sacrifices his own life for what he believes is a better country. The return to a strictly hierarchical but pastoral, pre-urban English society that Chorley envisions on the basis of his distorted ideas about what that past was like conform strikingly to the list of characteristic elements for Bauman's retrotopias. While the idea to improve one's country is not inherently evil, the means by which Chorley attempts to achieve it as well as the distinctively nationalist, patriotic, and supremacist ideological preconditions of that vision earn him the place as the *Rivers of London* series' prime antagonist and serve, vice versa, to demonise these anti-urbanist sentiments to the benefit of that 'Cool Britannia'-style London multiculturalism that the novels champion so overtly.

Eventually, however, Chorley fails to resurrect Merlin and to turn back the time to Anglo-Saxon England, because in his role as London's cultural ambassador Grant is able to strike a bargain with Mr Punch.[83] Being forewarned of Chorley's plans, Mr Punch overpowers Chorley and hands him to Grant's custody, where he remains until May shoots him for not keeping his promises

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[80] Fulford actually makes his point about eighteenth-century representations of the countryside in poems such as those of George Crabbe, but his observation is eerily acute with regard to contemporary nostalgia for a better rural past.

[81] I have previously discussed how Tolkien is used as a signifier for a particularly nostalgic example of a fantastical reimagining of Anglo-Saxon England which is appropriated here by a white nationalist.

[82] At one point, Chorley recites the chorus' opening of Act II from *Henry the Fifth*, which describes the country's dedication to go to war with France. Chorley thus indicates that he views his actions as taking place in times of war (*Tree* 395), although it is just his personal crusade against London.

[83] In a confrontation with one of Mama Thames's daughters, Lady Ty, early in the series, Grant makes his self-conception as being an emissary of the city quite clear: "'I am a sworn constable,' I said, 'and that makes me an officer of the law. I am also an apprentice, which makes me a keeper of the sacred flame, but most of all I am a free man of London and that makes me a Prince of the City'" (*Rivers* 358). Besides being situated between the magical and the mundane, Grant also occupies the space between the two cultures of native Englishness and West Africa, between his own working-class background and his mostly upper-class superiors. This liminal position as 'the middleman' makes him an excellent decoder of urban ambiguities, which allows him to strike the bargain between Father and Mama Thames to resolve their turf war that I have already examined and one with Mr Punch.

without Grant being able to stop her. Chorley's failure to carry out his plans, I want to suggest, stems from his failure to understand that magic is not a tool that he can yield and control as he pleases. Chorley thinks that "[m]agic is about man reshaping reality itself . . . A tool to reshape the universe" (*Lies* 377). While Grant concedes that magic is "[t]he creation of physical effects through the casting of spells" (*Tree* 109), he refrains from believing that the creation of effects equals the imposition of his own will on the universe, like Chorley does. Instead, he recognises that magic is a chaotic force that finds its own way, as it does in this instance in the character of Mr Punch. Therefore, Grant regards Mr Punch as "the lesser of two evils" (*Lies* 389), because he thinks that the chaos created by the "spirit of riot and rebellion" (*Rivers* 250) is "part of the ecosystem" (*Lies* 280) of London. Thus, the struggle between chaos and order cannot be solved by destroying chaos, but by accepting it as necessary for the system and by trying to balance it out both with the help of ordering institutions such as the police and the capability for negotiation that Grant already demonstrated in resolving the territory dispute between the two river deities. Chorley, however, has no understanding for such a nuanced equilibrium as he admits outright:

> "What I don't understand, Peter, . . . is your loyalty to these institutions. The police, the Folly – you swore an oath to the crown for god's sake – institutions with hardly the best track record with regards to you people."
> Because the alternative is you, I wanted to shout back. (*Tree* 290)

Clearly, the unmitigated position of chaos that is represented by Martin Chorley and, after her defection to his side, Lesley May is shown to be disruptive. Their rogue criminality assumes a notion of narcissistic egotism that ignores any casualties to achieve its aim. Relating to English nationalist and nostalgic fantasies, their aim is to return Britain into a supposedly better past, a state in which London had not supposedly destroyed the rest of the country. To Chorley and May, the British capital and the multicultural conviviality it represented during the 'Cool Britannia' era of the early 2000s is emblematic of everything they find deplorable about modern Britain. Consequently, they intend to return Britain to an allegedly ordered past by eradicating the chaotic part of London's ecosystem. In light of the political developments that have taken place as the series was written, most notably the decision of the United Kingdom to leave the European Union in 2016, Chorley's plans are aligned with nationalist discourse in the later instalments and draw parallels to the arguments that have been used to advocate for voting Leave in the EU referendum. Chorley and May's condemnation of London resonates with the urban-rural divide between the capital and the 'rest' of the country, which is one of the many axes along which the demographic of Brexit voters have been examined. Moreover, Chorley displays nationalist supremacist sentiments that become evident in his disdain of immigrants and the mythical exaltation of Anglo-Saxon Englishness. Thus, in addition to attempting to take back control over Britain with the help of magic, Chorley's

reasoning taps into the discourses around immigration that have coined much of the Brexit debate around the referendum.

Instead, the narrative conclusion which has Grant foil the antagonists' plans, presents his mindset as the better alternative to bigoted nationalism. His cosmopolitan attitude towards his fellow citizens has been described as "cooperative diversity" (Lethbridge 236) or "conviviality" (Borowska-Szerszun 2) respectively, and it is characterised by a desire to negotiate a middle ground between two extremist positions. The series noticeably stresses the necessity for an equilibrium between chaos and order by suggesting that, after a period of subdued magical activity immediately after the Second World War, magic is coming back. Reversing the stereotypical fantasy pattern of magic leaving the world, the *Rivers of London* series implies that modern London is the ideal environment for it.[84] The return of magic, thus, can be read as a signifier of social change. With it, change brings conflicts, be they supernatural or not, and conflicts, the novels argue, need resolution by negotiation and by cooperation. The illusion for total order is nostalgic and will, in the end, only breed its equally extremist counterpart: total chaos. Hence, a too strong belief in extremist positions of binaries does not solve the underlying conflict but exacerbates the infinite cycle of the mutual reinforcement of these positions. The Metropolitan Police's revised motto in the novels, "Working Together for a Stranger London" (*Homes* 150), epitomises the appeal to incorporate chaos into order and to bear the uncertainty that this involves.

This argument, however, disregards a causality between London's self-proclaimed multiculturalism and the outcome of the Brexit referendum and follows the simplistic narrative that rural regions of the UK, especially in the north, failed to match the accelerated economic growth of London, and that it is the discontent of the austerity state's left behinds that caused Brexit (Boyle, Paddington, and Shirley; Sykes). And while indeed the UK displayed the highest imbalance in wage distribution in the EU in 2016 (119), Gordon MacLeod and Martin Jones expose the simplistic and reductive character of this line of argument by noting pointedly that "the country did not suddenly *become* radically unequal on 23 June 2016" (113; original emphasis). MacLeod and Jones therefore stress the need for conjunctural analysis, advocating for "an appreciation of the miscellaneous economic trends, the accumulation of social tensions and the gradual erosion of instituted consent, alongside the sources of political and cultural conflict that generated the very conditions for Brexit to happen" (113). The *Rivers of London* series, however, perpetuates the simplistic and reductive Brexit narrative, eschewing the acknowledgement of complicated and entangled structural conjunctures giving way to the rise of nationalist end elitist sentiments in favour of attributing Brexit to the nefarious plans of a few ill-minded individuals, the elitists and

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[84] Both J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* and George R. R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* are excellent examples for the process of magic leaving the fantasy land, which John Clute has identified as "thinning" ("Thinning").

the rural left behinds. Emblematic for the failure to account for structural explanations of a complex political phenomenon, the novels masquerade the structures of feeling articulated by Brexit in a relatively unreflecting juxtaposition of urban and rural ways of living and thinking, which they then exploit for narrative purposes. Even though the only novel in the series set in the *actual* countryside, *Foxglove Summer*, depicts contemporary life there as being neither as 'backwards' as Grant previously thought nor as innocently preserved as Chorley would have it, on the level of plot Chorley's retrotopian re-imagining of history does not take place and, thus, the series' own variant of Brexit is prevented. In doing so, the series presents a counter narrative to the extradiegetic reality that is arguably nostalgic in its own way. Moreover, the novels perpetuate the myth that the UK is perpetually in decline since Thatcher's premiership which posits Brexit as the culmination of this development.

4.3 Conclusion

In conclusion, contemporary London urban fantasy makes use of the city-country dichotomy as a paradigmatic system of representing the British capital in opposition to the British, or rather most often the English, countryside. Due to these novels' proclivity for first-person focalisation, depending on the individual perspective readers are encouraged to side with a protagonist who either deplores or valorises London. In the first instance, the image of the city is usually that of a morally corrupted and depraved place run by unscrupulous politicians. These anti-urbanist sentiments draw on rhetorical strategies from the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and link the notion of moral depravity to a dysfunctional political system. In contrast, the countryside is praised in a demonstrably pastoral fashion for its innocence, which is construed via the notable lack of urbanity, although the actual countryside features little as a narrative space in the two texts I have examined in this context. They are, after all, *urban* fantasies, and their setting is the city. Benedict Jacka's *Alex Verus* series touches lightly on the extent of corruption in Britain's magical council but focuses primarily on Verus's personal animosities with individual members of government. Although the protagonist constructs himself as an urban person, the narrative gives away that he feels most comfortable in spaces which appear natural. I have examined three of these spaces which feature as Verus's home throughout the series to argue that the nourishing connotations of nature acquire a distinctively gendered dynamic, which constructs the city as a perilous domain for the hero to parade his masculinity. Jonathan Stroud's *Bartimaeus* trilogy places its focus on a full-fledged revolution against the oppressive magocracy. It is in these three novels that London is criticised strongest for its role as a parasite to the rest of country, and even empire, whose resources it consumes. It is consequential, then, that Stroud's novels end with London's destruction, which acquires the connotation of starting anew. Both series take inspiration of their

depiction of the degenerated city and the pastoral country from the already nostalgically laden literature of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The dichotomy is employed to give voice to anti-urbanist sentiments, which are rooted in present-day concerns of a capital city that has increasingly split itself in its own imagination from the country whose capital it is. London is noticeably *not* emblematic for the UK, but for itself, and its primary targets of comparison are other global cities such as New York or Tokyo.

In Ben Aaronovitch's *Rivers of London*, the perspective is reversed, displaying that of the arrogant urbanite who valorises life in London over the supposed 'backwardness' of Britain's rural regions. The M25 is taken as the demarcation line between civilisation and barbarity, and the countryside figures primarily as the nostalgic construction of an aggressively patriotic English nationalism. Although the actual countryside features equally little in the series, the fifth instalment, *Foxglove Summer*, redresses some of the stereotypical assumptions of the protagonists and shows that, while different, the city and the country are not inherently unequal. In subsequent instalments it is the nostalgic and retrotopian reimagining of a pastoral countryside that the antagonist Martin Chorley wishes to recreate which perpetuates these stereotypical notions of rusticity. Chorley's anti-urbanism is specifically directed against London, which he blames for everything supposedly wrong with Britain, thereby linking anti-urbanist sentiments with the sort of nostalgic nationalism that has its roots in nineteenth-century conservationism. *Rivers of London*, thus, denigrates a stratum of society that has been associated with stereotypical Leave voters in the 2016 EU referendum, attempting to offer political commentary on the rift in the contemporary UK's social fabric through the lens of urban fantasy and its employment of the city-country dichotomy.

I contend that both perspectives depicted in Aaronovitch's series rest to equal parts on a simplification of life in the city and life in the country. The nostalgic and pastoral notion of a somewhat simpler and more innocent life in rural regions overlooks, on the one hand, that the pastoral tradition of depicting this particular lifestyle disregarded the harsh and unforgiving daily work in favour of recreation and leisurely strolls through a picturesque landscape that only arose in the distorted representations of rural regions by a specific part of society in the first place. On the other, life in the countryside in the twenty-first century, while some may experience it at being blissfully removed from the technological hub of the city, can indeed feel like being left behind. Arguably, globalisation and the progress of the global economy towards ever more speed in the twenty-first century have exacerbated the feeling of neglect in the twenty-first century in rural regions that are customarily deemed 'structurally weak'. This neglect of the country by the city, while acknowledged in the *Rivers of London* series in passing, is never fully realised by the protagonist Peter Grant. His view of London as the epitome of a modern, urban cosmopolitanism is fuelled by an equally distorted and nostalgic perception of the capital stemming from the 'Cool

Britannia' era of the early 2000s; but it is one that does little to ameliorate the tensions between London and the rest of the UK in a post-Brexit reality.

While the fantastic mode offers the means to negotiate these structures of feeling in a way that goes beyond realist representation, I want to point out as a final observation that the narrative resolutions provided by the series uniformly remain somewhat unsatisfying and, thus, stand in contrast to the liberating possibilities of the mode. In the *Alex Verus* series, the plot privileges the individual over society at large; in the *Bartimaeus* trilogy, the ultimate solution lies in the *tabula rasa* form of extensive (and violent) political revolution and does not demonstrate a viable political solution for urban regeneration; and in the *Rivers of London* series, anti-urbanist sentiments are simply villainised and conveniently solved by having the villain assassinated in police custody. Thus, the fantastic may be able to offer us new ways to think about our contemporary realities, but eventually literature cannot solve the problems of these realities for us.

I have discussed the four series in this chapter under the label of nostalgia as the prevalent structure of feeling. I hope to have demonstrated in the respective readings how they engage with nostalgic longing either for a mythical past or a lost home each in their own way. With recourse to the question of poetics and politics, it stands to reason that Jacka's and Stroud's series are nostalgic in the way in which they evoke the pastoral countryside as a foil for the construction of a depraved urbanism, which they sketch either as perilous for the central protagonist in Alex Verus's case or as parasitic for the country at large in the *Bartimaeus* trilogy. While these two series thus engage with nostalgia poetically, Aaronovitch's *Rivers of London* novels put the concept centre stage on the representational level through their particular characterisation of Martin Chorley. As a white nationalist, Chorley's vision for England is emblematically nostalgic and becomes political. His desire to re-create the mythical England of King Arthur is not only reflective in Svetlana Boym's sense that Chorley retreats from a postlapsarian present to the prelapsarian past but restorative, since he actively tries to recreate the lost past as a national future.

In this chapter, nostalgia's preoccupation with "the ideas of decay, collapse, and change" (Santesso 34) have already shown through in my discussion of the four series. There is, as Niklas Salmose and Eric Sandberg observe with regard to the aesthetics of nostalgia, an undeniable fascination with "the potent symbol of the ruin" (205), which points to the concept's adaptation of Gothic tropes. In the next chapter, I will discuss the generic influence of Urban Gothic through the lens of haunting as another structure of anxious feeling in contemporary urban fantasy.

5   Cartographies of Haunting: The City-Body Metaphor

In the introduction to *London: The Biography*, the writer Peter Ackroyd claims that "[w]hether we consider London as a young man refreshed and risen from sleep or whether we lament its condition as a deformed giant, we must regard it as a human shape with its own laws of life and growth" (2). The representational strategy employed here, as the very chapter title of Ackroyd's introduction makes expressively clear, is that of construing the city metaphorically as a body; a metaphorical imagery which, he notes, can be traced all the way back to the city's Roman origins (1). Consequently, Ackroyd presents his history of the city as "its biography" (2).

The body is not the only metaphor with which to make sense of the city, but certainly one of the oldest and one of the most pervasive. Peter Langer's sociological typology of urban metaphors is built on the proposition to conceive of the city as a bazaar, a jungle, a machine, or an organism. The American urban theorist and planner Kevin Lynch observes that normative theories of urban formations, in the sense of "some coherent set of ideas about proper city form and its reasons", make use of a respective "comprehensive metaphor of what a city is and how it works" (73). As the three most influential models he identifies the cosmos, the machine, and the organism, the latter of which, according to Lynch, is "the most prevalent among planning professionals" (89). Sonja Hnilica's *Metaphern für die Stadt* offers a broader overview over metaphorical conceptualisations of the city from an architectural point of view. Hnilica argues that "[t]he search for an adequate description of the city is inherent in the urbanistic discourse that deals with cities and their construction" (7; my translation), and that this search for a descriptor frequently resorts to metaphorical imagery. She devotes individual chapters to the city as a house, the city as an organism, the city as nature, the city as a machine, the city as theatre, the city as mind, and the city as an artwork. As these three examples show, the organic metaphor is one of the most widespread and it remains a pertinent strategy of representing the city. The city as a body, both in terms of the cardiovascular and the neuronal system, will also provide the touchstones for my subsequent analysis, although I subsume them under the same overarching principle of linking the city to the human body.

Due to its broad historical range, it is Richard Sennett's *Flesh and Stone: The Body and the City in Western Civilization* (1994) that remains the paradigmatic study of the city-body metaphor to date. His explorations trace the figure of speech from ancient Athens to late twentieth-century New York, focusing on "individual cities at specific moments" (22). One of the general insights of the study – and one that, as Sennett indicates, stems from his collaboration with Michel Foucault in the 1970s – is that "collective, generic images of 'the human body'" generate "master images" (23) of the body which negate the diversity otherwise found in the city. Thus, "[w]hen a society or political order speaks generally about 'the body,' it can deny the needs of bodies which do not fit

the master plan" (23). Although my own interest lies in the way in which this imagery is employed in *speaking about* contemporary London and less in the actualities of urban planning, Sennett makes unmistakably clear that conceiving of the city as a body also entails political implications.[1] With the exception of the first, the categories Sennett examines – voice and eye, the heart, arteries and veins – display an analogy of the city and the cardiovascular functions of the body. Ben Highmore has supplemented these with a second metaphoric analogy to the brain's neuronal network ("Metaphor" 28). Since they are also made manifest in urban fantasy, these two prevailing analogies provide the analytical frame of the following chapter. The first part focuses on the analogy between the city and the body; a metaphorical configuration which I have aggregated under the term *somapolis*, a compound from the Greek σῶμα (sõma, "body") and πόλις (polis, "city"). Consequently, the second part is devoted to the configuration which foregrounds the mind and memory as the central referent for conceiving of the city, for which I use the term *mnemopolis*, the corresponding compound formed with the prefix μνήμη (mnēmē, "memory").

The cardiovascular analogy, Highmore points out, figures the city as a closed system, whereas the neuronal presupposes a more open system that, "[i]nstead of concentrating on the circulation of physical bodies and things", emphasises "the circulation of information" ("Metaphor" 30).[2] In addition, he argues that "[b]oth these analogies need to be assessed within both a medical and utopian understanding of their limits and potentials" ("Metaphor" 31). What Highmore means by this is that the metaphorical link of the city to the body presupposes both a healthy and a diseased body. In linguistic terms, two metaphors are nested within each other with regard to the target domain of the urban environment: first that of the body and second the source domain of health and disease. The utopian aspect of both the cardiovascular and the neuronal analogy relate to an idea of health, whereas the medical register indicates a pathological condition, though not in equal terms: "If the cardiovascular suggested an economy of illness and cure, or surgery, the neural suggests an economy of therapy, amelioration, and self-help manuals" ("Metaphor" 33). As Ackroyd also points out in his extremely brief genealogy of somatic London imagery, the idea of disease has been pervasive in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to express the city's rapid growth in a register that employs the monstrous. During this time an image emerged of the city as "fleshy and voracious, grown fat upon its appetite for people and for food, for goods and drink; it consumes and it excretes, maintained within a continual state of greed and

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[1] The longstanding tradition in Western thought to conceive of politics also in metaphorical terms referring to the body is not shy of examples. We tend, for instance, to refer to the highest political office as the head of state. Another prominent visual example of body imagery from political philosophy is constituted by Abraham Bosse's frontispiece to Thomas Hobbes' *Leviathan* (1651), in which the body of the sovereign is not just figuratively but quite literally constituted by the many individual bodies of the citizenry. The confluence of political power and the city has arguably also contributed to the application of body metaphorics to urban environments.

[2] The importance of information in a technological sense will be examined more closely in chapter 6.

desire" (Ackroyd 1). This imagery has been expressed particularly in the mode of the Gothic, whose variations in the twenty-first century I will examine below in more detail.[3]

Famously, I.A. Richards distinguished between the *tenor*, *vehicle*, and *ground* of a metaphor (96–117). The *vehicle* (*secundum comparandum*) is applied to the *tenor* (*primum comparandum*) on the basis of both sharing a common *ground* (*tertium comparationis*). If we say the city is a body, the city is the *tenor* and the body is the *vehicle* in this metaphorical expression. Both are likened in some way, which constitutes the common *ground* they share. In cognitive metaphor theory, this relationship was reconfigured in a less essentialist manner into one of attribution and projection rather than configuring *tenor* and *vehicle* as separate areas which share essential characteristics (Fludernik, *Metaphors* 42). In this cognitive understanding, *tenor* becomes the target domain onto which attributes from the source domain (*vehicle*) are projected. Under this model, those properties of embodiment which can be attributed to the city in a semantically fruitful way are projected onto urban environments in order to create new meanings (44).

The longstanding and pervasive usage of the city-body metaphor strongly suggests that it is conceptual rather than merely rhetorical. In other words, thinking about the city in terms of the body provides a fundamental way of understanding how a city works or can be constructed rather than just being an ornamental device which is employed for a specific rhetorical purpose. Drawing on George Lakoff and Mark Johnson's influential *Metaphors We Live By* (U of Chicago P, 1980), Zoltán Kövecses highlights how cognitive linguistics has shifted away from the traditional view of metaphors as mere literary or rhetorical devices. He emphasises that metaphors are "conceptual in nature" instead, meaning they involve "thinking of one thing in terms of another" (xi). Conceptual metaphors function by framing a more abstract domain through a more concrete one, thus revealing systematic correspondences between target and source domains (Kövecses 7–8). This process occurs because thinking about an abstract concept is made easier by linking it to a more tangible one. However, Kövecses stresses that these systematic correspondences are not based on pre-existing similarities. Rather, the source domain structures and effectively "creates" (9) the target domain, often as a product of historical and cultural development.

The human body constitutes "an ideal source domain, since, for us, it is clearly delineated and (we believe) we know it well"; hence, "a large portion of metaphorical meaning derives from

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[3] Deborah Parsons notes that modernist architectural thought also frequently drew on the imagery of the city as a body in healthy or sick terms. Particularly "Le Corbusier's modernity is based in the enlightenment principles of the past . . . in which the utopian city becomes analogous with the rational mind, and the disordered city with the sickness and degenerative processes of the body" (12). Furthermore, in the wake of the 9/11 attacks on New York, there was also a renewed attention to the metaphorical conceptualisation of cities as bodies, particularly bodies that can suffer wounds and "are susceptible to life-threatening damage in some way over and beyond the chronic habits of creative destruction that capitalism ordinarily produces" (Harvey, "The City" 26). For a more thorough consideration of wounded cities as a concept, see Jane Schneider and Ida Susser's edited collection of the same name (Berg, 2003).

our experience of our own body" (Kövecses 18). As such, the use of the body as metaphorical source domain for the city forms what the philosopher Hans Blumenberg has termed an absolute metaphor (14).[4] Absolute metaphors are such as have become inextricable from the discourse they illustrate, beyond the immediate point of comparison for which they were invoked. They have hence acquired a life of their own.[5] Thus, absolute metaphors can be examined with regard to the historical change of their surplus of expressive achievement in order to bring to the fore the historical horizons of meaning and ways of perceiving within which concepts undergo their modification (14). To put it simpler and more relevant to my analysis, examining the different ways in which the city is conceived of in likeness to the body reveals paradigmatic patterns of thinking about our life in urban environments. However, it would be remiss to ignore Blumenberg's caution that the dominance of absolute metaphors within the particular discourse entails that any study is inadvertently determined by the cultural stock and choice of images, almost 'channelled' into what it is able to demonstrate (91–92).

As a theoretical remedy, I suggest turning to David Punter's proposition "to see metaphor not only as something which is made or constructed by, for example, particular literary writers, but also as something inherited, something unexamined, something belonging to the cultural unconscious" (*Metaphor* 140–41). Punter links metaphors to the Gothic concept of the uncanny by suggesting that the question of the likeness between source and target domain invoked by the metaphorical comparison does not hold to closer scrutiny, "[f]or if any one thing can be like any one other thing, there can and must be between those things also a difference; otherwise they would be exactly the same thing, and any available metaphor would collapse into identicality" (*Metaphor* 88). Therefore, he concludes, "metaphor . . . asserts both similarity and difference" (88). Here, uncanniness enters the concept, as it "is intimately bound up with a notion of repetition, but of repetition with a difference" (88). The metaphorical expression constantly repeats a supposed similarity of its two domains on which the metaphorical comparison rests in the first place, but invariably also invokes the differences that ultimately separate them. The interplay of similarity and difference then poses the potential of appearing both familiar and strange, hence seeming uncanny. In turn, this uncanniness opens up the possibility to avoid narrowing the analytical perspective, which Blumenberg warned about, because it allows to point to the origin of the channelling effect in the first place.

Since the uncanniness of the metaphorical warrants a Gothic methodology, understood as "a language in which to address our ghosts" (Punter, "Introduction" 2), this chapter traces the

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[4] In the German original, Blumenberg speaks of "absolute Metaphern". An English-language translation by Robert Savage, *Paradigms for a Metaphorology*, was published in 2010 by Cornell UP.
[5] Blumenberg's prime example is the metaphor of light, which has paradigmatically dominated the discourse of truth in Antiquity.

Gothic elements of contemporary urban fantasy more explicitly than others. To be precise, there is a conspicuous concern for the pathological in the invocation of the city-body metaphor in contemporary London urban fantasy, as necropolitan allegories and haunting spectres from the past appear to dominate the fantastical urban imaginary. Consequently, I contend that haunting provides the second dominant structure of anxious feeling in contemporary urban fantasy. Haunting refers to an emotion that in its temporal dimension merges the past and future into the present and thus disrupts a linear experience of time. A haunted person senses traces of both the past and the future in the present. Haunting as an anxious feeling can manifest in two primary forms, though these forms are not easily separated. Rather than viewing them as distinct states, it is more useful to think of them as points along a spectrum. On one side, haunting may evoke a kind of anxiety closely linked to dread, where the collapse of time feels threatening. Time serves as a fundamental anchor for our perception of existence, and its disruption can unsettle our sense of being. The intrusion of the past into the present is particularly unsettling because it challenges the cultural notion that the past is firmly behind us. When the past reappears in the present, it feels out of place, creating a sense of threat. In chapter 5.1, I shall therefore consider how negotiating London's imperial past dovetails with imagining it in somatic and thanatic terms.

On the other side, the present opens up multiple potential futures, each contingent on the actions an individual might take. Yet, choosing one path inevitably forecloses other possibilities. This is not necessarily a conscious decision made with full awareness of future outcomes, but rather a latent understanding that certain actions lead to specific results, while closing off others. This awareness can induce a paralysing state of anxious indecision, where the individual feels immobilised by the weight of choice. However, recognising one's agency in shaping the future can be empowering or motivating action. This version of haunting frames anxiety as a potentially positive force, allowing us to see anticipation as an enabling emotion, not just a source of dread. In chapter 5.2, I will therefore examine the alignment of the neuronal urban metaphorics with the spectral, arguing that London figures in the fantastical imagination as both a haunt*ed* and haunt*ing* place.

5.1 Somapolis: The Heart of the City and the Necropolis in the City as a Body

In *A Theory of Good City Form*, Kevin Lynch traces the origins of the city-body metaphor to "the rise of biology in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries" (88). Without William Harvey's *De Motu Cordis* (1628), for instance, any likeness of the city to the system of blood circulation would have been unthinkable.[6] With recourse to Richard Sennett, I have suggested in the introduction to this

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[6] Tom Avermaete and Paola Viganò propose Plato and the sixteenth-century Italian architect Francesco di Giorgo Martini as potential candidates to be credited with the first use of the analogy (xiv).

chapter that the origins of the organic metaphor in form of the human body may be older still, going at least back to the idea of body politics and the urban as the emerging locus of political power in the twelfth century, but the essence remains the same: the metaphorical alignment of the city and the body is not an invention of the twenty-first century, but its longstanding tradition is subject to constant re-imagining, not exclusively but prominently in literature.

Lynch lists as central characteristics of the organic metaphor its definite boundary, the indissoluble link between form and function, which amounts to more than just the sum of the constituents and which fosters cooperation between communities rather than competition, and "a homeostatic dynamism" (89), that is, the self-regulating tendency to regain some sort of balance upon outside disturbance. While he acknowledges the usefulness of the metaphor, Lynch is also quick to point out its limitations, especially when the city-organism assumes notions of pathology which may lead, and have led, for example to ethnic cleansings under the cloak of medical language by presenting slum areas as festering, infectious parts of the city organism which need to be removed surgically (95).

The penchant of contemporary urban fantasies for the register of the diseased, decayed, or even necrotic urban body is particularly eminent.[7] The darker side of the metaphor emerges as a discursive formation in which several binaries are mapped onto each other, each of which points to Gothic concerns: sickness and health, past and present, centre and periphery, fantastic and mundane.[8] Firstly, I shall explore the British Museum as a specific place where these binaries manifest within two of the texts in my corpus, Benedict Jacka's *Fated* and Jonathan Stroud's *The Golem's Eye*. Though technically located in the borough of Camden, that is, in Bloomsbury, the museum is geographically positioned in central London. The museum building is close to Charing Cross, London's notional centre and the point from which all road sign distances from London are measured. On this ground, the British Museum is considered to be situated at – or at least near – the geographical heart of London, for the metaphor of the heart conveys notions of centrality and prime importance. On a larger scale, London itself has therefore continuously been imagined as the heart of the British Empire.[9] Consequently, the museum features as a place where the present

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7   I want to briefly delineate the representational engagement with urban death and decay from the concept of urbicide, which is a term that is more closely associated with military or political violence designed to erase cities, especially in the Global South (Goonewardena and Kipfer). That the representational and the actual do coincide is addressed by Steven Graham, who points to the use of urban simulation games for the training of soldiers for urban warfare (*Cities* 45–46).

8   The dichotomy between centre and periphery in particular has a long tradition as part of an imperial geography (Said 51). Matters of empire will be of concern in the subsequent discussion of the British Museum.

9   Two of the most laconic examples can be found, first, in Niels Lund's 1904 painting of London titled *The Heart of the Empire*, commissioned by the Corporation of London and depicting Bank Junction, "a symbolic site of a Britain made great by its global reach" (Jacobs 38), and, secondly, upon opening the 1921 anthology *London of the Future*, edited by the architect Aston Webb, which sports an aerial photograph of Buckingham Palace and the Mall, which is captioned "Heart of the Empire". In addition, the fixation of the Royal Observatory in Greenwich at the point

is confronted with the imperial past, which is simultaneously equated with the fantastic. These violent confrontations between the contemporary present and the imperial, fantasticised past damage the British Museum, both in content and form.

Secondly, I will then turn to the evaluation of London as a whole in Stroud's *Bartimaeus* trilogy which, in addition to the attention devoted to the British Museum, is characterised by the deployment of Gothic tropes in conjunction with the somatic metaphor. In particular, the narrative juxtaposes London as the foremost current imperial capital within the storyworld to its predecessor, Prague, in order to suggest a cyclical pattern of the emergence and death of cities of power. While Prague is presented in thanatological terms, the narrative perspective in the series suggests that London is the actual necropolis, thereby critiquing the imperialist ambitions of the ruling magocracy. I argue that, when read together, the somatic imagery employed in contemporary London urban fantasies examines the city's imperial heritage in the twenty-first century, where London celebrates itself for its multiculturalist diversity one the one hand, thereby suggesting to have overcome its imperialist past, but on the other continues to draw upon the history of the British Empire in order to fashion its identity as a city of global importance.

5.1.1 The British Museum as the Heart of the City in *Fated* and *The Golem's Eye*

Both Benedict Jacka's *Fated* and Jonathan Stroud's *The Golem's Eye* include the British Museum as a location for significant plot developments, thus indicating its importance for London urban fantasies. In *Fated*, the protagonist Alex Verus is asked by the magical council to investigate an ancient relic held at the museum, which he eventually does of his own volition. Over the course of the novel, Verus returns to the relic, eventually running into a third party of rogue mages. In the ensuing fight between Verus, the rogue mages, the council forces protecting the relic, and the relic's own magical defences the museum suffers considerable damage. In a similar vein, *The Golem's Eye* stages the confrontation between the titular golem, an animated clay figure wreaking havoc in London, and the main character Bartimaeus, who acts as an unofficial government employee. As in *Fated*, their combat equally destroys large parts of the museum building. The fact that the same plot element, that is, the demolition of the British Museum through supernatural forces, is no isolated motif warrants investigation as to what the British Museum and its integrity signifies in the fantastical urban imagination.

The British Museum was founded in 1753, originating from the personal collection of the physician Hans Sloane, who intended the more than 71,000 objects he had assembled to remain as a collection after his demise. As Tiffany Jenkins points out, London was not the sole contender for the museum's eventual location, but Sloane did offer his collection to London first (388). Its

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of origin for the global measurement of both time and space at the International Meridian Conference in 1884 contributed further to London's claim for world centrality.

denomination as a *British* public institution did not arise from its contents but is likely to stem from the attempt to "embody the values of the new state created in 1707" at a time when the meaning of *national* was increasingly shifting from encompassing older allegiances to crown or clergy towards "an emerging idea of the citizen" (Jenkins 388). However, this does not mean that any idea of Britishness, nor any attempt at building the nation through its public institutions, is absent from the British Museum's history. It was, much rather, "a national museum which implicitly, through its architecture, presentations of objects and position in relation to the British state, helped to make the nation's importance visible" (Jenkins 389) – a role the museum consolidated over the course of the nineteenth century.

Sir Edmund Thompson, director of the British Museum around the turn of the nineteenth to the twentieth century, is often quoted as having argued that the British Museum represents the British Empire: "It is not a London museum, it is a 'British Museum' and as such we naturally have to look after its interests, and make our collection as perfect as possible, to represent every portion of the Empire" (Crooke 131). Interestingly, Thompson positioned the museum's location in explicit opposition to its national prestige, thus expressing the idea that its Londonness does not contribute to its status and, vice versa, that the museum does not relate to London at all. Quite the contrary, however, "the form, use and representation of modern European cities have been shaped by the global history of imperialism in ways that continue to matter even in an apparently post-imperial age" (23), as the cultural geographers David Gilbert and Felix Driver argue. Proclaiming, on the one hand, a national public institution as an epitome of empire but assuming, on the other, that this leaves the location of the institution entirely unaffected by its presence is, quite frankly, ludicrous. Much rather, the influence of imperial meaning-making "was to be found throughout the urban experience" (Driver and Gilbert 12). For instance, the need for a larger building than the original Montagu house to accommodate the British Museum's collection led to the construction of the current Grecian-Revival building designed by Sir Robert Smirke. The Greek Revival style became especially fashionable in Europe in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, for it provided a legitimating connection between whichever country adopted it and the values of Ancient Greece. It was also seen as an expression of local nationalism and civic virtue, as being free of ecclesiastical and aristocratic associations, and as relating to the emerging classical liberalism. The style became, in a nutshell, "a common language for the urban expression of national and imperial power" (Gilbert and Driver 26). Moreover, the British Museum building was constructed out of Portland stone, which has been quarried since Roman times and constituted the favoured building material of Sir Cristopher Wren who used it, for example, for St Paul's Cathedral, thus placing the museum's new home in a direct line with other representative, magnificent buildings in London. The construction of the South Kensington building to house the museum's natural history

collections, which was begun in 1873 and completed in 1880 was arguably even more steeped in symbolic notions of imperial grandeur (Driver and Gilbert 19–20).[10] Both the ideological and spatial establishment of the British Museum can therefore be justifiably regarded as having heavily influenced the status and structure of London as an imperial capital.

The more critical evaluation of museums in general as "inherently and unavoidably political" (Jenkins 389) through the lens of postcolonial theory has resulted in the British Museum now being variously understood as "an essentially imperialist institution" (Duthie 13) or even an erstwhile "department of the British state" (Barringer 11).[11] Exhibiting the "interwoven nature of British identity with colonial and imperial tendencies" (Darwin 1), it is indeed hard *not* to see the museum's entanglements with the former British Empire despite its own recent efforts to re-brand itself as an encyclopaedic, global trustee of a shared cultural heritage.[12] Therefore, I contend that in the context of London urban fantasy literature, the British Museum functions predominantly as a signifier of empire and imperialism and that this function is expressed by the organic metaphor of the heart.

This is a reading which is supported by the building's central location in the city. As Tim Barringer observes, albeit with regard to the South Kensington Museum (from 1899 known as the Victoria & Albert Museum (V&A)), "[t]he procession of objects from peripheries to centre symbolically enacted the idea of London as the heart of empire" (11). "It was obvious", the sociologist and anthropologist John Eade further writes with recourse to H. V. Morton's story collection *The Heart of London* (1926), "that the City [of London] was at the heart of both a national and an imperial capital" (90). The British Museum's location within London, situated only 0.8 miles away from the equestrian statue of Charles I at Charing Cross, from which all road sign distances to London are measured and which is generally conceived of as London's notional centre, geographically emphasises the symbolical ideas of centrality and periphery conveyed through the heart metaphor. As Tessa Hauswedell has pointed out, it is through "London's description as a global metropolis that the British press [in the nineteenth century] constructs a notion of centre

[10] The Natural History Museum remained part of the British Museum until the passing of the British Museum Act 1963, which granted it the status of an independent museum. The South Kensington complex, on which the Natural History Museum building stands, also comprises among other institutions the Imperial College London, the Science Museum, the Royal Albert Hall, the Albert Memorial, and the Victoria and Albert Memorial, the last three of which have earned the area its nickname 'Albertopolis'.

[11] For literature on the changing social and political role of museums please be referred to, for instance, *The New Museology* (an anthology by scholars and museum professionals edited by Peter Vergo, Reaktion, 1989), Nick Merriman's study *Beyond the Glass Case: The Past, the Heritage and the Public* (Leicester UP, 1991), or Moira Simpson's monograph *Making Representations: Museums in the Post-Colonial Era* (Psychology Press, 1996).

[12] For an examination of the encyclopaedic museum, specifically with regard to the British Museum, please see James Cuno's *Museums Matter: In Praise of the Encyclopedic Museum* (Chicago UP, 2011). The cited article by Jaris Darwin critically engages with the position supported by Cuno, among others, and argues that the British Museum's sustained reliance on the concept of trusteeship does not signal a departure from, but rather continuation of Enlightenment values implicated in colonial and imperial practices.

and periphery on a global scale" (172). Contemporary London urban fantasies engage with these notions of centrality, imperial grandeur and prestige, and even the museum as an institution engaged in imperialist meaning-making processes. Through their depiction of the museum building as being damaged, or even destroyed, both *Fated* and *The Golem's Eye* relate to the problematic heritage of the institution and its questionable status in a city which attempts to envision itself as having overcome its imperialist past by overtly celebrating a lifestyle shaped by multiculturalism, albeit in different degrees of explicitness.

In Jacka's *Fated*, the British Museum is introduced by way of its imposing, monumental architecture. "[S]tone walls, tall gates and a high iron fence with spikes" are accompanied by "a line of massive columns" (*Fated* 45), as Verus reports upon his arrival at the building. The emphasis on architectural features designed for restricting access conveys the impression that Verus, who travelled to the museum on his own agenda, is not welcome at the site, as he immediately confirms to the reader: "it was a safe bet nobody inside would be happy to see me" (45). This impression is reinforced by the museal area being represented as clearly demarcated from the city that surrounds it. The traffic is, from Verus' point of view, "beyond the fence . . . casting light and sound . . ., but the courtyard itself was silent" (45). In conjunction, the access-restricting architectural elements and the emphasis on the courtyard's silence and darkness as opposed to the bustling streets beyond bestow on the British Museum the liminal notion of simultaneously belonging and not belonging to the city. It clearly is part of London, but then again, it is also not; it is something Other, a place of its own.

The weight given to the museum's spatiality continues after Verus has entered the building. The Great Court is presented as "massive, more than fifty feet high", with the Reading Room as a "huge cylinder" at its centre (*Fated* 47). The court's architectural design is "emphasising the empty space" (48), thus invoking a sense of sublime awe in the observer. Such vast space demands skilful navigation, and indeed Verus "pick[s] a map off the desk" in order to "map[] out [his] path through the museum" (48). Mapping is an epistemological activity in the sense that constructing a map of a place imposes on it a certain interpretation – that of the map-maker – and thus renders it legible to others.[13] The museum's empty space becomes meaningful to Verus through the map, and thereby loses parts of its previous sense of Otherness. Overall, Verus' ability to move competently inside the museum building, along with his ability to overcome the barriers in order to enter the museum in the first place, construe him as an apt decoder of meaning, both within the urban environment and the buildings that constitute it.[14]

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[13] For a study on the imperialist implications of map-making, please see James R. Akerman's *The Imperial Map: Cartography and the Mastery of Empire* (U of Chicago P, 2009).

[14] The architectural barriers of the museum building are supplemented by a magical defence blocking Verus from reaching his destination. While his narrative voice admits that "it was a fairly good setup", he then proceeds swiftly

Up until this point in the narrative the British Museum's building has been given much more attention than the objects and exhibits that it houses. In addition to the building, the exhibits also mark it as the imperial institution I have so far claimed it to be with regard to its significance in contemporary urban fantasies. In accordance with presenting the museum building as a vast space which necessitates navigation, the narrative contains several remarks of Verus passing the museums' various sections as if they were actual countries (e.g. *Fated* 48, 60). Moreover, the magical relic at the centre of the narrative displays the signifiers of exoticism that characterise the imperial practice of collecting. The relic statue of a man is described as displaying garments looking like "ancient ancestors of . . . ceremonial gear" (50), thereby characterising the artifact as temporally different and collapsing the past into the present. In conflating the exotic with the fantastic, the statue signals its difference also by radiating magical power, as Verus tells the reader, so much so that it is discernible "[e]ven without [his] mage's sight" (51).

The power of the statue stems from its magical defence system in form of an elemental spirit subsequently activated by three dark mages arriving to experiment on the statue, which marks the beginning of the museum's destruction through the concurrence of magical activity. Of the four parties present at the museum, the hostilities ensuing between three of them – the three dark mages, the security forces of the magical council of London protecting the relic, and the relic's guardian elemental spirit – wreak considerable havoc to the building. As the fourth party involved, Verus provides the narrative focalisation but is concerned with staying out of harm's way. Thus, the destruction is narrated from afar by reference to sensory impressions. Verus reports, for instance, hearing "a hollow boom" and "a crack of thunder" (*Fated* 57) resulting from the elemental's "crackling blue-white electricity" (59) and describes the first clash between all three warring factions in terms of primordial magic: "a lightning storm blazed outward from the top of the stairs, bolts slamming off shields to crackle down into the floor" (60). As he flees from the fight – again referring, in passing, to the various sections of the museum's collection such as the Rosetta Stone or the Nereid Monument – he still hears "a crash from the direction of the Great Court", sees "the air [light] up white", and feels "the floor vibrate[]" (60). Eventually the fight reaches Verus again, "a wave of heat" cast forward by one of the dark mages collapsing "the gallery [he]'d been standing in [into] a cloud of ash and smoke" (61), before he is able to escape from the museum.

Although the British Museum is depicted as an institution of imperialist collection practices in *Fated*, the devastation to the museum is framed by the narrative perspective as an ancillary effect rather than a commentary on the institution itself. As he moves through the museum, Verus does

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to confirm his navigational abilities by stating that it took him "slightly over five minutes" (*Fated* 49) to overcome it.

refer to the various collections gathered by imperialist practices but refrains from commenting on these practices themselves in any explicit way. The concentration of the narrative voice is on showcasing Verus' navigational skills and on construing the British Museum first and foremost as a space where the fantastical can plausibly exist. The museum's Otherness in terms of both its form and its contents is rendered legible through the difference from the environment of the city, which is presented as mundane and modern whereas the British Museum is narrated as temporally, spatially, and magically exotic. Admittedly, the fact that the most powerful magic in form of the elemental spirit resides in an ancient relic bears some resemblance to the widely established Imperial Gothic trope of the fantasticised past coming back to haunt the present, but ultimately *Fated* does not permit itself to be read as indulging in these anxieties.[15] As a protagonist-centred series, the British Museum's imperial connotations are exploited largely for the sake of fashioning the main protagonist as a skilled navigator of the urban environment.

In a marked contrast, the status of the British Museum as "a trope of empire" (Duthie 13) is entirely unambiguous in Stroud's *The Golem's Eye*. The *Bartimaeus* trilogy is set in an alternative history version of contemporary Britain in which the empire still persists. In the storyworld, the most ambitious rival power was the Holy Roman Empire, which the British defeated under William Gladstone in 1868, roughly 150 years before the novels' events take place. Following defeat, the Holy Roman Empire was dissolved and large parts subject to British rule, while Prague, its former capital, retained control over only limited territory. In this sense, the Czech capital became a victim of British imperial expansion and slowly transformed into London's Other. In *The Golem's Eye*, the trilogy's second instalment, London suffers violent attacks from an unknown assailant and Nathaniel, who works for the magical government, tasks Bartimaeus with discovering the assailant's identity. The moment of revelation comes when Bartimaeus follows the trail of destruction to the British Museum, where he discovers that a golem is behind the attacks, a gigantic, animated clay figure which is controlled by a magician from afar. In the storyworld, golems were created in Prague and used by Czech magicians in the war with Britain, which suggests the golem to be understood as a vengeful Czech agent.

When Bartimaeus confronts the golem, their fight severely damages the museum building. In this respect, the consideration that Bartimaeus gives to the extent of the damage done to the building is noteworthy. The spirit describes "the hole in the building" where the golem has forced entry as gaping "wide and black" (*Eye* 179). He notes that "a wall on the left had been broken through" (179) and he can "hear the distinctive sound of priceless antiquities being broken" (180). Moreover, the semantic field of destruction is represented lexically, as words such as "rubble",

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[15] Since Stroud's *The Golem's Eye* engages more explicitly with this trope from Imperial Gothic, it is introduced more fully in due course.

"debris", "shattered masonry" and "ruins" as well as "cracked", "splintering" and "breaking" glass, wood and stones abound (179–80). A "splintered sign cheerfully proclaiming WELCOME TO THE BRITT" (179) epitomises the demolition with the abruptly discontinued name of the institution. Ultimately, the golem tears down a load-bearing wall together with the ceiling: "Plaster dropped from above and a cloud of dust and debris fell into the room, to join the general whirl of wind, rain and antique fabrics" (191). Evidently, as the construction materials mix with the fragments of the artifacts, the destruction is not just to the building itself, but also to its contents, and that which the British Museum represents as an institution, namely a centre of an enlightened society and the imperial power of Britain, which the narrative also acknowledges explicitly (179). As an immortal spirit from a different dimension who has been summoned to Earth throughout various stages of human history, Bartimaeus is well aware of the fact that of the numerous antiquities in the museums only "several dozen . . . were legitimately come by" (178), as he comments bitingly. For him, the museum does not represent the glory of the nation but is nothing more than "an imposing cultural charnel house" (178). Bartimaeus does not indulge in the meaning-making codes of empire and even appears unable to recognise them for what they are signalling to the reader. Thus, he has little compunction appropriating the collected artifacts for his own purpose. He happily throws ancient statues at the golem and does not even stop at the British Museum's most priced exhibits, most notably the Rosetta Stone:

> In a glass cabinet nearby was an odd black stone, of irregular outline, small enough to lift, but large enough to brain [a golem] nicely. It had a lot of scribbling down one flat side, which . . . was probably a set of rules for visitors to the museum, since it seemed to be written in two or three languages. Whatever, it was just the job. (184)

As a result of the narrative focalisation through Bartimaeus, the museum is hence exposed as being implicated in "established spatio-political hierarchies" ("Past" 6), as Hadas Elber-Aviram observes; in this case, the hierarchies of imperialist collection practices through which colonial objects are brought to London.[16] The denotation of the artifact in the quotation above, the Rosetta Stone, totally escapes Bartimaeus but not necessarily the reader. However, its place as a fetishised object in an exhibition is foregrounded through the focalisation over its historical relevance for the understanding of ancient languages by reducing the Rosetta Stone to mere functionality as a projectile for the djinni. In doing so, the novel seeks to critique London's continued attempts to draw parts of its identity from Britain's imperial past by destabilising one of "the bastions of hegemonic history" (Elber-Aviram, "Past" 6) in the metropolis – in this case even literally to the point of collapse.

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[16] Elsewhere, Bartimaeus has already informed the reader that "[i]t's not the cultural vandalism I object to", but the vulgarity of "magical tourism", which has also individual magicians pick up magical artifacts "as a quaint keepsake on some package holiday in central Europe" (*Amulet* 20).

If we read London as the heart of the empire, and the British Museum as "an imperial institution in a post-imperial world" (Duthie 23) situated at the heart of the heart, this helps understand why the location is so central to contemporary London fantasy. The trope of the fantastical other coming to London to wreak havoc, to attack the empire's centre is a well-established narrative pattern from Imperial Gothic tales, which is clad into new robes here.[17] The *Alex Verus* series, however, does not indicate any awareness of political anxieties around this trope and exploits the British Museum primarily as a location for its exotic Otherness, which contributes to construing it as a liminal space within London which its protagonist, Alex Verus, can master through navigation. In contrast, in the *Bartimaeus* trilogy the supernatural is the means by which London's conflict with its past is re-negotiated and here the confrontation with the overtly imperial past results in violence and the, at least partial, destruction of the museum building, which points towards a failure of this re-negotiation. Moreover, in *The Golem's Eye* Bartimaeus and Nathaniel eventually discover that the golem is controlled by the Chief of Police who seeks to weaken the government for a political coup. This means that although a figure from Jewish mythology which is frequently associated with revenge and which is superficially aligned with an enemy nation on the level of the story is used to deliberately invoke the familiar narrative pattern from Imperial Gothic, in the *Bartimaeus* trilogy the empire is not attacked from without but crumbles from within. Instead of endorsing the pattern that stems from late Victorian horror stories and that indicates anxieties about the British Empire's decline, Stroud's novel pointedly turns into a cautionary tale, warning of the self-destructing side effects of the greed for power.

5.1.2 London as a Necropolis in the *Bartimaeus* Trilogy

As I have outlined in the introduction to this chapter, in addition to the imagery focussing on the city as a healthy organism, there exists a pathological metaphor of sickness as well. The pathological imaginary has been shaped by the Gothic tradition in which the representation of the urban body as monstrous is a long-established staple, as is "the iconic position of London" (Wasson, *Urban* 4) in the Urban Gothic imaginary. Tijana Parezanović and Marko Lukić locate this imagery in the rapid development of urban settlements in the eighteenth and nineteenth century, when poverty, crime, and other social problems were exacerbated by the rapid industrialisation and undermined the more progressive evaluation of these developments (77). Towards the end of the nineteenth

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[17] Patrick Brantlinger has coined the term *Imperial Gothic* as a form which "combines the seemingly scientific, progressive, often Darwinian ideology of imperialism with an antithetical interest in the occult" and is attuned to "the anxieties that attended the climax of the British Empire" (227–28). In particular, the three principal themes of Imperial Gothic are "an individual regression, or what was called 'going native'; an invasion of civilization by the forces of barbarism or demonism; and the diminution of opportunities for adventure and heroism in the modern world" (Warwick, "Imperial Gothic" 338). I have already pointed to the importance of such tales in the context of the Urban Gothic in chapter 2.3.2. Influential examples include, but are not limited to, Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Sign of Four* (1890), Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), Richard Marsh's *The Beetle* (1897), and H.G. Wells's *The War of the Worlds* (1898).

century, imperial anxieties of degeneration were refracted onto the urban environment and its "monstrous Others", as they "emerge from the shadows of the city, symbolizing anxieties around moral and physical degeneration, invasion, and imperial decline circulating at the *fin de siècle*" as well as "representing the corruption inherent in the urban environment and the degenerate potential of modern life" (Alder 704; original emphasis). In the twenty-first century, as "there is widespread recognition and agreement . . . that the global economic systems of the neoliberal period have exploited our monstrous desires, power, greed and inequalities", these Gothic staples are re-discovered and reworked especially in urban fiction, for "much of the focus of the discourse of doom, decay and despair is centred on global urban spaces" (Millette 1). This chapter investigates how Jonathan Stroud's pronounced criticism of London's indulgence in tropes of empire in the *Bartimaeus* trilogy adopts the pathological organic metaphor. Rather than the healthy organism the ruling magicians make it out to be, the trilogy suggests that London has become monstrous, even necrotic. Therefore, I argue that the continuous employment of the thanatic mode in the series when discussing the British capital reinforces the novels' anti-urbanist critique and denies entertaining neo-imperialist fantasies.

As Jane Jacobs has observed in 1996, "in the City of London the idea of empire is not confined to the past" but "an active memory which inhabits the present in a variety of practices and traditions and which still works to constitute the future of the City" (40). This sentiment has not changed in the almost thirty years that have passed since Jacobs put forth this observation. For one, efforts of preserving historical buildings which testify to London's imperial centrality are continuing (Bremner 125–58). More importantly, however, London's self-image as an economic node of world trade, a global city, is predicated now as before upon its imperial past and therefore depends upon the acknowledgement of a continuity between past and present.[18] In terms of London's economic prosperity at the turn of the millennium, John Eade, too, has argued that it "has been created by continuing a colonial strategy of looking far beyond the nation's borders" (2). At the same time, he warns that the ties to empire also have brought with them "inequalities and exclusions" (3) which counter the city's often-celebrated, newly fashioned spirit of multiculturalism, as it is "Black and Asian settlers from former British colonies [who] have played the major part in creating London's multicultural society, but it is they who experience some of the highest levels of poverty and discrimination" (2). As Eade further elucidates, "London's transition from an imperial capital to a global city . . . entails not just economic and political changes but also a reworking of people's understanding of the world around them" (16). The transition thus becomes a struggle over symbolical resources which makes "[p]owerful attempts . . . to relegate the

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[18] The term *global city* was coined by Saskia Sassen in her eponymous 1991 book (Princeton UP), whose subtitle confers the designation to New York, Tokyo, and, well, London.

dominations of empire to the dustbin of history as the national capital becomes the provider of services to insiders and outsiders" (179). For example, as London attempted to rebrand itself during the 'Cool Britannia' era, that very slogan masks imperial remains in the present, for it draws its meaningfulness from the pun on the quintessentially imperialist anthem *Rule, Britannia*, but pretends to transform it. In the following analysis, I read Stroud's series as a critical symbolical resource among competing representations of the city which negotiate London's transition from an imperial to a global city in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

In the *Bartimaeus* trilogy, London's political centre, Westminster, is not only synonymous with power, but it is metaphorically represented as one of "[t]wo hearts" that "power[] the metropolis" (*Eye* 21). It lies "to the west, hugging a sharp bend in the river" and is the place "where the magicians worked ceaselessly to extend and protect their territories abroad" (21). The other of the two hearts is the docklands in the east, London's commercial centre, "where traders from distant lands gathered to exchange their wares" (21). The juxtaposition of Westminster in the west and the London ports in the east on the one hand underlines the Orientalised notion of trading by reinforcing the spatial extension of the British Empire. The emphasis put on the fact that merchants come to London from "distant lands" (21) kindles the sort of exoticism that Edward Said has identified as a key component in the Occident's Orientalisation of the East (39–40).[19] Likewise, the narrator's statement that "the world's wealth was flowing back into the capital" (*Eye* 50) stresses the economic movement from the periphery to the centre via the heart metaphor. Wealth flows to London as blood flows to the heart.

On the other hand, the juxtaposition of Westminster in the west and the London ports in the east also reinforces the emphasis on labour that influences the configuration of the city. London, in effect, is presented as the centre of the magicians' power, which in turn is inscribed into it and which organises the city primarily around labour. In the context of the twenty-first century, the unequal social hierarchies of the storyworld can be mapped onto existing inequality gaps in the real world (Ashley). In the *Bartimaeus* trilogy, the oppressed nonmagical population, the commoners, are segregated into working boroughs around factories and workshops, while the magicians occupy spacious suburbs and the city centre. That the spatial segregation is the result of purposeful planning becomes especially evident in an episode during which the Second Foreign Secretary rhapsodises about the Prime Minister's plans for reorganising the city: "Mr Devereaux plans to bulldoze much of Covent Garden next year, rebuild all those little timber-framed houses as glorious visions of concrete and glass" (*Eye* 264).[20] These "slum-clearance measures" (271) are

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[19] A similar focus on the exotic is reflected in Kitty Jones' history lessons, which she enjoys because they "featured many stories of magic and far-off lands" (*Eye* 53).

[20] The Second Foreign Secretary also refers to Whitehall as "the heart of London, where we work and live" (*Eye* 264), thus demonstrating explicitly the importance of the heart metaphor for the discourse of urban development.

supposed to remodel London's "tatty, unreconstructed areas" (264) according to the magicians' vision of grandeur that, in their eyes, is befitting to their capital, while also increasing the magicians' comfort.[21] London's attractive areas are identified with the magicians, whereas the city's decrepit areas are attributed to the commoners' existence. It is also confirmed from Kitty Jones' perspective that the magicians "kept themselves removed from . . . the ordinary commoner, remaining in the centre of the city and in the suburbs, where broad, leafy boulevards idled between secretive villas" (46). Inhabiting the spacious suburbs and working in the city's centre, the magicians leave to the commoners "what lay between . . . streets clogged with small shops, waste ground, the factories and brickworks" (46), thus reinforcing the economic segregation in terms of space. The magicians' villas in "broad, leafy boulevards" (46) are as spatially opposed as possible to the "smaller, . . . more tightly packed" (*Amulet* 184) housings of the commoners. Since the density of population is traditionally equated with illness, these examples suggest the supremacist notion that a healthy city-as-body may demand "forms of aggressive surgery (slum clearance, new arterial roads and so on)" (Highmore, *Cityscapes* 4). It stands to reason that the re-organisation of the commoners into boroughs removed from the magicians' residences presents precisely such an instance of aggressive surgery performed on the body of London in the storyworld.

What is more, *The Golem's Eye* envisions in such language the demonstratively imperialist reworking of urban space that London has never actually undergone, in contrast to other European imperial metropolises such as Georges-Eugène Baron Haussmann's re-organisation of Paris or Léopold II's monumental plans for Brussels. As Gilbert and Driver have argued, late Victorian imperialism was marked by the competition between European nations, especially in terms of "architectural and planning projects designed to make capitals into more fitting centres of empire" (25). London, they continue, was often perceived as appearing "a poor second to Paris in the imperial stakes", accompanied by complaints that "the capitals of other lesser powers provided more impressive displays of their reach and authority" (25).[22] In *The Golem's Eye*, the magical characters are allowed to indulge in this imperialist revery, evident in the description of buildings in central London as "even bigger and more grand, as befitted the capital of the Empire" (*Amulet* 185) as well as being "heavy with the odours of power", that is, being constructed in an architectural style designed "to browbeat any casual observer into submission" (*Eye* 23). However, the narrative simultaneously reveals the less savoury aspects of urban re-development programmes through the

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[21] For instance, the magicians have built an exclusive highway from the airport that, "[f]or greater speed and convenience, . . . had been raised on embankments and viaducts above the maze of polluted slums" (*Eye* 377). Here, the spatial segregation of magicians and commoners assumes a vertical dimension.

[22] Aston Webb's widening of the Mall into a triumphal axis running from Trafalgar Square to the refaced Buckingham Palace, completed with the monumentalist neo-classical Admiralty Arch and the Victoria Monument at its ends, certainly counts as the most far-reaching urban design project in terms of imperialist architecture in London. Another, less expansive example is the construction of the 'Albertopolis' area in South Kensington and the building of the British Museum, which I have examined in chapter 5.1.1.

Secretary's cheerfully unperturbed attitude towards Londoners who previously inhabited the re-development site, clearly marking such fantasies as being dreamed up by removed elites who do not have to bear the consequences of their disconcertingly inhumane schemes.

In addition to the novels' framing of Westminster as London's political and the ports as its economic heart, in the London of the storyworld the "sinews and tendons of the magicians' rule [are] running up and down the . . . streets" (*Gate* 89). Both the heart as part of the cardiovascular system and sinews and tendons as crucial components of the musculoskeletal system suggest a functioning, that is, a healthy body, and thus support the magicians' perception of themselves as bringing order to London. It is suggested that the magicians can care for the healthy body that is the city and guarantee its smooth functioning only as long as they rule, which implies the position that, vice versa, London will tumble into chaos as soon as commoners are in positions of power. Exemplarily, Nathaniel's (commoner) tutor, Mr Purcell, has internalised this order-vs-chaos narrative of the magicians to the extent that he partakes in perpetuating it. Asking Nathaniel what "the chief purpose of our noble government" (*Amulet* 60) is, Mr Purcell immediately answers his own question:

> "To *protect* us. . . . If the Empire is to be kept whole, a strong government must be in place, and strong means magicians. Imagine the country without them! It would be unthinkable: *commoners* would be in charge! We would slip into chaos . . . All that stands between us and anarchy is our leaders." (60; original emphasis)

The extract from Mr Purcell's lesson exemplifies two points simultaneously that I have made previously. Firstly, the notion that the empire is to be kept whole aligns with the conceptualisation of London as a body in the series. Wholeness in bodily terms implies health, whereas diseased bodies need to be subject to surgery, which, depending on the severity of the disease, may even mean amputation. If the metaphor is to be followed to its conclusion, amputation amounts to the secession of empire territories or, on the smaller scale of the imperial capital, the slum clearance measures planned by the Prime Minister. Secondly, the extract translates the order-chaos dichotomy into the political terms of stability and anarchy, though what is termed *anarchy* here is actually more reminiscent of democracy in the literal sense of 'the rule of the people'. The supposedly anarchic energy of chaos is assigned to commoners, whereas the magicians are envisioned as being strong, and therefore the only ones who can guarantee political stability.

The Second Foreign Secretary's mesmerised gaze on London's heart exemplifies another, a temporal binary which also assumes the somatic metaphor: that of past and present, or even a present oriented towards the future. The view over Whitehall, the government district within Westminster, affirms London's modernity. "Look at the proud buildings of Whitehall: none of them more than a hundred and fifty years old!", the Secretary claims, "the heart of London, where we work and live, is entirely forward-looking" (*Eye* 264). Although he acknowledges the city's

"tatty, unreconstructed areas" (264), their continued existence is uncertain in light of the government's rebuilding measures, which seek to make London "the modern city . . . built to the finest modern templates" (264). As such, he concludes, London is a "city of the future. A city worthy of a great empire" (264). The order of causality is striking here: The reorganisation of London under the magicians' rule transforms London into a city that is destined for an empire, destined for expansion beyond its city boundaries. Such reasoning suggests that expansion is inevitable and, indeed, the natural cause of events. The city is "entirely forward-looking" (264), and the future symbolises untarnished greatness as opposed to the lacklustreness of past empires in the storyworld.

The importance of temporality around the magicians' notion of London as a modern city is further emphasised when Nathaniel visits Prague on a reconnaissance mission and finds the Golden City epitomising the past.[23] The Second Foreign Secretary had warned Nathaniel already that Prague was "a melancholy city" (*Eye* 263), a "peculiarly *gloomy* sort of spot, far too nostalgic for the glories of its vanished past" (265; original emphasis).[24] The ascension of the British Empire over the Czech is broken down here to the empires' two capitals, which for British government officials have come to represent the past and the future respectively. Here is Prague, with "a morbid fixation on things that are dead and gone: the magicians, the alchemists, the great Czech Empire" (265); there is London, the epitome of modernity. The use of words such as "morbid" and "dead" suggests death as the temporal master metaphor for Prague, which turns spatial for Nathaniel when he is instructed by his contact in Prague to meet at the Old Cemetery in the Ghetto. Nathaniel is baffled by the cemetery's inclusion within the city's very centre, which presents to him a spatiotemporal anomaly: "In London . . . the cemeteries are outside the city boundaries. Much more hygienic that way. . . . That's the modern method. This place is living in the past" (268–69). The cemetery connects Prague's master metaphor of death to an actual place, one that allows Nathaniel to compare it explicitly to London's modernity. As a result of Prague's sense of morbidity and the past, Nathaniel despises the city in comparison to his home, London. To him, Prague "was all a bit too messy, a bit too out of control" (272). He is used to "the broad . . . span of Whitehall" (*Amulet* 187) which, as I have argued above, symbolises the magicians' spatial and political control over London. In this way, Prague is juxtaposed to the British capital with the help of three

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[23] The juxtaposition of London and Prague can also be read in terms of the previously acknowledged practice of Orientalisation, although the focus is here not on the exotic but on the barbaric side of the East in the form of Eastern Europe. For a more detailed examination of the representation of Eastern European Otherness in the trilogy, I recommend Marek Oziewicz's article "Representations of Eastern Europe in Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials*, Jonathan Stroud's *Bartimaeus* Trilogy, and J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* Series" (*International Research in Children's Literature*, vol. 3, 2010, pp. 1–14). Oziewicz also comments on the centre-periphery dichotomy that is allocated to London and Prague respectively.

[24] The attribution of nostalgia to Prague on the level of the narration can be linked to my reading of the series' own anti-urbanist nostalgia in chapter 4.2.1.

dichotomies: future vs. past, life vs. death, and order vs. chaos, which all underline the magicians'
heralding of London's supremacy as the nucleus of a great empire whereas Prague, though formerly
equally central to its own empire, is now relegated to the periphery of global importance in the
storyworld.

However, the dichotomies are not as clear-cut as Nathaniel makes them out to be, and
Bartimaeus is the one who draws attention to this fact. As they wander through Prague's
purportedly "*messy*" (*Eye* 271; original emphasis) Old Town on their way to the Old Cemetery,
Bartimaeus reminds Nathaniel that "[g]reat magicians lived here" (272). Uneasy of the implicit
challenge to London as the place where great magicians reside in Nathaniel's world, the boy replies:
"That was then. . . . This is now" (272). Nathaniel is unable to accommodate the idea that London
has not always been the city that he knows, not as ordered and controlled as it allegedly is under
the magicians' rule, as this state constantly threatens to return once their control slips. Thus, he
reaches for the stable binaries to assure himself of his position of power. As such, "[w]ith its
higgledy-piggledy disregard for clarity and order, the cemetery was exactly the kind of place . . . to
unsettle Nathaniel's tidy mind" (274–75). In effect, Prague presents Nathaniel with the possibility
of chaotic Otherness that constantly threatens to engulf London should the magicians' hold on the
city waver.

In addition to requesting a meeting at the cemetery, the British agent Harlequin further
tests Nathaniel's proclivity for order with his appearance and demeanour. He is clad in a black
hood, speaks with an eerie voice, and carries a candle wedged into a skull, all of which Nathaniel
dismisses as "Gothic stuff" (*Eye* 281) which "wouldn't be tolerated in London" (279). Harlequin,
in contrast, claims that Nathaniel is "being overly fastidious . . . You're ignoring the fundamental
basis of our magic. It isn't so clean and pure as you make it out. Blood, ritual, sacrifice, death …
that's at the heart of every incantation we utter. We all rely on 'Gothic stuff', when all's said and
done" (281). Like Bartimaeus, Harlequin points out to Nathaniel that his binary categorisation of
London and Prague is inaccurate, as are the conclusions he draws with regard to magic and its
power. And like Bartimaeus' remarks before, Nathaniel dismisses Harlequin's argument with a
reference to the city in which he lives, claiming that the less clean aspects of magic are a part of it
only "[h]ere in Prague" (281). Harlequin, however, cautions: "Never forget, London's power was
built on Prague's" (*Eye* 281), suggesting once more that the cities cannot be as easily demarcated
as Nathaniel would like.

The still-existing connection between Prague and London becomes tangible for Nathaniel
when he discusses the reason for his visit with Harlequin. A golem wrecks London, and since
golems have been developed by Czech magicians in Prague, Nathaniel was sent to the Golden City
to discover information on golem magic. Harlequin spots the irony immediately and comments:

"A golem abroad in London? . . . There's your Gothic stuff coming home to roost, whether you like it or not" (*Eye* 281).[25] Significantly, the golem is set loose not anywhere in London, but at the city's innermost borough, Westminster, wrecking not only Piccadilly Circus (85–86) and Westminster Bridge (549) but culminating in the destruction of the imperialist institution that is the British Museum, as I have examined in chapter 5.1.1.[26]

The allusion to imperialist Gothic revenge narratives is eventually demasked as false, since the golem is directed by the British Chief of Police and thus the attack on the British Empire does not come from outside of it but from within. And indeed, the *Bartimaeus* trilogy constantly employs the cyclical pattern of the rise and fall of empires and their capitals, which is expressed in organic terms through life and death, thereby drawing quite explicitly on the Victorian anxiety of imperial decay. In our extradiegetic consensus reality, the condition of London increasingly acquired "[t]he sense that London's preeminence might pass, indeed that it – like ancient Rome – might sink into corruption and decay" (Driver and Gilbert 24), as my previous discussion of claims to the capital's lack of imperial grandeur has already indicated. With its plots centring on not one but two conspiracies within the ranks of the ruling magicians and the eventually successful uprising of oppressed parts of society, Stroud's *Bartimaeus* trilogy therefore invites a reading as literalising these imperial anxieties.

I hope to have demonstrated that within the storyworld the magicians constantly suggest that only their rule prevents the British Empire from slipping into chaos by framing London as a healthy organism. The power imbalance between them and the oppressed commoners and enslaved spirits is spatially inscribed into London, whose magical parts emphasise order over chaos. In comparison to its necrotic others, such as the commoners' slums or the fallen city of Prague, London is primarily represented as an orderly place as long as the magicians are in control. Once their control wavers at the end of the trilogy's narrative arc, though, when both commoners and the spirits revolt against their rule, London suffers as well and goes up in flames (*Gate* 451). In the heart of the empire, anarchic chaos now reigns, as the characters themselves observe multiple times (e.g. *Gate* 397, 450–52, 471). The burning city also calls up the history of the Great Fire, which provides a comparative scale for the dimension of London's destruction as the symbolic demolition of the centre of magical power in Britain in the storyworld.

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[25] Arguably, Harlequin's remark serves as an explicit reference to the typical Imperial Gothic plot pattern on which I have already commented in chapter 5.1.1. The continued reference to the Gothic calls up the discourse of reverse colonisation that has revolved around *Dracula* (1897), and the parallel of something Eastern European coming to London to haunt the British capital is indeed hard to miss. The term *reverse colonisation* is inextricably linked with Stephen D. Arata's influential essay "The Occidental Tourist: Dracula and the Anxiety of Reverse Colonization" (*Victorian Studies*, Summer 1990, vol. 33, no. 4, pp. 621–45).

[26] The aftermath of the golem's attack at Piccadilly Circus describes each shop there as having "been disembowelled, its contents scrambled and disgorged out into the road through broken doors and windows" (*Eye* 86). The use of language again aligns with the metaphorical description of London as an organism, suggesting that the shops are part of the city body, which has been clearly violated by the, at that time unknown, assailant.

The narrative focalisation through Bartimaeus, Nathaniel, and Kitty Jones, however, makes it clear that the destruction of London is not the confirmation of the magicians' view that it is they who stand between order and the constant threat of slipping into chaos, but that rather it is their hubris and corruption that has ultimately brought about the destruction of the city, which thereby acquires the notion of facilitating a fresh start.[27] The rapidly deteriorating condition of the British Empire and its capital is contextualised by Bartimaeus throughout the trilogy as being another one in the long line of empires which have risen to and fallen from power. In accordance with his rather pessimistic view of things, the djinni suggests the thanatic as an alternative to the magicians' emphasis on progress and as the more apt mode for speaking of empire. In the prologue of *The Golem's Eye*, he narrates the conquest of Prague, where he is bound to one of the Czech king's advisers, by British forces. The prologue ends when the advisor is killed and Bartimaeus is freed from the magical ties to Earth. As his substance leaves for the alternative dimension where the spirits normally reside, he "look[s] down upon the burning city and the marching troops, . . . on the death throes of one empire and the bloody baptism of the next" (17). The alliteration of the "bloody baptism" emphasises the Gothic notion that every empire is but the uncanny *doppelgänger* of its predecessor. To further strengthen this perspective, Bartimaeus corrects the organic metaphor of the magicians by framing them as the vampiric parasites to an otherwise healthy organism, who live off a society for a certain time until they have drained its life force; the empire falls once it is no longer able to sustain the magicians' insatiable power hunger (*Amulet* 364).[28]

To conclude, I have shown in this chapter how contemporary urban fantasies connect to the Gothic tradition in their use of the city-body metaphor. The cardiovascular notion of London as the heart to a larger body is conventionally employed in the context of empire, naturally figuring London as the British Empire's centre. The contained binary of centre vs. periphery can be reconfigured to denote specific places as being located within the heart of the larger city as well, as I have done with regard to the British Museum, thereby lending these places connotations of imperialism by virtue of the association with the heart metaphor. Benedict Jacka's *Fated* implicitly uses these connotations to uncritically exploit the museum as an exotic location where a violent conflict between various fantastical elements can be credibly staged and to present the protagonist as skilled (urban) navigator. Jonathan Stroud's *The Golem's Eye* appropriates the metaphor for its anti-urbanist critique of London's ongoing negotiation of its imperial past, which the novel claims as unsuccessful. Similarly, *The Golem's Eye* explores the pathological implications of the organic metaphor. In contrast to the alignment of the notion of London as a healthy organism with the oppressive magocratic government, the series' protagonist Bartimaeus constantly challenges this

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[27] I have made the point already in chapter 4.2 that this is a well-established topos in contemporary fantastical fiction with theological roots in the Book of Genesis.

[28] The image of parasitic urbanism has already been examined in chapter 4.2.1.

point of view through the mode of the thanatic. While the magicians indulge the fantasy of an imperialist urban development programme that London was largely denied outside of the storyworld, the metropolis's juxtaposition to Prague's necropolitan cityscape serves as thanatological foreshadowing of the trilogy's conclusion which narrates how the magicians' oppressive politics have resulted in full-scale revolution and the subsequent destruction of their imperial city. In doing so, Stroud's novels speak to the developments in the twenty-first century, which saw London strive to emancipate itself from its imperial heritage and re-brand as a multiculturalist global city which is at the centre of global commerce. As an alternative history fantasy, the *Bartimaeus* trilogy criticises these aspirations in exaggerated terms as tyrannical, neo-imperialist, and exploitive by presenting them as a direct continuation of colonialist practices which widen existing inequalities for political purposes and ultimately can only lead to ruin and decay, as the novels envision through Gothic imagery.

5.2 Mnemopolis: Ghostly Ecology and the Spectres of Capitalism in the City as a Mind

In the introduction to this chapter, I have outlined the central distinction that the metaphor of the city and the body takes, namely the cardiovascular, organic formation of the heart of the city and the formation which conceives of the city akin to a neural network and presupposes a register that relates to the human mind and memories. On the one hand, as Ben Highmore has pointed out, like the cardiovascular organism the idea of a mnemopolis exists in a healthy and a diseased state ("Metaphor" 33). In contemporary London urban fantasy, this rhetoric is expressed through the spectral, that is, through the city's ghosts, which can either figure as parts of a healthy urban ecosystem or intrude on the urban mind as unwelcome disruptions.[29] On the other hand, the metropolis itself can become spectral, not in the sense of its literally ghostly inhabitants in urban fantasy but rather in the way of living that it generates. In the texts subjected to analysis, this is made manifest by a postmodern fracturing of any understanding of the city, as London is too vast and too multifaceted to be comprehended in total by a single individual. These fractures assume a haunting presence in the lives of the protagonists. There is, in other words, a conceptual distinction between London as a haunt*ed* and as a haunt*ing* space.

The theoretical frameworks which underpin my subsequent investigation of fantastic London's spectral qualities are those expounded by scholars of cultural memory and the theoretical lens commonly referred to as hauntology. The existence of ghosts in urban fantasy is invariably attributed to the nonmaterial remains of people, what has been left behind once the body of a

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[29] There is an etymological difference between *spectre* and *ghost*. The former stems from the Latin *specĕre*, "to look" or "to see", the latter from the Old Germanic *gāst*, "fear". In terms of their use, however, both words have come to denote the apparition of something that should not be there, usually the nonmaterial remains of a person or animal. In both hauntological literature and this dissertation, *spectre* and *ghost* will be used interchangeably.

person is gone. In this way, ghosts are representations of the past in the present, conventionally understood as being motivated by "unfinished business" (Rushdie 129) which necessitates finishing. As Robert Mighall has pointed out, this "persistence of historical memory" ("Gothic Cities" 55) is a fundamental staple of the Gothic, especially if the intrusion of the past in the form of ghosts lacks benevolence. In this case, the involuntary recall of past memories in the present constitutes symptoms of a wound that has not healed, positioning the ghosts as manifestations of trauma. As such, ghosts point inadvertently to a lack of control, for "[r]eckoning with ghosts is not like deciding to read a book: you cannot simply choose the ghosts with which you are willing to engage" (Gordon 190). These wounds, the literary scholar J. Roger Kurtz points out, "require interpretation" as a form of working through what "[w]e think of . . . as a pathological mental and emotional condition" (2). Two of the series in my corpus – Paul Cornell's *Shadow Police* and Ben Aaronovitch's *Rivers of London* series – investigate the status of ghosts *in* the city in a way that I subsequently aggregate under the label of ghostly ecology. The question is precisely what is the status and purpose of ghosts in London in these novels? While both texts convey the notion of London being haunted, they use their ghosts to different ends. The *Shadow Police* characters are haunted by ghosts from the pasts which can be read as the fantastical manifestations of collective and personal traumatic memories which disrupt the functioning of both the urban ecosystem and the characters' individual lives and eventually result in a paralysing state of fatalistic helplessness. In contrast, in the *Rivers of London* novels the ghostly manifestations of the past are posited as being not just an integral part of but even vital to the system's functioning. Embedded in what is essentially an exchange economy, the protagonist Peter Grant has to learn the spectral value system in order to engage meaningfully with London's ghostly inhabitants and the larger urban ecosystem to which they belong.

The third case study, Kate Griffin's *Matthew Swift* series, warrants a different theoretical approach, as it does not predominantly deal with the ghosts in London but *of* London. The tools for analysis are provided by a body of works referred to as being concerned with hauntology. Hauntology emerged as a critical term from the writings of the French philosopher Jacques Derrida. In *Specters of Marx*, Derrida introduces the term as a near-homonym in his native French to *ontology* through a combined reading of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels's *The Communist Manifesto* and Shakespeare's *Hamlet*.[30] He takes his cues from the *Manifesto*'s famous opening line, which postulates that "A spectre is haunting Europe" (2), and Hamlet's observation that "time is

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[30] Before publication, *Specters of Marx* was delivered as a talk in 1993 at the 'Whither Marxism' colloquium held at the University of California, Riverside. Thus, the English language translation by Peggy Kamuf uses the American English spelling of the word *spectre*, which I retain throughout this dissertation where Derrida's book is concerned. However, whenever the word appears outside of this specific context, it will be spelled according to British English conventions.

out of joint" (1.5.188) to argue that there is no single point of temporal origin, that history is always simultaneously absent and present. From this observation, two directions of hauntology emerge, which both destabilise the present's ontological sense of origin: one, hauntings emerging from the past and, two, hauntings from a future which has not happened yet. The spectre as a figure of thought then "testifies to a living past or to a living future" (Derrida, *Specters* 123; cf. also 30). Derrida thus establishes hauntology as a means of using ghosts as analytical metaphors for phenomena concerned with the simultaneity of past and present and the potentiality of possible, but not-yet-realised futures in which the present will manifest as anticipated memory.

Specters of Marx has hence spawned an entire academic field in its own right – a veritable "spectral turn" ("London" 527) by the mid-2000s, as the literary scholar Roger Luckhurst has put it – which was brought forth by "a range of critics [who] harnessed Darrida's concept as a critical lens through which to read twenty-first-century English culture" (Ka. Shaw 2). The temporal disjunction – the feeling that time indeed is out of joint in the sense of both being less linearly organised than conventional narratives of historical accounts would have us believe and having broken down into a distinctly postmodern state of inertia where the future no longer seems possible – opens up critical explorations of both the presence of a utopian future in a less-than-ideal present and the fear of possibility in the sense that things might just as well get worse than they already are.

One of the most prolific hauntologists in recent years was the cultural theorist Mark Fisher, who can be credited with being chiefly responsible for hauntology gaining new currency in the second decade of the twenty-first century, the period in which most of the urban fantasy texts I discuss in this dissertation were published. In a 2012 essay titled "What Is Hauntology?", Fisher connects Derrida's writing with the late Frederic Jameson's *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991) to argue for hauntology as providing a different logic from Jameson's deeply pessimistic stance that postmodernism is unable to find cultural forms beyond pastiche and reiteration and thus is dominated by "the nostalgia mode" (Jameson, *Postmodernism* 20) of constant reproduction.[31] As time folds over itself, Fisher diagnoses the cultural industries of the twenty-first

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[31] As the title of his book indicates, Jameson argues about the relationship between postmodernism and postmodernity that the former is the cultural, aesthetic manifestation of the latter. In other words, postmodernity as the era of late capitalism engenders postmodernism as "a periodizing concept whose function is to correlate the emergence of new formal features in culture with the emergence of a new type of social life and a new economic order" ("Postmodernism" 1759). Late capitalism is conceptualised as a distinct mode of economic and cultural production, characterised by processes such as globalization, technological innovation, consumerism, and the increasing dominance of finance over traditional industrial production. The term frequently carries a critical undertone, suggesting that this phase of capitalism is marked by deepening inequality, exploitation, environmental degradation, and a prioritisation of short-term profits at the expense of long-term sustainability. Jameson identifies late capitalist cultural production as marked by postmodernism, particularly in its approach to subjectivity, temporality, and narrative. Under this framework, all aspects of cultural life – including art, entertainment, and identity – become subsumed under the logic of capitalist commodification. The prevalence of nostalgia as a system of representation and production has both shone through the discussion of imperial remains in the first part of this chapter and been addressed in its reactionary appropriations in the previous chapter on the city-country dichotomy.

century with anachronistic inertia and concludes that the social imagination has lost "the capacity to conceive of a world radically different from the one in which we currently live" and "in which culture would continue without really changing, and where politics was reduced to the administration of an already established (Capitalist) system" ("Hauntology" 16). Fisher thus focuses on the second direction of spectrality as outlined above, that of the haunting future "that already impinges on the present, conditioning expectations and motivating cultural production" (16). For Fisher, hauntology becomes a way of excavating the futures that have been lost, particularly as a result of having been denied by a neoliberal, late capitalist postmodernity, as "[h]aunting can be seen as intrinsically resistant to the contraction and homogenization of time and space" (19) which according to Jameson so characterises postmodern anachronism. Haunting thus "happens when a place is stained by time, or when a particular place becomes the site for an encounter with broken time" (19). In other words, hauntology values multiplicity, and thus refuses to give up on the possibility of more optimistic futures despite the faltering ontology of postmodernity. "One function of hauntology", Fisher puts it, "is to keep insisting that there are futures beyond postmodernity's terminal time" ("Metaphysics" 53).

As a method, hauntology places emphasis on the multiplicities of meaning in the sense that both the past and the future leave spectral presences and absences in the present. The spectre is the metaphorical means by which to excavate these multiplicities. "In practical terms," the literary scholar Ian Hickey explains, "the spectre has the ability to defer meaning but also to offer different meanings and in order to interpret these we must be able to identify their traces in the present" (18). This enables living *with* the ghosts, as Derrida himself suggests (*Specters* xvii–xviii), instead of truly being haunted by them.

This sentiment is congruous to what Margaret Cohen has propagated as a Gothic Marxism which valorises "a culture's ghosts and phantasms as a significant and rich field of social production rather than a mirage to be dispelled" (11). "[I]f images from the past spring to legibility in the present", Cohen writes further, "it is because they speak to its concerns" (11). Like hauntology, whose permutations it has adopted, Gothic Marxism has arisen from a Gothic reading of Marx's *The Capital* and the Gothic metaphors in Marx and Engels' *The Communist Manifesto*. However, as Andrew Rowcroft notes, "the notion of a Gothic Marxism . . . has yet to be fully developed in the critical dialogue" (195). Rather than using it as a full-fledged methodology, then, Rowcroft suggests comprehending Gothic Marxism as a framework that "enables one to grasp the subjective peculiarities of a given historical situation: to be contemporary with transformations which figure uncompleted historical developments as ghostly, uncanny, supernatural or strange" (196). "Neither living nor dead, present nor absent", the Gothic scholar Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock clarifies, "the ghost functions as the paradigmatic deconstructive gesture, the 'shadowy third' or trace of an

absence that undermines the fixedness of such binary oppositions" (62). As an exemplification of the "postmodern suspicion of meta-narratives . . . [t]he ghost is that which interrupts the presentness of the present" (63). In doing so, "its haunting indicates that, beneath the surface of received history, there lurks another narrative, an untold story that calls into question the veracity of the authorized version of events" (63). The epistemological and ontological uncertainty that ghosts exemplify therefore "reflect[s] the ethos and anxieties of the eras of their production" (63) as they point to past misdeeds which the present seeks to avoid but always threatens to repeat or to futures which threaten to not come to pass. At the same time, as María del Pilar Blanco and Esther Pereen point out in the introduction to *The Spectralities Reader*,

> [w]hile it has insight to offer, especially into those matters that are commonly considered not to matter and into the ambiguous itself, its own status as discourse or epistemology is never stable, as the ghost also questions the formation of knowledge itself and specifically invokes what is placed outside it, excluded from perception and, consequently, from both the archive as the depository of the sanctioned, acknowledged past and politics as the (re)imagined present and future. (9)

Evidently, while the ghost is commonly construed as a conceptual metaphor in spectral studies, fantasy's potential for literalising the impossible entails a 're-supernaturalisation' of the spectral (del Pilar Blanco and Pereen, "Conceptualizing" 14). China Miéville similarly expounded in a keynote lecture at the Socialism 2013 conference in Chicago that "this is a kind of Marxism which stands against not just, obviously, class exploitation and so forth, but against the disenchantment of a certain kind of cold, abstract rationality" (00:15:05–00:15:18). Surely, the ongoing urbanisation of (Western) societies and its meaningful processing in the literary imagination, which is, as I have explained earlier, more often than not dominated by a disenchanted realism, can be deemed such an uncompleted historical development that provokes a reading through a Gothic Marxist lens without unduly presuming to envision here a more pronounced critical framework than others have previously attempted.

In contemporary London urban fantasies, readers are not confronted with metaphorical ghosts, but, provided they suspend their own disbelief, with actual ghosts on the level of the story, and the aim of this chapter is to investigate their purpose. Perhaps somewhat paradoxically, the actuality of ghosts in fantasy entails that they are imbued with historical and cultural specificity, which, however, may serve to avoid reducing them to "a meta-concept that comes to possess virtually everything" (del Pilar Blanco and Pereen, "Conceptualizing" 14). This provides the opportunity to move beyond the generalising limits of the spectral to which Roger Luckhurst pointed in his 2002 essay by noting that "it is worth recalling that ghosts are held to haunt specific locales" ("London" 541). Luckhurst further demands that "surely we have to risk the violence of *reading* the ghost, of cracking open its absent presence to answer the demand of its specific

symptomatology and its specific locale" (542; original emphasis). Ghosts, in this sense, are *hic et nunc*, they "speak both to and of [a] particular cultural moment" as spectral manifestations of a conjuncture and "signal towards larger social anxieties" (Ka. Shaw 2). The ghosts in London urban fantasy are indeed caught between the past and the present, presence and absence, life and death, spectrality and actuality, and in doing so perform cultural work by shedding light on the local and temporal specificities in which they are apprehended and employed. Cognisant of "the specificity of ghosts, the fact that they appear in specific moments, and specific locations" (del Pilar Blanco and Pereen, "Introduction" xi), what is under scrutiny here are the concerns voiced in contemporary urban fantasy by means of a Gothicised metaphorics that connects the city to the mind.

In addition to the Gothic Marxist lens I adopt, what is particularly Gothic about the texts themselves is that they present the city as an enclosed space, cut off from the flow that usually characterises the metaphor of the neuronal network. The sense of spatial enclosure stretches to both the borders of London, which Cornell's Shadow Police team and Griffin's Matthew Swift find confining on an almost habitual basis, and the wider enclosures of postmodernity's paralysing inertia. Moreover, Griffin's novels in particular ultimately construe the city not so much as being haunted but as doing the haunting itself. The eponymous protagonist simultaneously embodies both a human and a nonhuman entity, and strives to make meaning out of the chaos and disorder of a postmodern urban existence through his phenomenological experience of the city and to engage with the futures which have not yet happened, but which seem impossible in the face of postmodernity's anachronistic inertia. Although the novels depict Swift as an isolated character in the urban ecosystem, who not only struggles against the madness this isolation engenders in other urbanites but also with the madness of his own fragmented identity, he constantly fights back on those who have succumbed to the repetitive practices of pastiche and parody to the point where he is eventually able to escape the postmodern denial of possibilities and keep London intact by envisioning a positive understanding of the city as an entomological organism.

5.2.1   London as a Haunted City in the *Shadow Police* and *Rivers of London* Series

Paul Cornell's *Shadow Police* series focuses on a team of detectives with the Metropolitan Police who are given what is called 'the Sight', the ability to perceive the supernatural. The newly formed unit becomes London's only Occult Detective force and is tasked with doing what one of them terms "proper police work" (*London* 133) on the magical horrors lurking inside the city. The overarching plot development of the three novels has London spiral into chaos while the police attempt to impose order on both the human and the supernatural community. While this narrative development would have warranted the novels to be discussed in chapter 5.1.2, ghostly apparitions of people and places are the driving force behind London's decay, and their depiction as

manifestations of trauma necessitates a different frame. Whereas the characters in Cornell's London clearly cannot find a way of living with their ghosts, Ben Aaronovitch's *Rivers of London* series offers a different portrayal of what I have termed ghostly ecology.[32] Aaronovitch's protagonist Peter Grant meets multiple ghostly figures over the course of the series and must learn to understand them as a vital part of London's ecosystem. Thus, their inclusion in the story conforms to an understanding of a haunt as a place of frequent resort and emphasises the conviviality of all beings in the metropolis.

In the London of the *Shadow Police* series, memory is power. The team consisting of Detective Inspector James Quill, analyst Lisa Ross, Detective Sergeant Tony Costain, and Detective Constable Kevin Sefton quickly discover that supernatural forces can gather "power from some intrinsic property of the metropolis itself" (*Severed* 13) by two ways: either by sacrificing to the Smiling Man, a divinity of chaos, or by being remembered by London itself.[33] Thus, London is construed as a living entity with a memory, whose commemorative capacities generate magical power. In all three novels, this concept produces ghostly manifestations, which in turn are controlled by the Smiling Man for his own nefarious purposes of plunging London into chaos. In the first instalment, *London Falling*, the investigation team is confronted with the manifestation of Mora Losley's ghost, a sixteenth-century witch with a penchant for child murders. In the second instalment, *The Severed Streets*, the ghost of Jack the Ripper is terrorising London and even manages to kill DI Quill, who is subsequently brought back to life by his team with the help of magic. In the third instalment, *Who Killed Sherlock Holmes?*, the ghost of the eponymous great detective himself is revealed to be a murderous spirit. In all these cases, the ghosts are powered by the metropolis's memory of them as the people of London believe that these figures once existed and that their deeds have transitioned into the cultural memory of the city. Moreover, all three ghosts are framed as revenants, that is, as ghosts who have come back from the past to the present in order to cause disruption, and this disruptive quality is unanimously narrated in a rhetoric of fear and anxiety. In this environment, the novels position the police forces as the keepers of order, whose daily work prevents the supernatural from actually plunging the city into chaos. Quite explicitly even, the *Shadow Police* series links this narrative arc to disruptive events in the real world, namely the 7/7 bombings and the 2011 riots.

In *London Falling*, the detectives discover the concept of commemorative power as the investigation of Losley's crimes progresses by deducing that the witch's power stems from the fear

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[32] The term *ecology* originates in environmental studies and is employed here in the sense of denoting the "vast array of relationships among species and their environments" (Seidler and Bawa 71), in this case among ghosts and the city.

[33] There are characteristic similarities between the Smiling Man in Cornell's novels and Mr Punch in the *Rivers of London* series, but their similarities do not have any analytical purchase on the hauntological discussion.

generated by memories of her: "So this was remembering", Sefton observes. "The force of it was huge, like continents. It was older than everything. It flowed through everything. . . . the fear . . . was always so strong" (*London* 194). Later in the series, it becomes clear that the power of urban memory is tied to affect, as "London seemed to remember the big stuff, the emotional stuff" (*Severed* 59). Losley's ritualistic child murders in the sixteenth century have had an emotional impact on the city population, and the more contemporary Londoners are confronted with these historical events due to their repetition by the revenant in the present, the more powerful the revenant becomes. The evocation of the past, thus, empowers the haunting ghost in the present. The novel exacerbates this vicious circle of remembrance and power to the point where Losley seems to permeate the city ubiquitously:

> "She's become *remembered*," said Sefton. "The masses have got hold of her. These visions aren't really her. These are people's ideas of her. She's—"
> "Everywhere," said Quill, looking up from his phone. "She's all over London. There are people in Shoreditch who swear they've seen her . . . . coppers on the street there who say they nearly grabbed her." (*London* 268; original emphasis)

The passage points explicitly to the ontoformative power of memory and belief. Obviously, the citizens of contemporary London cannot actually remember children being murdered by a maid in the sixteenth century.[34] Although there is a certain specificity of place to the ghost, this is largely tied to London as a place. Moreover, as the following quotation makes clear, Losley's role in the narrative is primarily a manifestation of fear around anxiety-inducing events, such as child murders: "By a few mornings later, on his morning drive to work, Quill was seeing Losley *everywhere*. For real, not just in the media. . . . She now seemed to be a fixed and central part of this London" (*London* 270; original emphasis).

How central the notion of commemorative power is to the revenant's strength and how it is exacerbated by media representation becomes even more pronounced when the team is finally able to corner Losley. Injured from multiple gunshot wounds that her increasingly corporeal manifestation has suffered, she recovers by absorbing the energy generated by Londoners' remembrance of her:

> Something was rushing into Losley from all directions. . . . all the different versions of Losley, the visions from the front of the newspapers, the haunting photographs, they were smashing into her, plastering themselves over her, putting flesh back onto her bones new, skin forming out of newsprint, muscle from the three colours of television. (*London* 366)

If remembrance is power, the novel suggests, then surely the ubiquitous presence of a terrifying assailant in the media must contribute to this pool of energy. Even after her manifestation is

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[34] The series never specifies its temporal setting, but it is understood that the timeline in the narrative roughly mirrors the novels' publication dates. For example, the 2011 Occupy protests (*London* 291) and the 2012 Olympics (*Severed* 212) are explicitly referenced.

eventually defeated, the narrative leaves no ambiguity in how the ghosts of London are powered: "as she emerged again . . . [g]hosts of her would appear this very night, and often, as the stories would spread, and people would look out for her and believe" (*London* 373). Powered by the stories and belief of the people and the media, therefore, Losley's haunting presence all over the city manifests in fearsome spectral apparitions which are simultaneously her and not her, simultaneously there and not there, simultaneously the past and the present.

The overall effect by the revenant's assault on London as described in the novel is indicative of a terrorist attack, marked not just by the extensive media coverage but also by massive police presence and crowd manipulation:

> Losley looked around at them, at the masses of people and police closing on her from all directions. . . . She looked at the mob and hissed at them. The people in her way broke and scattered. She hurled across the road. She went straight through the uniforms. Screams and explosions of blood, and coppers were shouting, *She's got a gun, she's got a gun.* Coppers fell bloodied and injured and crying out . . . The crowd began screaming and some of them started running. (*London* 265; original emphasis)

In *London Falling*, the assailant is a revenant from the past, who literally draws her power from the terror she generates. Thus, the novel's combination of the urban fantastic with the crime fiction genre showcases the vicious circle of power and public memory generated by terror and terrorism and the role of the police as an ordering agent is juxtaposed to the chaos generated by fear. This storyline is continued in the second instalment, as the supernatural assailant whose deeds induce anxiety in the population of London changes from the revenant witch Mora Losley to the ghost of Jack the Ripper.

The Ripper storyline of *The Severed Streets* brings another element to the portrayal of London, namely that of financial corruption. The Ripper revenant's victims are in the majority white, wealthy men, and throughout the second novel the sentiment prevails that "money can be used to shape the power of London too" (*Severed* 115), even "beyond the reach of the law" (215). These cursory remarks to the complicated socioeconomic fabric of London in the twenty-first century invokes the idea that the British capital is plagued by social and economic injustices, and that this environment is conducive to summoning the spirit of Jack the Ripper, who resumes his murderous activities from the 1880s and becomes "the symbol of everything that was happening" (333). The novel's emphasis on the cyclicality of chaos and violence emplots the murders and the police's inability to prevent or solve them as the cause for multiple riots in London, which in turn further empower the murderous ghost (149).

In this melange, again the police are posited as the force of order, but one that also has its socioeconomic demands. Against the context of the first novel, in which considerable police resources are employed in the attempt to retain Mora Losley, *The Severed Streets* empathises greatly

with the precariousness of police officers' profession and narrates how the Metropolitan Police go on strike as the riots intensify. "[T]he public should know", one unnamed police superior points out, "that, even in the current situation, with disorder on the streets of London every night, this government has not seen fit to look to better conditions for police officers, nor for greater numbers of police officers, and put in place a cut in starting salary" (*Severed* 229). As the novel's plot progresses, the conflict situation worsens to the point where "the riots in the further boroughs had started joining hands, were becoming what the few news commentators . . . were calling a 'ring of fire', moving towards the centre of the cities of London and Westminster" (*Severed* 333).[35] Eventually, the ultimate aggravation finds its narrative expression in the murder of DI Quill himself by the ghost of Jack the Ripper.

Read together, the first two instalments of the *Shadow Police* series employ murderous revenants from the past as supernatural manifestations of urban anxiety revolving around the juxtaposition of chaos and order. The growing socioeconomic inequalities in the extradiegetic consensus reality London of the 2010 era are (re)presented in the novels as the tensions to which these ghostly manifestations attach themselves, to which they give a tangible form on the level of the narrative. Against the riots arising out of these unequal existential conditions, the novels uncritically pit the positively evaluated, ordering force of the police, which is clearly distinguished from a government "incapable of restoring order" (*Severed* 333) in the series. Cornell's novels thus attempt at mounting a critique of British political elitism by championing the supposedly honest work of the copper on the street.[36] In this context, the novels' referencing of the 2011 riots is especially problematic, as these riots were caused by police mistreatment of London's nonwhite communities and subsequent racial tensions.

Nonetheless, *The Shadow Police*'s increasingly despairing and grim atmosphere makes for an apt supernatural narrativisation of public opinion in the United Kingdom in the twenty-first century's second decade. Socioeconomic inequalities were severely exacerbated by the 2008 financial crisis, and the ramifications of the government's austerity politics have been proven to have hit hardest those who were the most disenfranchised to begin with (Stedman and Gohrisch 2; cf. also Berry 1–2).[37] The evocation of the murderous spirit of Jack the Ripper draws a

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[35] The duality of London and Westminster alludes to the metaphor of the two hearts of the metropolis, which I have analysed in chapter 5.1. The notion of centrality is also equated with political power in this example. The expression 'ring of fire' uses the purifying connotations of fire and the allusion to the devastating Great Fire of 1666 as a symbolical parallel to the 'ring of steel' of governmental surveillance, which, as I will argue in the next chapter, symbolises the dystopian control of the city through authorities.

[36] This critique is also present in the revelation that the Ripper spirit was not actually summoned by the riots on the streets calling for social justice, but by a member of the British upper class, "one of the richest and most powerful men in the world" (*Severed* 314), who plans to destabilise the political authorities by spurring violent protests in order to take over in a veritable *coup d'etat*.

[37] Among the many austerity measures adopted by the various conservative-led governments since 2010 are increases of regressive taxes, such as Value Added Tax, while Corporation Tax was reduced from 28 to 19 percent between 2010 and 2017 (HM Treasury, "Corporation"); cuts to social benefits such as replacing former benefits with the

supernatural parallel to the pessimistic *fin-de-siècle* sentiment towards the end of the Victorian era in order to provide a meaningful frame for people's experiences in times of economic crisis. However, the attempt at making sense of the world through reference only works to a certain degree, as *The Severed Streets* itself makes unmistakably clear: "Anything seems to be able to mean anything", Sefton is told by the Rat King, another one of the manifestations of Londoners' beliefs, and one to whom Sefton turns for explanations. "[A]ll the signifiers have been thrown into a barrel and are being picked out at random and assigned to just about anything" (*Severed* 298). In the second instalment, the total annihilation of meaning is not yet acknowledged to its full extent, however, as the Rat King does indeed provide a definite answer to the question of who retains the prerogative of interpretation, though with a notable sense of fatalism: "the choice of what means what, *as always*, seems to be down to those with money and power" (298; my emphasis).

The fatalistic feeling of doom is also conveyed by a chapter that focuses on Quill's experiences after his murder before he is magically brought back to life by his colleagues. The chapter in question sets its nihilistic tone with the very first sentence: "Quill had felt all the signifiers, all the meanings of the world collapse at the moment of his death" (*Severed* 344). Subsequently, Quill discovers that he finds himself in Hell, which looks like an eerie replication of Victorian London. In the course of the chapter, Quill discovers that this hellish London is ruled by the Smiling Man, who plans to extend his rulership to the contemporary storyworld London as well, and that all its inhabitants are governed by fear. Moreover, Quill learns that under the corruptive influence of the Smiling Man, everyone who has ever lived in London is destined for Hell, for the structures of the real London have indeed broken down in the storyworld, which the narrative expresses through the image of the wheel of fate:

> There was the physical city, there was a sort of contour map of rushing energies, and there was . . . as if it had been built there, a great wheel, the structure of which was threaded through everything, that cut across everything. The wheel was made of ideas made by people, or imposed on them. It had gone wrong, he saw it: it was moving the wrong way. . . . there was nothing he could do about that. (*Severed* 361)

The series' third instalment, *Who Killed Sherlock Holmes?*, continues the theme of the ultimate denial of signification and aggravates the sentiment of chaos and gloomy despair even further. Although the Metropolitan Police has managed to restore public order after the riots narrated in *The Severed Streets*, a rhetoric of decay and demise now permeates the entire narration. Crippled by his traumatic experience in Hell and the claustrophobic feeling of inevitability and helplessness

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less-generous Universal Credit system; introducing means-testing for child benefit; cuts to local council funding, which are then less able to assist people in need through specifically designed aid programmes; and reducing spending on education – while simultaneously increasing the cap on tuition fees – and public health, which disproportionately affects young people (with a particular need for education) and the elderly (with their disproportionate demand for care).

of preventing every Londoner's damnation, including his family, Quill gives in to depression and cannot provide successful leadership to his team. What is more, the corruptive influence of hellish London encroaches on the city in which the characters live:

> This fallen London he found himself in now felt like Hell, but he knew it was real. So many criminals, degenerates, suspicious foreigners, so much that was new and contradictory forcing its way into his head. Where was meaning? Where could one begin one's deduction? (*Sherlock* 282)

As this passage demonstrates, the narrative perspective provided by Quill attempts to convey to the reader the ramifications of the inspector's traumatic experiences. On the one hand, the notion of things forcing their way into his head speaks to the severity of the mental illness from which Quill suffers. On the other hand, the demise of London is evoked by words such as "fallen", "criminal", "degenerate", or "suspicious". The implication is, again, that meaning has broken down, that the world around the detective team has become so meaningless that even they cannot make sense of it. Signalled by the word "deduction", the novel here draws on the cultural imagery of the detective as someone who makes things mean, who is able to bring order to chaos. As I have already noted in chapter 2.3.3, this imagery stems from the Enlightenment period and has been shaped by the investigative function performed by detectives. In the context of the novel, its very title references Sherlock Holmes as arguably one of the most influential literary depictions of the detective figure and one who espouses precisely the Enlightenment value of rational intellect. However, in *Who Killed Sherlock Holmes?* the ghost of the great detective becomes the murderer in the procedural narrative arc of the instalment. As with Losley and the Ripper, the ghost of Sherlock Holmes is powered by the cultural imagination of London, by "Holmesmania" (*Sherlock* 323), as the characters call it. Sherlock Holmes, here, is not the one who brings meaning but chaos, and thus he further contributes to the sense of impending doom, because "[w]hat Londoners believe *can* change the nature of a ghost" (324; original emphasis). The novel seems to argue that if not even the greatest British detective can be trusted to be what people think he is, what then is the sense of it all? In the narrative, Holmes functions as a symbol, the symbol of rational intellect, and the novel makes it strikingly clear that it does not believe in symbols at all, which it construes as "just a rather desperate attempt at control, a search to impose meaning, or find it" (250).

In the interest of its overarching storyline, the novel's final confrontation reveals Sherlock Holmes's ghost to have been controlled, again, by the Smiling Man, who thus consolidates his role as the series' primary antagonist. On the level of the story, the public imagination of Holmes in the form of competing literary and filmic images of the great detective has produced a profoundly schizophrenic character. As a result, the ghost has both committed murders and deluded himself into believing that his "existence is necessary to redeem this infested, degenerate, fallen London", which the Smiling Man has exploited "first to create chaos in this world, then to clamp down on

it" (*Sherlock* 347). The notion that London has fallen already, that it is decayed beyond salvation, appears for the third time here after the very title of the first instalment and Quill's earlier description of his depression and the experiences in Hell. This idea is firmly aligned by the narrative with the past at the expense of the future, as the following passage demonstrates:

> The Smiling Man stood at the centre of London. He spread his hands wide and drew his people and his monsters from the darkness in which they had been exiled. The real London was coming back, alongside poverty and tuberculosis and history. The civilized consensus was over. *The future was not going to happen. . . .* He would have to do this many times, to keep the wheel turning backward and backward, widdershins. (*Sherlock* 305; my emphasis)

As this quotation demonstrates, *The Shadow Police* series periodically invokes the spectre of the Victorian era with its horrors of socioeconomic injustice in order to criticise the situation in the United Kingdom, and London in particular, at the beginning of the twenty-first century. The obsession with the past as manifesting itself in the present through people's beliefs – and as wreaking havoc in the present – uses fantasy's potential for literalising the metaphoric. By employing the dichotomy between chaos and order, the novels suggest that growing inequality and the power conveyed in the rich by virtue of their financial resources opens the door to corruption and decay. The police is championed as the keeper of order in the face of harmful chaos, at least at the level of the hard-working copper as opposed to the elites, thereby disregarding that the increasing reports of police violence and political bias in the police force can hardly warrant such a romanticised view of the institution. At the same time, the socioeconomic and political conditions are depicted as being without an alternative, which produces depressed and broken characters, especially among the police, who are unable to decode for the readers the signifiers of our postmodern existence. Although the procedural murder mysteries are eventually solved in all three of the novels, the ghosts of London in *The Shadow Police* series are posited as the haunting symptoms of an eternally damned society, doomed to repeat the past and going backward rather than forward. There is, in other words, no glimpse of hope in the novels that the ghosts of the past can be lived with or that a more optimistic future is possible.

In contrast, Ben Aaronovitch's *Rivers of London* series depicts its ghosts much more nuancedly as part of an urban ecosystem. In the following analysis, I will be concentrating on two distinct types of supernatural entities, both of whom invoke the spectral presence of the past in the presence through their very existence: the *genii locorum*, the spirits of London's submerged rivers, and proper ghosts. Both these entities are posited within the series as vital parts of the city's ecosystem, and the protagonist Peter Grant must learn to understand the intricate ways in which

that ecosystem functions in order to navigate it successfully.[38] These interactions are predominantly centred around the basic law of exchange economies in the sense that any demand necessitates the offering of an endowment in turn, thus contributing to the series' overall emphasis on conviviality within the urban ecosystem. Unlike in Cornell's *Shadow Police* series, the spectral presences of the past in the present do not invariably symbolise a wound needing treatment but are simply part of the specific way of life in fantastic London.

The *genii locorum* of London's (submerged) rivers are the most prominent members of the supernatural community in the novels. They appear as political agents as well, which illustrates that the community is both structured itself and intertwined with London's nonmagical population.[39] In addition, as the manifestations of rivers spirits, they have attributes of the specific parts of the city and their historical importance folded into their personality, which Grant is able to perceive supernaturally through their *vestigia*, the sensory impression their magical aura radiates. As such, the *genii locorum* can be read as the spectral presence of the past in the present, which simultaneously point to historical memory and the notion that time is out of joint. The existence of the river spirits suggests that London cannot escape its own past, as it is always present through them. They are the literal embodiment of historical memory in the present city and symbolise the integration of the past in the present. The subsequent analysis will concentrate on two of the *genii locorum* – Lady Ty and Fleet – thus illustrating two different historical periods and the importance of their manifestation in the present through the two spirits.[40]

Cecelia Tyburn Thames, nicknamed Lady Ty in the series, is a daughter of Mama Thames and replaced William of Tyburn as the *genius loci* of the eponymous river after the Great Stink. She is well-educated, politically active, serves as the executive director of five firms, and resents the involvement of Grant and Nightingale in matters of London's supernatural community, thus opposing them where she can. Nonetheless, as Grant grows in negotiation skills over the course of the novels, he is able to strike bargains with Lady Ty (e.g. *Whispers* 228; *Tree* 1), exemplifying that the novels construe their ghosts and spectral figures, such as the rivers spirits, as parts of a balanced ecosystem that revolves around exchanges. Her *vestigium* contains references to the historical importance of the area around the River Tyburn, where the old London gallows stood. Grant describes it as

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[38] Grant links ghosts and the *genii locorum* in that both entities draw magical sustenance from their immediate surroundings in a symbiotic relationship (*Rivers* 245). A full typology of different spectral entities in the novels is never offered, however.

[39] The *genius loci* of the river Tyburn, for example, Lady Ty, attended Oxford University, graduated with a double first degree, and heavily lobbies in local politics with members of the civil services.

[40] As an additional example, the reader may be referred to the analysis of Mama and Father Thames's *vestigia* in chapter 4.1.2, which I have read in the context of nostalgia as signifying two different notions of British- and Englishness respectively.

a wave of brandy, cigar smoke and pheasant that had hung too long. Then, mixed in with nutmeg and the shine of silver, the heated excitement of the mob, the creak of wood under strain and the smell of old rope, defiance and fear. And rising above it like a clear note in a trumpet solo, the smell of wood smoke and fresh caught fish cooked over an open fire. (*Tree* 349)

The old rope, defiance, and fear clearly allude to the rope of the gallows, the defiance of criminal acts against the authorities, but also the fear of those hanged facing their own death. These spectral presences of the gallows are strengthened by other signifiers of the execution as a public event: nutmeg refers to both the strong spiced brown ale convicts were allowed to drink before their execution and the smell from street vendors' stalls, the silver denotes the weapons worn by authorities, the creak of wood refers to the sounds of the gallows under the weight of the bodies stepping up, and the excitement of the mob conveys the impression of the extent to which public executions were a public spectacle. These signifiers mix in Tyburn's *vestigium* with those denoting her political involvement – brandy, cigar smoke and pheasant – particularly by invoking a sense of posh upper-classness. Both her Nigerian heritage and the contemporary immigrant population which has settled in the area around Edgeware Road are also present through the signifiers of wood smoke and fish cooked over fire. The blend of different impressions conveys different layers of history and connotes the complexity of both Tyburn's character and the area of London which she personifies.[41]

Both the spectral presence of the past and the notion that the *genii locorum* are entities bound to bargains are also exemplified by the meeting between Grant's little cousin Abigail Kamara and the goddess of the river Fleet in the companion novella *What Abigail Did that Summer*. Kamara investigates kids' unresolved disappearances around the area of Hampstead Heath, which "lies in the arms of two branches of the River Fleet" (*Abigail* 65). The area thus is Fleet's domain, which makes the spirit a potential source of information. The problem, Kamara points out to the reader right away, "is getting her to talk to you" (66). The answer to this problem lies in the concept of "propitiation" (66), which both harks back to the idea of placating local spirits in spirit religions and denotes the exchange principle I have described above. Kamara explains to the reader that one has to "sacrifice" (67) something that possesses personal value in order to attract the interest of the spirit in question. Consequently, the thirteen-year-old chucks her mobile phone into a pond at the Heath and is awarded an audience with the *genius loci*; she exchanged a personal item against the possibility of obtaining information.

On meeting Fleet, Kamara describes her impression of the spirit's *vestigium* as follows:

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[41] Another layer is added by Grant's discovery that Lady Ty retains memories of Sir William of Tyburn, a son of Father Thames and the personification of the river before the Great Stink, whom Grant meets in *Whispers Under Ground* and designates as "a *ghost* . . . [o]r a sort of echo in the *memory* of the city" (223; my emphasis).

> "Abigail," she says, and beneath her voice is the roar of the printing press and the crackle
> of telegraph wires. . . . The great mechanical presses that once thundered out the news and
> gossip may have gone from her valley, but the spirit remains . . . her words draw me closer
> with promises of secrets and gossip, of witty conversation and smoky after-hours clubs.
> (*Abigail* 72–73)

The goddess is explicitly linked to the modern technology of the city that was established along her course rather than to the ostensibly natural environment of her headwaters, for the park is noted for its un-cityness through the lack of urban soundscape (96).[42] The sensory impressions refer to both the historic importance of the area around Fleet Street as London's printing press centre from the eighteenth to the twentieth century as well as its contemporary associations with the banking, consulting, and legal professions. As I have argued with regard to Lady Ty, Fleet's *vestigium* also mixes past and present to denote the specific London locale of which the respective *genius loci* is the personification. As the quotation above makes explicitly clear, the past retains a spectral presence in the present through the spirits' *vestigia*, for the historical characteristics "may have gone . . ., but the spirit remains" (*Abigail* 72). All the *genii locorum* draw magical power from their urban surroundings, and thus also from the past and the historical importance of their specific domain on a temporal layer. The past is literally used to positively (em)power the present, as the historical memories are integrated within the present and provide important historical information rather than symbolising a wound inflicted by old injustices.

The same characteristics of the integrated spectral presence of the past in the present and the value of equal exchange also characterises the interactions with proper ghosts in the series. A good example to illustrate these interactions is Grant and Nightingale's visit to Colonel Sir Thomas de Veil in the first novel, *Rivers of London*. The two visit the old Bow Street Magistrates Court – and Grant relates to the reader the historical significance of the location as the headquarters for London's first (unofficial) police force, the Bow Street Runners – which has been redeveloped as part of the Royal Opera House during rebuilding in the 1990s; again, past and present intersect, here on the spatial level of the building. When they reach the right room, Grant feels a spectral *vestigium* of "parchment, old sweat, leather and spilled port" (*Rivers* 257) and understands that who they have come to visit is "a ghost magistrate . . . [t]o provide a ghost warrant" (257) for the arrest of the revenant spirit Henry Pyke, whose nefarious schemes are at the centre of the novel's plot. Their request, the warrant, comes at a cost, and Grant is required to feed the ghost magistrate magical energy in exchange for signing the document (260). In the novel's reality, the warrant document is still blank, but as Nightingale explains: "Symbols have power over ghosts. . . . They

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[42] The use of acoustic impressions to differentiate spaces connoted with naturalness from the surrounding city has been examined with regard to the *Alex Verus* series in chapter 4.1.1. Here, Kamara's sensory experiences construct and semanticise both the urban space and its fantastic topography simultaneously, as I have also argued in chapter 4.2.1.

often have more effect than anything we can bring to bear from the physical world" (257). This interaction illustrates the two purposes I have previously argued spectral entities to have in the series: the symbolisation of the successful integration of the past as the historical memory of the city in the present and the demonstration of the emphasis the series places on balanced interaction by the example of symbolic exchanges. The past is recalled in spectral terms both on the spatial level – the building – and the temporal – the appearance of the ghost – and in both cases, while its spectrality signifies the disjointedness of timelines, the integration of the past in the present is successful; in terms of urban reconstruction on the spatial level and on Grant and Nightingale's profitable negotiation with the magistrate on the temporal.[43]

The encounter with de Veil is actually not the first time Grant meets a ghost in *Rivers of London*, since the importance of ghosts in the novels has already been established right at the very beginning of the first novel. After having provided the reason for his presence at a murder investigation scene in central London, the protagonist and narrator Peter Grant proceeds nonchalantly to informing readers that what he has just described are the circumstances which led to "why it was me that met the ghost" (*Rivers* 3). Up to this point, there has not yet been any mentioning of the supernatural in the novel, and its fairly generic description of a murder investigation scene instead invokes the impression of a classical crime fiction setting. Of course, the narrative is delivered in hindsight, and Grant was not aware at the time that the person he was speaking to, who would turn out to be the prime suspect in the investigation at hand, was in fact a ghost. However, what matters more here is the sequence of events as it is presented to the reader, and in that sequence the mentioning of the ghost constitutes the first instance of the supernatural in the entire series.[44]

The ghost in question is Henry Pyke, a failed and murdered actor from the eighteenth century who presents himself to Grant as Nicholas Wallpenny and pretends to be a witness of the novel's murder case to disguise his own involvement in it. In truth, Pyke is a revenant spirit re-enacting evil events from *The Tragical Comedy, or Comical Tragedy, of Punch and Judy* by assuming the mantle of Mr Punch, thereby releasing the necessary magical energy to call up the actual Mr Punch, a much older revenant spirit "of riot and rebellion" (*Rivers* 250). While Pyke and Mr Punch are assumed to be the same person during the first novel, it becomes clear that Mr Punch is a much older, more mythical spectral entity, and thus more interesting as an object of and more relevant

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[43] I have chosen the example from the first novel for its succinctness. There is, in addition, an entire companion novella, *The Furthest Station*, which revolves around Grant tracking down ghosts in London, negotiating with them, and providing exchange endowments for their demands.

[44] In urban fantasy, the acceptance of the supernatural is never really a question. In most cases, the investigators are part of the supernatural domain themselves, or have been on the job for a longer period of time before the narrative starts. In this case, Peter Grant is newly initiated, but he does never really doubt the existence of supernatural beings. It takes about 50 pages into the first novel, which is roughly 12% of its total length, for Grant to be firmly established as a member of the Metropolitan Police's supernatural investigation unit.

to an analysis of the series' ghostly ecology. In the seventh novel, *Lies Sleeping*, Grant discovers that Mr Punch is the ghost of a Romanised Atrebate, Gaius C. Pulcinella, living in Londinium (*Lies* 196).[45] In addition, "[h]e was a true believer in law and order" (196–97) but was deeply disappointed in his belief in the security provided by the Roman army when his entire family was tortured and killed during an Iceni raid led by Boudica. The torture and slaughter of his family drove Pulcinella mad and the amount of magical energy released by the deaths of many during the raid turned him into the spirit of riot and rebellion that he is during the time the novels take place: "So up he sprang. A thing full of hatred and mad laughter, capering through the ashes of the city. Because order did not save his children. Law did not save his wife" (198).

Crucially for my argument, Grant and his associates from the Metropolitan Police discover that Mr Punch is the manifestation of the Lord of Misrule, or Trickster god, a common character in most mythological pantheons.[46] As such, he is an integral part of what Dr Abdul Haqq Walid, the team's medical consultant, terms the city's "*Eidolonisphere . . .* From *Eidolon . . .* Greek for phantom or ghost" (*Lies* 161). Throughout the second to the seventh instalment, it transpires that the series' villain, Martin Chorley, plans sacrificing Mr Punch in his capacity as the "manifestation of . . . disorder" (*Rivers* 250) in London in order to magically fuel his vision of "a new order" (*Lies* 291).[47] Grant's erstwhile colleague Lesley May, who has been possessed by Pyke's spirit posing as Mr Punch during the first novel and been seriously maimed in the process, assists Chorley for reasons of personal revenge. In an argument between her and Grant, the latter argues for the necessity of keeping Mr Punch alive:

> "You think killing Punch is going to settle things down?" I said . . .
> "Well," she said, "killing Punch would be a good start."
> "What if getting rid of Punch fucks everything up?"
> "Like what?"
> "Like the city. Maybe he's part of the ecosystem – maybe he's necessary." (*Lies* 280)

In contrast to Chorley and May, who are deluded by their respective ideological and revenge fantasies, Grant is able to recognise the importance of ghosts for a functioning urban ecosystem. The spectral manifestation of disorder is necessary to define order in the first place, as any meaning is dependent inherently on its opposite. Similar to Cornell's *Shadow Police* series, *Rivers of London*

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[45] The association between a Romanised Atrebate and the name of Mr Punch is established in two ways. One, when Grant first encounters the spirit, he is summoned by Henry Pyke's re-enactment of the Punch and Judy plays in contemporary London, which is why Grant labels him Mr Punch and sticks with this denomination for the rest of the series. Second, the Punch and Judy plays themselves originate in the sixteenth-century Italian *commedia dell'arte*, where Pulcinella is a Neapolitan stock character. These Italian roots link to the Romanised origins of the character in the novels.

[46] For the role of trickster gods, particularly in African and Afro-American mythologies, see Eva M. Thury and Margaret K. Devinney's *Introduction to Mythology: Contemporary Approaches to Classical and World Myths* (4th ed., Oxford UP, 2017; esp. 467–82) and Lewis Hyde's *Trickster Makes This World: How Disruptive Imagination Creates Culture* (Canongate, 2017).

[47] Chorley's plans have been subject to analysis with regard to their nostalgic character in chapter 4.2.2.

develops this sentiment to argue for the importance of the police, which is repeatedly construed throughout the novels as the institution which brings "order out of chaos" (*Rivers* 16; cf. also *Moon* 23; *Foxglove* 322; *Tree* 48).[48] Policing is concerned with gathering knowledge, evidence, to produce a "regime of truth" (Foucault, *Biopolitics* 18), in this case a regime that serves to apprehend and convict perpetrators of crime. However, *Rivers of London* acknowledges that, although policing is shown to seek to order an otherwise chaotic reality, this practice can "butt[] up against boundaries" (*Lies* 71) when dealing with the supernatural, emphasising chaotic improvisation over ordered protocol in the process. The focus on police work in the series in combination with the fantastical setting firstly works to transform the elements incorporated from crime fiction into urban fantasy, secondly provides chaotic elements that challenge the otherwise heavily regulated bureaucratic administration of the police apparatus, and thirdly poses the question of how to encounter the supernatural population.[49] In line with its emphasis on conviviality, the series firmly answers this question by emphasising "complex webs of interpersonal relationships and traded favours . . . as the quickest way to get the job done" (*Lies* 70–71). Balancing and exchanging are key characteristics which frame the interactions between the police and the policed, thereby accentuating that policing is about consent rather than uncritically championing London's police forces.

In conclusion, both the *Shadow Police* and the *Rivers of London* series portray the ghosts in London, albeit to different ends. The spectral presences of the past are employed in Cornell's novels to evoke a fatalistic, claustrophobic sense of inescapable doom. Especially the Victorian era features prominently as a spectral foil for critiquing London's contemporary socioeconomical inequalities. Despite solving every murder case in all three of the novels, the members of the Shadow Police find themselves unable to counter the larger problems they face, thus giving in to despair in face of the potential cancellation of a more optimistic future. This results in an incredibly pessimistic narrative populated with broken characters who suffer from mental illnesses and cannot meaningfully interact neither with each other nor with the larger urban population. Though the police are heralded as the keepers of order, their struggle against the crushing circumstances of London's postmodern condition is met with failure. The London of *Rivers of London*, in contrast, while also being haunted by spectral beings, offers a more positive evaluation of its ghosts. The

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[48] The idea of the police as an ordering institution was also put forth by Michel Foucault (*Discipline* 214). The police in its institutionalised form was created at the beginning of the nineteenth century at a time which Foucault argues to have been central to a re-ordering of knowledge and power. The London Metropolitan Police was founded in 1829 and constitutes the oldest official, institutional, non-paramilitary police force.

[49] In the series, references to the bureaucratisation of daily police work abound (e.g. *Rivers* 21–22; *Moon* 81; *Foxglove* 83; *Tree* 51; *Lies* 70). However, these are predominantly evaluated positively by Grant as a means of ordering the chaos despite the fact that "inertia [is] another key characteristic . . . of bureaucracy" (*Rivers* 288). The emphasis is put on a balance between regulated processes and room for improvisation as the situation demands it. As I have demonstrated, the weight placed on balance is characteristic of the series' approach to interactions with all beings. The intersections between the technologised bureaucracy which forms the background of daily police work and urban fantasy's supernatural elements is further examined in chapter 6.2.1.

spectral presences of the past in form of both the *genii locorum* and proper ghosts are successfully integrated into a larger urban economy, which functions on the basis of an economy built around symbolic exchanges. The protagonist Peter Grant learns to successfully navigate these structures to the point where he is able to recognise that even the destructive force of chaos in form of the revenant going by the name of Mr Punch is vital for the urban ecosystem to function properly.

5.2.2   London as a Haunting City in the *Matthew Swift* Series

In Kate Griffin's *Matthew Swift* series, spectral presences abound in London. The subsequent analysis will concentrate on two of these spectres in particular, namely those of a late capitalist lifestyle engendering indifference and isolation and those of a fracturing postmodernism which seeks to detach itself from a meaningful engagement with the past in order to foster a sense of anachronistic inertia. As such, the ghosts are not merely *in* London but rather *of* London, as their existence points to a certain way of life in the contemporary metropolis. Despite his own fractured identity, the protagonist Matthew Swift is able to exorcise these spectres. In doing so, Swift argues for conceiving of London as a connected organism, which employs the organic variant of the city-body metaphor in service of countering the maddening characteristics of the image of the diseased mind.

The critique of an alienating, isolating late capitalist lifestyle which disconnects the individual from the community permeates the entire series. The prologue of the second instalment, *The Midnight Mayor*, literalises these effects of the capitalist economy in form of teenage spectres hunting Matthew Swift in the borough of Willesden with the intention of killing him. The overall description of the spectres invokes the notion that under late capitalism, all possibilities in, and of, the future have been cancelled and all that is left for young people is the one path laid out for them, which in the unequal social makeup of contemporary London has more often than not nothing positive in stock. Thus, the various spectres hunting Swift are characterised by a notable lack of individuality, having succumbed to the stuporous rhythm of a life devoid of hope in the future:

> He sat on the narrow red bench, which was designed to be as uncomfortable as possible. His knees were wide apart as if someone had stuck a frisbee down his pants, his arms were folded across his chest to make it clear he didn't care about anything. He wore pale grey trousers three sizes too big, passed down by an elder brother moved on to better things, whose crotch began around the knees; a pair of black gloves like a motorbiker's gauntlets; sporty trainers adorned with rip-off logos; and a hoodie. . . . His head bounced gently to the rhythm playing from a pair of headphone cables that vanished into the interior of his tracksuit. The only sound that escaped them was a regular:
> *Chi-chichi chi-chichi chi-chichi . . .*
> Not an angry bee, but the bass rhythm of a song turned up too loud; tune, if there was one, lost to beat. Madness was no longer talking to yourself; technology had changed all that. (*Midnight* 10–11; original emphasis)

The lengthy passage unites several of the hallmark signifiers of late capitalism: defensive architecture, off-the-peg attire lacking any individuality at all, emphasised by the idea that it has been passed down from an older sibling, acoustic seclusion from the environment, which is pointedly counteracted by the intrusion of the very acoustic barrier *into* the environment, and finally the monotony of the music's rhythm, which is not just "lost" but a symbol of madness. The overall picture that is painted here is of Swift's opposite as an almost comically stereotypical teenager in a metropolitan suburb, whose chances of climbing up the socioeconomic ladder are slim at best, and who knows that they are going nowhere in life. Such a person, the narration makes subsequently clear, may not even be considered as possessing personhood any longer, being reduced to pure human functionality:

> And "he" was an "it", and "it" had no face. It was a sack of clothes sitting on empty air, a pair of white headphones plugged into the floating nothing of his not-ears. The body of his clothes, bulked out so humanly, was held in shape by air, by an ignorance of gravity and a perversion of pressure, by floating shadow and drifting emptiness bundled together into a nothing-something in a tracksuit. He was an it, and it was a spectre. (*Midnight* 12)

As the negatives – "not" and "nothing" – dominate this passage, the being is clearly denied personhood and only appears "humanly". Consequently, Swift adjusts his use of pronouns from *he* to *it* in the narration. Moreover, the lack of individuality is explicitly emphasised when other spectres arrive to join the pack hunt.

> Next to the bike, another spectre was waiting. At first I thought he was just some kid. But when he looked up, there was nothing inside that hood to stare with. And that nothing stared straight at me. He was dressed identically to the one at the bus stop; . . . and the beat out of his headphones went *dumdumdumdumdumdumdumdum* with relentless cardiac monotony. (*Midnight* 15; original emphasis)

As before, the semantic emphasis is on absence, on nothingness, on identicality, and on monotony. Swift's narration suggests that these teenager ghosts are what has become of young people in London's suburbs; the spectres of capitalism, robbed of any dreams of the future, caught in the relentless monotony of late capitalist existence which has nothing to offer but repetition. This fear of the meaninglessness of one's own life under capitalism is engrained into the cultural imagination, and *The Midnight Mayor* takes it and amplifies it through what can only be described as cartoonish exaggeration. As a logical consequence to this exaggerated effect, the narrative presents Swift's way out of the situation in as exaggerated terms as the spectres themselves. Swift enters a 24/7 shop, buys the cheapest bottles of beers on offer and the cheapest cigarettes as well as Sellotape. Thus equipped, he casts a binding speel which involves filling the emptied beer bottles with cigarette smoke, sucking the spectre inside the bottle, and sealing it shut with Sellotape (*Midnight* 24–27). That empty bottles of cheap beer and cigarettes are the means able to hold the spectres of capitalism only reinforces the stereotypical bleakness of the lack of futures these beings seem to

have – or rather the futures they do not have. Swift's ability to trap the spectres entails the fatalistic recognition that the spectres' referents – young teenagers in London's suburbs – are indeed doomed to an existence revolving around extensive drug (ab)use that numbs the recognition that the capitalist system has indeed nothing meaningful to offer to them.

However, if the spectres are not read as referring to a specific demographic group but as representing the spectres of capitalism, Swift's magic becomes culturally therapeutic, as he is empowered by the resources of his own mundane existence and, by making do with what is at hand, is indeed able to find meaning in it. Swift does not only exorcise – or trap – the spectres of capitalism, but his use of magic offsets the capitalist logic of production as well. One of the central tenants of the capitalist mode of production is that surplus value cannot be produced from nothing but is always dependent on resources and the addition of labour. Magic, however, and particularly in the way it is construed in Griffin's novels, is able to generate something from nothing – or at least nothing material. As Swift tells the reader right before casting the binding spell trapping the spectres, "[a]ny magician can tell you words have power" (*Midnight* 27). As the series repeatedly emphasises, magic comes from life:

> *Life is magic.* . . .
>
> Life was not the magic of spells of enchantments or sorcery; or, it was, but that was not the point. Life *created* magic as a by-product . . . Life was magic in a more mundane sense of the word; the act of living being magic all of its own. (*Madness* 498–99; original emphasis)

Thus, magic in the series is inextricably interwoven with the city: "'Life *is* magic. Where there is life there is magic! Sure, the magic is in the city, in the street, in the neon lamp and the coughing pigeon and the stray cat and the sewers and the cars and the smell of dirt'" (*Madness* 405; original emphasis).[50] In addition to being able to withdraw cash from an ATM by scribbling a series of numbers – ostensibly resembling a credit card number – on the back of a cardboard card advertising licentious services found at the back of a telephone cell (*Madness* 38–40), the most prominent instances of spell magic in the series are dependent on the mundane regulations of city life, which are imbued with magical power by appealing to the belief of Londoners in their regulatory power. Instances of these comprise Swift's invocation of the Transport for London Terms and Conditions in order to create a magical barrier around Bond Street Tube station to keep out a shadow monster (*Madness* 99–101), and the invocation of waste collection service agreements to dispel another magical monster created out of the human waste of the city (*Midnight* 181–84). As Swift explains at length to another woman present at the Tube station after having warded off the monster, the

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[50] As an effect, descriptions of London in the novels are littered with the semantics of something alive, as if the city itself lived. I will return to this observation later in this chapter when I juxtapose Swift's particularly organic view of the city with the view of London as an alienating place.

effectiveness of the spell as performative utterance, which is able to change the reality to which it relates, rests on the qualities of the specific place, again imbuing them with elements of vitality:

> Everything, everyone and every place has its own unique magic. The underground's magic is defined by the rhythms that go through it. It's *like a heartbeat, a pulse, the flow of life like blood through its veins* [me], describing in every detail the shape of power in its tunnels. When you go into the underground, you buy a ticket, you pass through the barrier, you enter the tunnels, you take the train, you use your ticket, you exit through the barrier. This is part of what defines it, this is part of what makes the taste of its magic different, heavy, crowded, full of dirt and noise and *life* [oe] and strength. (*Madness* 103–04; my emphasis and original emphasis)

Swift's magic, thus, rests on the mundane aspects of London city life, as he is able to draw power from the city itself. At the same time, it defies the logic of capitalist production, as magic can turn nothing into something. The TfL T&Cs and the waste collection SAs are performative utterances in the sense that their invocation by Swift imbues them with the power to magically alter the social reality which they describe. If the rhythm of the underground did not rely on passengers adhering to the T&Cs or if Londoners would not dispose of their waste in accordance with the collection SAs, there would not be any power in them for Swift to invoke.

In addition to the spectres of late capitalism, the series prominently includes the London dragons as symbolical spectral representation of the postmodern condition in contemporary London as fostering alienation and isolation, particularly by framing the dragons as being mad. The London dragons retain a spectral presence in the city as they are historical remnants testifying to the origins of the city, with the City of London being a distinct administrative formation from the City of Westminster, and what has become Greater London through the London Government Act 1963 in the extradiegetic consensus reality. However, the origins of the dragons are unknown, which leaves room for fantasy authors to fill the historical gaps with the dragons' mythical origins.[51] In the late 1960s, cast iron statues of a silvery dragon on a plinth, supporting a shield with the City of London's coat of arms painted on it, were erected along the course of the old London wall to mark the boundaries of the City of London.[52]

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[51] The most plausible theory to date points to the legend of Saint George and the dragon. St George is one of the patron saints of England and London, and the red St George's cross is born on both the English flag and the coat of arms of the City of London since the fourteenth century. The origin of the dragon as supporting heraldic animal for the City of London crest can be traced to the seventeenth century, but no testimony survived as to why a pair of dragons was chosen.

[52] There is a total of fourteen of these statues. There is one of a different, particularly fierce-looking design by Charles Bell Birch at Temple Bar on Fleet Street. Two other statues were mounted above the entrance to the Coal Exchange, which served as the original designs for the boundary markers, but they were moved to Victoria Embankment when the exchange was demolished in 1962–63. Statues modelled on the Coal Exchange design are placed either as single or as double replicas at the south end of London Bridge, on High Holborn near Gray's Inn Road, on Aldgate High Street, Norton Folgate (north of Bishopsgate), Byward Street, Moorgate, Goswell Road (north of Aldersgate Street), Farringdon Street, and at the south end of Blackfriars Bridge.

In the *Matthew Swift* series, the dragons are ubiquitous inside the boundaries of the City of London, which as the innermost part of the city hold special significance for Swift:

> When we crossed the Golden Mile, once encircled by the London Wall and whose symbol was still the dragon holding a shield of twin red crosses, I felt it like a jolt of pure caffeine straight into the heart. . . . here, if anywhere in London, I was at home. . . .
>
> On the street corners or embedded in coats of arms on grand municipal buildings, we could feel the watching mad eyes of the silver-skinned dragons of London.[53] (*Minority* 45)

In addition to the several dragons, there is one specific dragon of London in the singular, whom Swift meets during the climactic episode of the first instalment. The dragon is summoned by Swift's current adversary, the shadow creature Hunger, and consists "of forgotten and disobeyed things", as Hunger explains. "He is summoned from the broken street sign, from the smashed order and the bent commands, vulnerable to being summoned because so much of what he is has simply been ignored" (*Madness* 582). Swift's own description of the beast equally mirrors the notion of the lost and disregarded:

> The tail was the signs of street names that had been changed by the local council; its claws were the bent pipes of signposts that had been smashed into by speeding cars; its spine rippled with the reflective Catseyes of the motorways; its belly was plated with speed warnings; its haunches were tense with the triangular fluorescent warning signs of "DANGER!" or "SLOW—CHILDREN CROSSING", bent and twisted to fit the curves of its hulk. (*Madness* 579)

The disregard of traffic regulations, whose signifiers make up for more than half of the description of the dragon, seems to constitute the epitome of the disobedience of urban regulations, the "smashed order" (*Madness* 582), as Hunger points out. But it does not stop there; the dragon is the embodiment of the disconnection between the people of London and their city. What the disregard of regulations stands for is the lack of a symbiotic relationship between people and environment, the alienation of the modern urban population. Hunger makes this point explicitly clear to Swift: "Little humans always think they know best. Forget the past, forget the rules, forget humility – that is their natural place, being petty things. It is why he [the dragon] is angry" (*Madness* 582). The dragon as the symbol of London *represents* London, as symbols do, and London is angry about the disobedience of its rules and the disregard to its building materials, as exemplified by cars crashing into lampposts. The connection between the denizens and the city seems to be broken at the time of narration, which roughly corresponds to the beginning of the second decade of the twenty-first century.

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[53] The body and mind of the narrating protagonist are shared by the human Matthew Swift and the supernatural entity referred to as the blue electric angels. Prior to the start of the first novel, Swift the urban sorcerer had been killed by his own master and resurrected by the angels, which transitioned into his body. The angels are described as a magical entity that fed off the human emotions poured into the wires of the telephone lines (*Madness* 246). Due to the protagonist's complicated ontological status, the narration constantly shifts between first person singular and plural pronouns whenever the angels take over the narration – frequently, like in this example, mid-sentence.

Consequently, in order to best it, Swift argues with the dragon that he does not conform to the pessimistic view of London's inhabitants. Quite the contrary, he calls attention to his own status as a Londoner: "'You are the dragon of the city of London. . . . Listen to me! I'm from this city, I know its laws, I know what makes it alive, I understand it. . . . I know your history. . . . I know the history, duty, humility, laws, time…'" (*Madness* 585–86). To give force to his words, Swift invokes the magic of the city by reciting, firstly, both the *Grant of Tax Liberties to London*, issued by Henry I in 1133, and Clause 13 of the *Magna Carta* of 1215, which grants London "all its ancient liberties and free customs" ("Magna Carta"), and secondly the city's Latin motto *domine dirige nos*. The combination of Swift's assurance of his own Londonness, of his being a Londoner who has not succumbed to the postmodern condition of alienation and disregard as epitomised by the invocation of London's motto, and the magical power held in the ancient degrees assuages the dragon:

> And the dragon of broken and disobeyed signs was, in the end, an urban creature, summoned out of the city itself; and the city's dragon, the lord of the city's gates, did so very much like to lead, and be obeyed, and have its own rules . . . Hunger had told me the key himself: time, law, humility, a recognition that in the eyes of the city, we were nothing, and the dragon was the lord. . . .
>
> We looked at the dragon, it looked at us . . . Then, without a sound, it started to melt. (*Madness* 588)

As this description makes clear, Swift is able to relate to the dragon, and by extension, London, because he indeed understands the city as he claims to do. He knows the city's history, knows the ancient laws and customs that legally brought it into existence, understands the need to obey the rules which govern the cohabitation of a large amount of people, and, perhaps most crucially, understands that the city has existed for thousands of years, and that no individual person can be above that and that no individual can ever know all of London. The point of knowing, thus, is acknowledging that one can never know everything. Such a level of symbiosis with one's own environment, the novel thus suggests, is the key to combatting a postmodern alienation which seems to characterise the contemporary urban existence.

The second crucial episode revolving around the dragon(s) of London occurs in the second instalment and narrates Swift's inaugural walk as Midnight Mayor, fantastic London's equivalent to the Lord Mayor of London, along the route of the old city wall. As he grapples with the office newly bestowed on him on his nocturnal perambulation, Swift is again confronted with two different philosophies of the city: isolation and alienation versus communal collectivity. The first of these philosophies is expressed to Swift through a beggar who conveys to him that life in London has succumbed to the postmodern fragmentation of any collective urban identity. "You've got to admit", the beggar argues, "it has a certain chaotic something. London burnt down in 1666 and

everyone went, whoopee, let's rebuild! A golden city! But look what happened. Chaos and fluster. Everyone was so eager to live in this golden city that they didn't even have time to build it" (*Midnight* 346). Chaos, fragmentation, the crowd – the beggar seems to have given up on saving the city from the state of deterioration in which he sees it slide. Consequently, his advice to Swift consists in not doing the walk, not becoming inaugurated, and not protecting London against the Death of Cities, who is the supernatural antagonistic force in this instalment. This notion of futility, I contend, is reinforced by the constant affiliation of London with mad-eyed dragons "holding the shield with the twin crosses" (*Midnight* 345); a collocation which occurs in double figures throughout *The Midnight Mayor* and several more times in the two following instalments (e.g. *Neon* 297). Along his route, dragon statues are "everywhere, once you looked, if you stopped to look" (*Midnight* 348); at the Barbican, at the junction of Goswell Road and Clerkenwell Road, and at the Holborn Viaduct. In their ubiquity, the mad-eyed dragon statues represent the semanticisation of

> a history too big, a life too immense for any one mind to comprehend. That is why the dragons are mad, the ones who guard the gates of London. When you look into their eyes you see nothing but endless insanity. They comprehend how big the city is, how great and how deep and how beautiful and how dark, and it sends them mad. (*Midnight* 472)

Towards the end of Swift's nocturnal ramble, it becomes clear that the mad-eyed dragon statues of London point towards a manifestation of the city's lost souls, all the Londoners who went unnoticed by historiography: "Here we are", Swift comments ambling down Fleet Street, "[a]nd here's the shadows, the memories that no one bothers to remember: who put down the stones and laid the streets and painted the lines and powered the wires and pumped the water and stacked the sandwiches onto the shelves" (*Midnight* 358).

When Swift arrives at the Temple Bar Memorial at Fleet Street, which is topped by a dragon statue that looks fiercer and madder than all the others due to its design history, he again meets the entity that actually manifests as *the* London dragon. This dragon defies any attempts at categorisation, it is indeterminable: "it felt impolite to try and tie it to any particular biology. Impolite to impose anything as mundane and boring as up, down, sideways, forwards, back, in, out, here, then, there, now", for "in its gaze were a million ghosts who pressed up against the cornea of its eye and stretched their fingers through the blackness of its pupil" (*Midnight* 362–63). The London dragon epitomises the fragmentation of the city to the point that language breaks down, as Swift also makes clear later in the novel:

> "I saw a thing that looked like a dragon simply because it had looked like itself my brain wouldn't have been able to comprehend it. . . . It wasn't a dragon. . . . It was everything else. Up, down, in, out, forward, back, time, width, length, depth, stone, brick, leaf, pipe, iron, steel, glass, gas, breath, dirt, dust, fear, anger, madness, fury, hurt, life… . . . It was the city. Too big and wild to ever understand, except to call it a dragon and hope your brain doesn't dribble at the thought." (*Midnight* 377)

Here, the London dragon represents the ultimate postmodern, chaotic illegibility of London as "inimical to any ontological project or indeed any project the purpose of which is definition" (*Writing London I* 4), as Julian Wolfreys writes. In contrast to the manifestation in *A Madness of Angels*, where the blame for the alienation of urbanites lay firmly with the people, the dragon now illustrates the failure of the city to provide to its inhabitants a sense of community, of belonging, offering instead only an isolated existence characterised by frantic madness. The dragons are imagined as mad, the novels suggest, *because* they symbolise the illimitability and illegibility of London, which is simply "too immense for any one mind to comprehend" (*Midnight* 472). Read alongside each other, then, the two manifestations of the London dragon provide a nuanced evaluation of the relationship between the city of London and its inhabitants in the twenty-first century. This rather bleak view of the *conditio urbana* and the sense of isolation and alienation in the metropolis is subsequently substituted with a return to an organic metaphor, that of the city as an antheap.

Originally, this variant of the organic metaphor is employed in the series to reinforce the notion of individual insignificance in the city, and thus contributing to rather than countering the sense of alienation and isolation. "London is an antheap", Swift is told by Mr Earle, one of the London Aldermen, who continues as follows with an illustration of his point which is worth quoting in full:[54]

> It is a great, sprawling, beautiful nest, built by two thousand years of man, so deep and so dark that its people can never see or know it all, but live their lives rather in this or that complex of the city, burrowing deeper and deeper into their little caves, because to know the full extent of the nest is to realise that you are nothing . . . There is nothing that binds these ants together, that stops them from ripping each other apart, save that they share the same structure, the same city, the same physical structure that only exists because, for two thousand years, the ants have carved. . . . We are insignificant, living in a world of life and wonder and miraculous existence and excitement, not because of who we are, or whom we know, but because the construction around us, the bricks and stones of London, shapes and guides us, and gives unity to the millions of strangers who inhabit its caves, so we can all say, "I live in the city". (*Midnight* 331–32)

Earle's view of the city-antheap is one that promotes isolation, the insignificance of the individual life with regard to the bigger whole, and the meaninglessness of the place of habitation. The people of London, he argues, add nothing to the city itself. He asserts that it is not because of who people are or their acquaintances that their life in London means anything, but by virtue of living in the city itself. The city, in other words, is regarded as giving meaning to the lives of people, not the other way around. The people themselves are meaningless for the Aldermen, it is the city that

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[54] Historically, the Court of Aldermen is part of the governing structure of the City of London Corporation. In the novels, the Aldermen advise and support the Midnight Mayor in his task to protect the city. However, as a political body, they have their own agenda and not always agree with Swift's actions.

matters. From this point of view follows that the Aldermen regard as their first and foremost duty to care about and protect the city itself from magical dangers, not the people living in it, as they make clear multiple times throughout the series (e.g. *Midnight* 333; *Neon* 251; *Minority* 63).

And indeed, under the London dragon's ghostly gaze, even Swift's blue electric angels feel the isolation and alienation so often assigned to life in the city:

> We, who were born from the chatter of mankind, from the things that got left behind in the wires, who were bigger than any city or mortal, were nothing: tiny, insignificant, footsteps walking on stones where a thousand million feet a year would walk, nothing more than ants in a heap. (*Midnight* 363)

Nonetheless, in his liminal state between the living and the dead, the human and the angelic, Swift is ideally positioned to challenge this pessimistic stance towards the postmodern urban existence. As *The Midnight Mayor* progresses, Swift offers his own philosophy of the city, which subverts the Aldermen's antheap metaphor and turns it into a positive urban ecology. Swift proves the more knowledgeable entomologist in pointing out that

> nowhere did anybody bother to mention that this tiny little ant scuttling within the heap is a best buddy of this tine little ant who knows this ant who knows that ant who lives on the other side of town whose family all know these ants who just happen to know another ant who knows your initial scuttler and it's not strangers, we are *not* strangers. (*Midnight* 480; original emphasis)

As the Death of Cities, the magical menace to London in the second instalment, feeds on the frustration and anger generated by the isolation and alienation that life in London can generate, Swift emphasises the other side of the same coin in their final confrontation in an attempt to disempower his antagonist: "There's no such thing as strangers . . . Not in the city. Just Londoners. Not strangers at all" (*Midnight* 535). His entomological ecology privileges community over isolation and thus is able to create a London-specific urban identity: "You get born in London, you get raised in London, sooner or later you'll put 'Londoner' on your passport", Swift says, acknowledging on the one hand that "[t]he city defines you. . . . I am born in this city and it makes me who I am. The streets, the stones, the strangers, everything, whether I meant it or not, made me me" (*Midnight* 357). On the other hand, he constantly emphasises that not only does the city define its inhabitants, but also that "people make a city what it is" (*Madness* 515). In contrast to both the Aldermen and the supernatural menaces which with he is confronted in all four of the novels, Swift recognises the symbiosis between the city and its inhabitants, and thus the need to protect not just the city but also its people.

The intersection of life and magic, which I have already briefly examined, is one of the central characteristics which reinforces Swift's recognition of the need for symbiosis. Earle, the Alderman, argues that

> The city is so old, now. So many millions of dead men and dead women buried beneath it. They all scuttled through the streets and made the city what it is, and now they are forgotten. Millions of wandering forgotten ghosts; but the city! It is so alive. (*Midnight* 333)

But Swift acknowledges more than just the spectral presence of people. For him, for whom magic is life, the city comes alive through its people: "[Y]ou'll realise that you can see the city all around, and its so full of lives and life, and they're all buzzing around you, and every single individual is real and alive and passionate and full of mystery" (*Madness* 531), he tells Earle. In other words, Swift refutes the pessimistic perspective of the Aldermen and the supernatural villains, which is symbolically represented by the spectral London dragons, that the city generates alienation in its people and thus either warrants total destruction or the complete disregard of its inhabitants. Instead, he argues for a more optimistic point of view which privileges communal collectivity over individual isolation. In doing so, Swift appropriates the organic metaphor of the city as an antheap by pointing out that the antheap is so much more than its structure and in its metaphorical quality does not promote individual insignificance, as Earle contends, but fosters collaboration in the collective for the sake of the overall structure.

In conclusion, Griffin's *Matthew Swift* series engages with the postmodern *conditio urbana* which is significantly impacted by the characteristics of late capitalism. The novels summon the spectres of capitalism, which they envision as soulless, de-individualised beings for whom any sense of the future has been rendered impossible by the capitalist conditions governing their existence in order to exorcise these ghosts, thereby resisting the pessimistic capitulation in the face of a seemingly cancelled future. In addition, the series utilises the spectral presence of the London dragons to suggest that the contemporary existence in a metropolis construed as illimitable and illegible must be conceived of as meaningless, fractured, isolated, and alienated. I have read the emphasis placed on the dragons' description as mad as the pathological employment of the city as mindscape in the sense that the capitalist and postmodern *conditio urbana* is one of sickening estrangement of the city and its inhabitants. This pessimistic point of view is supported both by the London Aldermen, whose conclusion is that they should focus their efforts of caring solely on the city itself, and the various supernatural villains with whom the protagonist Matthew Swift is confronted in the four novels and who threaten the city with destruction. The protagonist Matthew Swift, however, is able to draw upon the vitality of magic to exorcise the spectres of alienating capitalism and to substitute the pathological mind-metaphor with a positive urban ecology which draws its referent from entomology. By emphasising the multiplicity of connections in urban networks, he refutes the sense of alienation generated by feelings of isolation and, on the level of the story, is able to avert the destruction of London. Both the narrative perspective and the plot structure of the novels, which has him come out on top every single time, stimulate the readers' identification with Swift and suggest that his position is not only the more successful but also the

more enduring, thus offering an optimistic way of making sense of one's contemporary urban existence in a time of crisis where one may find oneself indeed in a state of alienation.

5.3 Conclusion

This chapter has presented the argument that the metaphorical construction of the city in such terms as refer to the human body still remains productive in the twenty-first century and that London urban fantasy employs these metaphorics in a variety of ways. In particular, two discursive formations dominate the representation of the British capital: London as an organism and London as a mindscape. As Highmore has argued, the metaphorical alignment of the city and the body invariably entails a medicalised split – disease and health – which makes this particular strategy of representation amenable for a Gothic analysis.

With regard to the city as an organism, in chapter 5.1 I have identified the continued relevance of the heart metaphor as a signifier for centrality and periphery. In particular, the British Museum assumes prominence in contemporary urban fantasy novels as a location in central London. The conjunction of the epistemological history of the urban heart metaphor and the museum as a signifier of the British Empire imply that the location of fantastic stories at the museum constitute an intersection of the imperial past and London's contemporary present. I have argued that the invariably violent nature of these encounters points to the notion that Britain's capital has not yet come to terms with its own imperial history and continues to be haunted by it, as remnants of the imperial past surface in the present and destabilise the city's self-image as multicultural and diverse through London's implication in colonial practices of exploitation. In varying degree, Benedict Jacka's *Alex Verus* series and Jonathan Stroud's *Bartimaeus* trilogy engage with this specific discursive pattern. As I have explained, the *Alex Verus* novels employ this setting to construct their protagonist along the lines of imperial sense-making processes. Verus's narration presents the museum simultaneously as an exotic space by virtue of the 'foreign' exhibits and as a space that needs to be navigated and thereby rendered legible. The imperial connotations of the British Museum are thus merely utilised as a shorthand for the series' character development. The *Bartimaeus* novels, in contrast, engage more critically with the imperial practice of collecting. The focalisation through Bartimaeus, a nonhuman character, draws attention to the colonising procedures through which the museum has been stocked. Moreover, the staging of a violent encounter between London's governing authorities and the golem at the museum subverts the plot of Imperial Gothic narratives, since the golem seemingly conforms to the well-established trope of the fantasticised periphery coming 'home' to haunt but in actuality illustrates the series' overall alternative history depiction of a degenerating empire. This narrative pattern also manifests in a thanatological metaphor of the necrotic city-body in Stroud's series. Its second instalment, *The*

Golem's Eye, juxtaposes two imperial capitals, London and Prague, which are not only frequently compared with each other but also used for identity construction by using the other in comparison to the self. The magicians who rule London in particular employ the image of Prague as a dying city in order to enhance the notion of London as a city of the future. Again, the narrative focalisation through Bartimaeus, who provides historical context to the magician's boisterous claims and constantly subverts their self-image in an ironic manner, contributes another level of meaning and suggests to the reader that it is actually London which must be conceived of in thanatological terms. The juxtaposition of the metropolis with the apparently necropolitan cityscape of Prague serves as a thanatological foreshadowing of the end of the trilogy, in which the repressive policies of the magicians lead to revolution and the subsequent destruction of their imperial city. As an alternative history, *The Golem's Eye* links Victorian imperial fantasies to London's aspirations in the early twenty-first century, in which the city reimagined itself as an important world city in terms of its cultural heritage and economic status, and exaggeratedly criticises these aspirations as neo-imperialist and as being built on previous exploitation.

In chapter 5.2, I have employed a hauntological lens in order to examine contemporary urban fantasy's engagement with London's ghosts as a signifier of the urban mindscape. In both Paul Cornell's *The Shadow Police* and Ben Aaronovitch's *Rivers of London* series the spectral population of the city features as mnemonic remnants of the past in the present. In Cornell's novels, they induce a fatalistic, claustrophobic sense of inescapable doom, which renders the novels noticeably pessimistic. This inescapable pessimism suggests what scholars of hauntology have termed the cancellation of the future, that is, a sense of postmodern meaninglessness which results in a state of paralysed inertia in the *Shadow Police* novels. In contrast, while also depicting a haunted city, the *Rivers of London* series evaluates its ghosts much more positively. Rather than standing in as the anxiety-inducing cancellation of possible futures, the past's spectral presences in form of both the *genii locorum* and proper ghosts are conceived of as an integral part of the urban ecology with whom the protagonist Peter Grant can meaningfully engage. The past is envisioned here not as the paralysing reminder that no better future seems possible, but as an integral part of the present. Lastly, I hope to have demonstrated how Kate Griffin's *Matthew Swift* series employs the spectral in order to examine the postmodern *conditio urbana* as impacted by late capitalism. Similar to the pessimistic engagement with spectral presences in the *Shadow Police* series, Griffin's novels summon soulless, de-individualised spectres of teenagers for whom any sense of the future has been rendered impossible by the existential conditions of late capitalism. Nonetheless, although the series also utilises the spectral presence of the London dragons to acknowledge the sense of meaninglessness, fractures, isolation, and alienation in a seemingly illimitable and illegible metropolis, the protagonist Matthew Swift employs his own urban metaphorics to successfully

oppose this view. Whereas the dragons' description as mad can be read as the pathological character of the urban mindscape epitomising the estrangement of the city and its inhabitants, Swift constantly emphasises the multiplicity of connections in urban networks and thus rejects the sense of alienation generated by feelings of isolation. This is rendered legible through the organic, entomological metaphor of the antheap, which the London Aldermen originally propose as an analogy for the meaninglessness of individual lives but which Swift turns into a positive way of imagining one's position in the city despite the fact that one may find oneself indeed in a state of alienation but to which he refuses to succumb.

6 Cartographies of (In)Security: London as Surveillance City

In an interview included in the novella *The Furthest Station*, Ben Aaronovitch is asked why he decided to make magic and technology "really incompatible" in the *Rivers of London* storyworld. He replies:

> Well, you have to explain why no one's recorded it on their mobile phones, don't you? Otherwise . . . why is there no footage of half the things that have happened [in the novels]? . . . Because you've got to explain why it's secret, otherwise it wouldn't be secret.

Aaronovitch's answer points to a larger concern permeating urban spaces in the twenty-first century and their representations: the ubiquity of information and surveillance technology. Both the virtually all-encompassing distribution of smartphones in the general populace and technological apparatuses designed to increase public security and to facilitate the management of cities guarantee that urban citizens are watched and traced almost constantly when moving outside of their own home. In particular, contemporary London with its dense network of CCTV cameras, automated number plate recognition, and other surveillance technologies is less a mere patchwork of surveilled spaces than a veritable space of surveillance. As Aaronovitch indicates, writers employing a fantastic mode are faced with the question of how to combine the nonrealist elements of their fiction with this culture of constant visibility and the concomitant politics of control in urban space.[1] In addition, technology is ubiquitously used for administrative purposes and designed to gather information, which provides the challenge of asking how the fantastic can be captured by the technocratic language of modern bureaucracy.[2] In this chapter, I therefore argue that the fantastic mode serves to either exacerbate or contest political and bureaucratic attempts to reproduce social order through surveillance practices and will inquire in how far these

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[1] Since this study is concerned with the meso-level of the city – as opposed to the macro-level of state and the micro-level of the individual – this chapter focuses almost exclusively on technology employed by authorities for administrative and public security purposes. While it would be remiss not to acknowledge the similarity of governmental structures on the macro-level of the state and the meso-level of the city and their intersections at, for example, matters concerning public security, a discussion of the macro-level would go too far afield. Similarly, this is not a study concerned with the individual, but of course the micro-level of individuals is entailed in discussions that comprise the entirety of urban citizens. However, since both the macro- and micro-level play only a limited role in the texts examined here, I will address intersections of the urban meso-level with micro- and macro-concerns where appropriate, but otherwise limit myself to an analysis of the representation of the city.

[2] My use of the word *technology* in this chapter follows its quotidian sense as a means by which something is effected, usually relating to the mechanical arts or applied sciences. There is a human factor in the equation in the sense that technologies warrant their use through humans, which posits the word's understanding in the adjacency of an *instrumentum*, a tool. In the context of this chapter, specifically, *technology* refers to the information and communication technologies (ICT) of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. The element of control is crucial in all of these surveillant interactions with technologised institutions, because otherwise all human-technology-interaction would need to be deemed surveillant in character (cf. Monahan, *Surveillance* 8). This notion is predicated on the assumption that technologies in general, and surveillance technologies in particular, shape social practices by exerting agential force upon the people who use them, because they frame what is possible and what is not. Nonetheless, a careful analysis of this agential character of surveillance technologies is needed to acknowledge the individual agency of people and counter simplistic beliefs about technological determinism.

representational strategies thus throw contemporary urban anxieties connected to surveillance into sharp relief.

The ubiquity of surveillance technologies in our extradiegetic consensus reality and their representation in urban fantasy points to (in)security as a third dominant structure of anxious feeling. The term *(in)security* is employed in this form to emphasise the interrelatedness, and sometimes simultaneity, of feelings of security and insecurity. These emotions represent two facets of the same phenomenon and cannot be easily disentangled, as each derives its meaning in relation to the other. Conceptually, (in)security is predominantly future-oriented, assessing an individual's present state in light of anticipated future conditions. When the future is perceived as threatening, this engenders a sense of insecurity; conversely, when the future appears safe, it generates a feeling of security. This duality reflects the inherent ambivalence of anxiousness: in the first instance, insecurity manifests as an anxious response to the perceived threat posed by the future, while in the second, anxiety is experienced as a form of excited anticipation. The notion of (in)security can also provoke discourses centred on control, as individuals tend to prioritise feelings of security over insecurity, seeking to establish certainty through their actions, which in turn fosters a sense of safety. Conversely, the absence of control is often associated with heightened feelings of insecurity.

Regarding to the extensive technological permeation of urban space towards the end of the twentieth century, the sociologist Manuel Castells was among the first to devote academic attention to what had been quickly labelled 'the information age' (Alberts and Papp 2). Castells proposes the concept of the network society, characterised by the processing of knowledge and information through technologies. For him, the ubiquity of digital technology provides "an instrument . . . of the process of organizational restructuring dictated by economic, social, and institutional changes" (*City* 126) which produces a "new spatial logic" (127). This new spatial logic Castells terms "space of flows" (6), and it is the informational city which epitomises it. Under the condensation of time through digital communication technologies, "[t]he meaning of space evolves", but instead of indulging in futurological statements such as "the vanishing of space, and the end of cities", he cautions that "we should be able to reconceptualize new forms of spatial arrangements under the new technological paradigm" ("Introduction" 146). As Nora Pleßke astutely observes, however, the reduction of urban spaces to mere "nodes within the[] rhizomatic structures" of the global network society constitutes a "neo-Marxist obliteration of the meso-space of the city, either emphasising transformations of society or local contestations, but never urban culture" (96–97). Nonetheless, she concedes, "the Informational City creates a specific urbanity determined by collective space-time compression" (97). It is precisely this role that technology plays for the postmodern metropolis which is of interest here. Overall, Castells' opus draws attention to the fact that digital technologies increasingly impact the spatial configuration of contemporary metropolises

to reduce the complexity of their functioning. Although he emphasises the dislocation of specific urban spaces and concomitant urban identities and privileges their nodal role in a rhizomatic network society, connected by the digital flow of information around the globe, the changes to the organisational structures and policies in the city effected by technological progress are undeniable and cannot be viewed in isolation. In the information age, the question of what constitutes the metropolis – or, more specifically, what constitutes its boundaries – are more complex than ever and the space of flows results in increasingly porous delineations of spatial urban configurations.

A similar idea is advocated by the sociologist Zgymunt Bauman, who speaks of the liquification of modernity. Since the publication of *Liquid Modernity* (Polity, 2000), Bauman has published several monographs which sport the liquidity metaphor in their title. The central assumption behind the conceptual figure is that social boundaries have become fluid, and this also extends, in the spirit of Castells, to spatial configurations. Moreover, the metaphor of liquidity allows to conceptualise how whatever has become liquid – in this case, surveillance – seeps into every nook and cranny of contemporary life. Thus, in surveillance terms, Bauman's metaphor "speaks to the looseness and frailty of social bonds, seen . . . as the transformation of ordinary citizens into suspects and their relegation to consumer status across a range of life-spheres" (Lyon, "Liquid" 325). As David Lyon clarifies elsewhere, "surveillance works at a distance in both space and time, circulating fluidly beyond as well as *within* nation-states in a globalized realm" (*Culture* 35; my emphasis). Although it may seem anachronistic at first glance to discuss the idea of urban surveillance at a time where the dissolution of spatial configurations is a proliferating argument, my own stance mirrors Nora Pleßke's contention that the increasing embedding of urban spaces into globalised networks does not necessarily require the obliteration of urban space at the theoretical level but rather provokes the question of how globalised networks and the urban spaces within them intersect and interact, thereby influencing each other. Something as seemingly monolithic as 'the surveillance society' does not float above particularities but must still be interrogated in spatially and historically specific contexts, even more so if one is interested in how people make sense of its role in their lives.

I am, however, not interested in the wider implications of what Castells calls global information capitalism (cf. *City* 16–19), but rather how the space of flows "refers to the spatial organization of the dominant, managerial elites" (*Rise* 445). He argues that the organisation of urban space in a globalised and networked society produced by digital technologies manifests in specific forms of administration, which are "asymmetrically organized around the dominant interests specific to each social structure" (445). Contrary to the focus on the global macro-level, this idea opens up the possibility to investigate the concrete administration of specific cities at a specific time under the conditions of the network society and technologised urban space briefly

outlined here, for surveillance forms one aspect where the contemporary phenomena of networked societies and technologised urban space intersect. As Peters Rogers explains:

> *Surveillance* in this context draws upon a body of research that explores the influence of observation and information upon everyday life in the modern world. To many laypersons surveillance is about 'being watched' and understood through the well-worn tropes of visual surveillance or privacy – so commonly connected to Orwellian notions of a 'Big Brother' archetype. However, one must also appreciate the complex interplay of infrastructure, technology, communication, records and transactions, forms of identification, potential for social sorting and the ambient ubiquity of such 'ways of knowing' as pervasive influences upon how we experience the world around us.[3] (3–4; original emphasis)

Never before has so much personalised data about our everyday lives been collected, processed, and circulated, facilitated by rapid advances in computing and information technologies; so much so, that "[s]urveillance . . . is rapidly becoming the dominant organizing principle of our late modern world" (Bennett and Haggerty 4). In this sense, David Lyon argues that surveillance has become so pervasive in the twenty-first century that is can be regarded as a culture in the sense of Raymond Williams, that is, as a whole way of life (*Culture* 9, 30). He proposes to view surveillance as constituted by imaginaries and practices as cultural formations which serve to legitimise or contest the use of surveillance practices in a hegemonial or counter-hegemonial way (41–50).[4] Thus, simplistic critiques which viewed surveillance in exclusively negative terms can be eschewed in favour of positioning surveillance practices as operating along a spectrum from care to control, and often in both of these registers at the same time (Lyon, *Surveillance Society*). The surveillance city thus emerges from these theoretical advances of the field as a particular spatial configuration in

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[3] Rogers' understanding of the term surveillance is predicated on Richard Ericson and Kevin Haggerty's concept of the surveillance assemblance, which they presented as an alternative paradigm for surveillance studies to the Foucauldian panopticon in an eponymous article in the *British Journal of Sociology* (vol. 51, no. 4, 2000). The surveillance assemblage is based on the observation that previously distinctive surveillance systems are increasingly brought together, "driven by the desire . . . to combine practices and technologies and integrate them into a larger whole" (Haggerty and Ericson 48).

[4] In reference to Charles Taylor, Lyon uses the term surveillance imaginaries similarly to how the term urban imaginary has been used throughout this dissertation. Contemporary London urban fantasy can thus be understood as constituting one example of a surveillance imaginary. The question of how hegemonial and counter-hegemonial surveillance practices relate to each other in particular will shine through my subsequent analysis of Benedict Jacka's *Alex Verus* series. In these novels, the all-encompassing influence of surveillance is attempted to be anachronistically reduced to surveillance done to groups and individuals, most obviously to Alex Verus himself. Thus, where Lyon sees the beginnings of a shift in surveillance's effect from discipline to performance (*Culture* 11), the fantastic urban imaginary elides this development almost entirely. I want to offer here the tentative explanation that Lyon's observation is closely tied to the advent of social media which, as the quote by Ben Aaronovitch at the beginning of this introduction elucidates, poses problems of narrative continuity for writers of the urban fantastic and is thus almost entirely left out of their stories. Indeed, none of the protagonists in my corpus texts ever engages in social media relations. As will be shown, all of the texts portray instead the minute and quotidian ways in which individual agents engage with surveillance culture in their everyday practice – complicitly or resistantly. In doing so, they draw attention to actors and thus make visible that devices and data are never morally neutral but always implicated in activities and practices.

which the omnipresence of surveillance produces specific affective responses (Rogers 3), a certain habitus.[5]

As the elaborations of Lyon and Rogers make clear, the particular configuration of the contemporary surveillance city is produced and constantly reproduced in relation to a specific way of life; one that is marked on the one hand by resilience to the constant threats of the risk society, and which thus warrants an extensive security apparatus, and by attempts to increase the convenience and efficiency of public administration services on the other.[6] With regard to the latter, surveillance practices by administrative institutions veer towards the establishment of eGovernment services, amassing information about citizens as they are geared towards both more convenient and more efficient services and the just allocation of welfare benefits. These developments take their cue from surveillance capitalism technology which aims to enhance the consumer experience and is often perceived as less intrusive on people's lives than security surveillance, as the consumer-citizen tends to volunteer information in exchange for better service. With regard to this security aspect, Rogers explains further that the twin concerns of surveillance and resilience to danger "are enmeshed in the fabric of governance and the production of space" as well as "in cultural values of the wider public, which then in turn may legitimate increased surveillance in the public eye – the implication [is] that we need to be more resilience [sic] and to be both watched and watchful in order to make sure that everyone is kept safe" (Rogers 10). This affective mobilisation of (in)security as an anxious feeling, in other words, serves as justification for expanded surveillance practices under the auspice of public security as *summum bonum*. Much of the anxious potential of the risk society comes from the fact that it is unclear where these dangers originate specifically. A threat can emanate from ecological disaster in the times of climate change,

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5   If we remember that Rolf Lindner also speaks of the habitus of the city more generally ("Habitus"), the use of this term in Lyon's and Rogers' specific sense seems justified. In these discussions, one usually does not have to look too far to find a reference to the opening chapter of George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, which still constitutes one of the paragon texts for (urban) surveillance studies, for a fictitious rendering of this surveillance habitus: "There was of course no way of knowing whether you were being watched at any given moment. . . . You had to live – did live, from *habit* that became instinct – in the assumption that every sound you made was overheard, and, except in darkness, every movement scrutinised" (4–5; my emphasis).

6   The risk society theorem has attracted renewed attention in an urban context after the 9/11 and 7/7 terrorist attacks in New York and London, and I will return to this aspect later in this chapter when I examine the *Rivers of London* novels. The term was introduced by the German sociologist Ulrich Beck in an eponymous publication in 1986 (*Risikogesellschaft: Auf dem Weg in eine andere Moderne*, Suhrkamp), which has been translated into English in 1992. Beck's central theorem is that the 'other modernity' to which he refers in the title of his book is characterised not by industrial wealth-production but by the production and mediation of global, pervasive, and often unpredictable risks. Prime among Beck's examples are natural and social disasters, with the former having received eerie validation at the time of publication by the 1986 nuclear disaster in Chernobyl. Following Beck, it is not the abstract risks themselves that are perceived as threatening, but their circulation in discourses, e.g. by the mass media, which leads to a structure of reality oriented towards a logic of constant danger warranting omnipresent security. Beck's research has been received and expanded by, among many others, fellow sociologists Anthony Giddens and Ortwin Renn. In the context of surveillance studies, Torin Monahan claims that the notion of the risk society has "solidif[ied] insecurity as lived cultural experience" (*Surveillance* 1) and produced an ideal "insecurity subject" (2) which employs surveillance to anticipate and mitigate risks. Monahan's argument helps to further understand how surveillance can be employed both on an organisational and individual level.

from terrorist cells deeply embedded in society, from ruthless capitalist corporations or even from governmental agencies and institutions. In this respect, surveillance technology shapes what we perceive as risks by privileging short-term violent threats such as crime over the slow violence of, say, climate catastrophes. Such an amorphous, seemingly omnipresent anxious (in)security is moulded into a contemporary *conditio urbana* which is made manifest in affective responses to an often technologically fortified city in times of multiple crises.

Globally informed anti-terrorism and general security measures implemented in urban environments thus become part of a wider politics of control which builds on the information-collecting tendencies at the centre of Western public administrations overall. I contend that this development can be observed not just on the macro-level of geopolitical security but also on the meso-level of the city itself. Borrowing and slightly altering a term from Steve Herbert (13), it seems therefore prudent to speak of a mesogeopolitics of spatial control which not only aims at collecting information about the citizenry for purposes of deterring the *real* risk of terrorist attacks and reducing *real* crime, but also at assuaging the public's anxieties about *perceived* threats.[7] At the same time, and perhaps somewhat paradoxically, since democratically elected authorities generate a fair share of their votes from successfully convincing the general public of their capacity of keeping them safe, there is a vested political interest in sustaining a certain level of anxiety for, in all honesty, public relations purposes. If citizens can be persuaded that they are constantly on the verge of being terrorised, the authorities can style themselves as successfully protecting the citizenry from these – real or perceived – threats.[8] At the same time, these seemingly constant threats provide justification for the collection of as much information on citizens as technically possible in order to calculate risks and responses.

This observation brings into focus the influence that representations of administration and security technologies have on the general public.[9] Pete Fussey and Jon Coaffee, who have both

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[7] Herbert synthesises approaches by Michel Foucault and Max Weber and writes of the microgeopolitics of spatial control inherent in policing, which I have adapted to my designation of different levels. While the concrete policing of society will be at the centre of chapter 6.1 and trace surveillance as a disciplinary tool in Jonathan Stroud's *Bartimaeus* trilogy and Benedict Jacka's *Alex Verus* series, Herbert's notion of normative rationales governing police managerialism will be of particular import to the other two case studies, Ben Aaronovitch's *Rivers of London* and Kate Griffin's *Matthew Swift* series, and receive more attention in chapter 6.2.

[8] Colin J. Bennett and Kevin D. Haggerty note that, in this regard, "[t]he 9/11 attacks destroyed or seriously re-calibrated existing notions of security 'proportionality' – the notion that the level of security should be proportional to the risk of untoward event" (5).

[9] From an epistemological perspective, Torin Monahan points out that an approach such as I adopt here, which Monahan and Lyon term 'cultural surveillance studies', views surveillance as "embedded within, brought about by, and generative of social practices in specific cultural contexts" (Monahan, "Cultural Practice" 496; cf. also Lyon, *Culture* 1). In contrast to sociological approaches, cultural surveillance scholars apply cultural theory, often include elements of popular culture, and attempt to "comprehend people's engagement with surveillance on their own terms, stressing the production of emic over etic forms of knowledge" (Monahan, "Cultural Practice" 496). Moreover, such an approach is more suited to excavating the agency of the subjects of surveillance rather than focusing on the perspective of the watchers, even if attempts of resistance at times confirm rather than contest systems of control (498), as will be illustrated below with the example of Jacka's *Alex Verus* series. For other cultural studies perspectives on surveillance, see, among others, the edited collection *Surveillance | Society | Culture*

published extensively on issues of urban control in relation to crime and terrorism, note that, for instance,

> [s]urveillance camera footage monitoring 9/11, the 2004 Atocha bombings, the 7th and (failed) 21st July 2005 London urban attacks have become iconic. This continual replaying and, hence, re-articulation of the spectacle of barbarism has enabled the creation of a dubious fact by repetition: that surveillance cameras are central to the amelioration of such atrocities. ("Urban" 202)

With regard to fictitious rather than media representation, Professor of English and Political Science Peters Marks has already argued in 2005 that "[i]n the current environment, where rapid and massive changes in surveillance technologies and imperatives demand increasing degrees of speculation, fictional works provide stimulating points of reference for surveillance scholars" ("Imagining" 222). Torin Monahan concurs that surveillance systems "attain presence as negotiated components of culture and accrete meaning by tapping a culture's immense symbolic reservoirs" ("Cultural Practice" 499), which "shape quotidian meanings" and "operate as powerful truth constructs that drive ideology and policy" (501). What is more, surveillance novels and films "offer ways to publicly debate the consequences of surveillance in an academic as well as non-academic discourse" (Kammerer 194) and, "because they are usually negative, dystopian[, they] give us a sense of the kind of world we wish to avoid" (Lyon, *Surveillance Studies* 137).[10] Stories narrate experiences of surveillance and thus supply a vicarious repertoire of tropes, characters, and narratives patterns to make sense of them. To quote Marks again, they provide a "critical human dimension" and "in their variety and inventiveness they illustrate the critical interplay between people and processes, supplying judgements, options and possibilities at the personal and societal levels" (*Imagining* 4). It is therefore my firm contention that the representations of contemporary surveillance in London not just in the media but also in fiction – and, more precisely in the context of my own study, in urban fantasy – articulate and shape critical discourses surrounding the organisation of urban space through the help of extensive security apparatuses and surveillance technologies. Investigating the ways in which technologies of urban surveillance and control are imagined in the fantastic mode therefore constitutes a primary objective of this chapter.[11]

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by Florian Zappe and Andrew S. Gross (Peter Lang, 2020) with a comprehensive introduction that also addresses disciplinary concerns.

[10] Cheekily, Lyon subsequently tries to push his academic readers out of their ivory tower: "while some people may have read social science or philosophical work on surveillance, a much larger audience will have seen a surveillance movie, so knowing how surveillance is framed in popular cultural forms such as film should at least be a rough guide to public perceptions" (*Surveillance Studies* 139) and concludes that "our experience of surveillance is itself shaped in part by popular culture" (141). This chapter is meant as substituting for such a rough guide a critical study of urban fantasy.

[11] Apart from engagement with dystopian surveillance societies, texts of the fantastic are noticeably absent from literary surveillance studies. A partial list of academic discussions of the nexus of surveillance and literature must include Mike Nellis's chapter on *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and its literary heirs as well as Peter Marks *Imagining Surveillance, Eutopian and Dystopian Literature and Film*, which shifts the focus to other genres and modes of writing. Increasingly, other texts than Orwell's novel, such as Philip K. Dick's short stories *The Minority Report*

As things stand in surveillance studies, where surveillance traditionally calls to mind police and state, it has now become a social practice so pervasive that it constitutes an epistemological frame of its own right.[12] However, this has prompted a shift of attention away from police and state surveillance, with many studies calling attention to the idiosyncrasies of surveillance capitalism in particular (e.g. Zuboff). While these studies are indubitably important to advance the field, the texts in my corpus privilege the point of view of the police or policing institutions due to their generic vicinity to crime fiction, as well as the individuals dealing with them, thus indicating that this is not a bygone concern. Hence, I intend to hereinafter examine the role of the police as one of the city's most prominent managerial institutions, as it is represented in the texts in my corpus.[13] As I have stressed before, the fantastical mode provides different epistemological and ontological tools than a realist one, which also applies to interrogating the efficient and humane use of modern technology in the city for imposing an ordering framework and the resistance to it. While the twin areas of concern, security provision and administrative purposes, can be delineated on an analytical level, the subsequent analyses will demonstrate that the novels' concern with policing will always bring them together, albeit to varying degree. From the managerial perspective, the conception of the city advocated in the texts is invariably the same, namely, that London is conceived of as an *apparatus* which needs to be governed, ordered, and secured. Crucially, the *collectivity of urban denizens* is then always implied as an anonymous mass to be managed but never placed centre-stage on the meso-level. This insight will be of import in later discussions of the overall benefit and cost of the focal points of both chapters 6.1 and 6.2, public security in the first and technocratic bureaucracy in the second. It is also for this reason that I have structured the following chapters in a way that they first examine the systemic perspective (*Bartimaeus*, *Rivers of London*), which is then juxtaposed

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and *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* or Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, have also attracted attention. Jade Hinchliffe's essay "Speculative Fiction, Sociology and Surveillance Studies" addresses the lack of speculative fiction case studies in the field, but her chosen texts also differ considerably from mine as her objective is geared towards rectifying an exclusive focus on texts from the Global North. Nonetheless, Hinchliffe's astutely observes that the turn away from paradigmatic twentieth-century texts such as *Brave New World* or *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is important for advancing the field (421), as these texts were written before the incisive event of 9/11 and the accelerated technological development at the core of contemporary surveillance societies and therefore provide limited ontoformative tools for their understanding.

[12] In addition to Lyon's postulation of a culture of surveillance, Jonathan Finn's notion of "seeing surveillantly" (67) is also of note in this respect. Drawing on the established considerations of John Berger, Roland Barthes, and Susan Sontag, Finn grounds his argument in a concise historical examination of photography and vision as a general epistemological practice. I will offer a similar, though noticeably shorter, chronology in the introduction to the first chapter 6.1 in order to contextualise Michel Foucault's development of panopticism and the importance placed on vision in my two case studies considered in that chapter.

[13] The prolific interplay between surveillance concerns and novels about the police has already received critical attention, although without any mention of the fantastic, in studies such as D.A. Miller's study of Victorian fiction, *The Novel and the Police* (U of California P, 1988), or David Rosen and Aaron Santesso's *The Watchman in Pieces: Surveillance, Literature and Liberal Personhood* (Yale UP, 2013), in addition to multitudinous articles and chapters devoted to Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and some to Franz Kafka's *The Trial* as the concomitantly dystopian vision of enigmatic bureaucracy.

to the encounters of the individual with the governing urban institutions (*Alex Verus*, *Matthew Swift*).

In contemporary representations of urban life, literary scholar Nick Bentley has observed, the "unplanned and spontaneous nature of the postmodern city" frequently results in the evocation of "tropes of the metropolis as unpredictable and potentially dangerous, where crime is rife and the darker human desires find release" or a rendering of "this idea of the city's uncontrollable nature in a metaphor of the metropolis as a cybernetic organism" (176). Where the preceding chapters have addressed such tropes by emphasising urban fantasy's generic intersections with urban and Gothic literature, the focus on policing entails that this chapter will foreground more explicitly than others narrative structures and tropes inherited from crime fiction. As I have already stated in chapter 2.3.3, this genre is fundamentally concerned with the reproduction of social order and has bequeathed this ideological impetus to urban fantasy. More precisely, I will argue that the fantastical representation of London as a surveillance city which is policed and administered with the help of technology takes two specific forms. In chapter 6.1, I shall therefore examine how the employment of *magic as technology* is expressed in a register which alludes to the dystopian paragon texts of surveillance literature and echoes concerns of contemporary surveillance leading to total political control over the populace. In chapter 6.2, I will then consider how the understanding of *technology confronted with magic* provides the potential for highlighting individual agency through the appropriation of technological infrastructures for territorial action which counters dystopian fears of a totalitarian police state. Such a reading probes the democratic and participatory aspects of surveillance and is predicated upon understanding the police in their capacity as institutional urban actors exercising consensual spatial control as part of a collective rather than their conception as a managerial apparatus.

6.1   London as a Panoptic Fortress

This chapter is concerned with urban fantasy's representation of how contemporary urban surveillance is supposed to provide security. It is important to note, though, that what informs these representations is less a sense of factual accuracy when it comes to the likelihood of terrorist attacks and rising crime, but rather an affective engagement with (in)security as the structure of anxious feeling which circulates around these developments in the urban realm. In other words, the perceived threat of crime and terrorism, and measures against them, are more important for literary representations of Fortress London than reliable statistics. However, this is not to suggest that, firstly, the threat of terrorism is not real, but rather that the realness of potential terrorist attacks cannot be disentangled, at least not conclusively, from its perception and the public anxieties that revolve around it. Secondly, literary representations are obviously not disengaged

from extradiegetic developments, which necessitates first a brief survey of these developments in real London, before focusing on fantasy's engagement with the city's fortification and surveillance.

In the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, London was increasingly fortified to ward off terrorist attacks, and this development also entailed the increased implementation of surveillance technologies. The terrorist attacks on New York on 11 September 2001 and London on 7 July 2005, usually referred to simply as 9/11 and 7/7 respectively, set the agenda for public security in Western metropolises in the twenty-first century as well as producing an overall "anxious and hostile atmosphere" (McLeod, "Writing" 258) which is also palpable in much post-9/11 urban fiction.[14] In their introduction to *The Routledge Handbook of Surveillance Studies*, editors Kirstie Ball, Kevin D. Haggerty, and David Lyon point out that 9/11 in particular "prompted widespread attempts to bolster security through unprecedented levels of surveillance", but immediately qualify this statement:

> Those events did not produce a radical rupture in existing practices, but instead served as an important punctuation point for wider processes in the dynamics of security and surveillance that were already in play. The terrorist attacks coalesced a sense amongst security experts that surveillance might be a panacea against terrorism, and this, in turn, led to a significant expansion in the "surveillance industrial complex" as corporations rushed to sell surveillance solutions to any number of perceived security needs. At the same time, the enormity of the attacks also tended to dampen the voices of those individuals and groups who historically have been most opposed to new state surveillance practices. (6)

The urban geographer Stephen Graham points out that, in the aftermath of 9/11, it has become obvious that "issues surrounding institutional, military and geopolitical security now penetrate utterly into practices surrounding governance, design and planning of cities and urban regions" ("Reflections" 589), which leads to a massive "militarization of civil society", that is, "the extension of military ideas . . . into the quotidian spaces and circulations of everyday life" (*Cities* xi). As a result, juridical and operational distinctions between the police, intelligence agencies, and the

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[14] Although Didier Bigo rightly cautions that it is 'naturalist' to "reduce an historical process of struggle for civil liberties, freedom, security and protection to post-September 11 outcomes" (281), I seek here to place literary representations of contemporary London in a historical context in order to carve out the interactions between literary representations and cultural sensibilities. Likewise, it is not my intention to ignore, for example, the fact that Western warfare on the neo-colonial frontiers of the world in what has been described as asymmetric wars pitting (Western) nation states against (non-Western) insurgent or resistance groups has also largely manifested as urban warfare. Rather, the necessarily limited focus of my study justifies at this point the inevitable reduction of complex historical phenomena, since I do not intend to accommodate them in my analysis *tout court*. The selection of different literary texts which take divergent standpoints on the matter of London's militarisation under the auspice of security may serve as a rudimentarily remedy to any shortcomings on my part. Likewise, it is not my intention to present the 7/7 bombings as an isolated incident nor to give off the impression all attacks have been carried out with an Islamist ideological background. Since 2005, there have been other attacks in the British capital with a whole range of ideological motivations, such as those at Westminster in 2017 and 2018, at Finsbury Park in 2017, at London Bridge in 2017 and 2019, or at Parsons Green in 2017. However, with no disrespect meant to the victims, all of these and other attacks are not (yet) as committed to collective memory as the 7/7 bombings and have not had the same impact on London's ongoing fortification measures nor have they, in contrast to the 2005 attack, fostered a conspicuous sense of public solidarity, whose emphasis on resilience has been frequently linked to the famous 'Blitz spirit' and exploited for political purposes (Closs Stephens).

military become increasingly blurred, and urban security becomes a matter of national interest (*Cities* xv). As the 7/7 bombings, 9/11, and the US invasion of Iraq in the wake of the attacks have so painfully made clear, the local space of the city is inseparably permeated by global, geopolitical concerns, laced together not just by the flow of information and technological infrastructure but also by the mobility of things and bodies.[15] Although the actual success of (increasingly military) counter-terrorism measures remains subject to heated, and deeply partisan, debates, political scientists in particular point to their *affective* significance. Ayse Ceyhan argues with regard to the ubiquity of CCTV cameras in contemporary public urban spaces that, "while aiming at controlling and regulating populations' movements and preventing the emergence of risky features . . ., [their] aim is also reassuring populations in the context of fear and uncertainty" (41). However, David Altheide claims that installing cameras or urban fortresses can also "reaffirm and help produce a sense of disorder that our actions perpetuate" (80), which fosters the cooperation of many people with extended surveillance measures motivated by a generalised anxiety generated by the conditions of the risk society.

Even before the 9/11 attacks and the 7/7 bombings, London held the dubious accolade of being viewed as the most surveilled city on the planet.[16] After the attacks, however, previously existing anti-terrorism measures were increased in the British capital on a large scale, as the city authorities and the police "made use of both territorial and technological approaches to counter-terrorist security" (Coaffee 203); most notably the expansion of the so-called 'Ring of Steel', a security and surveillance cordon consisting of road barriers, checkpoints, Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) technologies, and an unknown number of CCTV cameras surrounding the

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[15] The interlacing of the local and the global is further complicated by spaces which are situated at the territorial borders of nation states, such as airports, railway stations, or cargo ports, which usually display technologies linked to global surveillance networks. However, since the texts in my corpus disregard these spaces with transnational links, I will forego framing them theoretically.

[16] The use of CCTV rose steadily in the United Kingdom from the late 1960s and early 1970s onwards. Originally, the use of cameras was confined to public transport and the retail sector to deter both vandals and shoplifters. From the mid-1980s, however, the system was introduced in Bournemouth in the context of the annual Conservative Party Conference, which had been targeted by Provisional IRA bombers in 1984, and henceforth used more widely in public spaces of British cities. The rapid rise of CCTV in the 1990s was facilitated by the lack of a legal right to privacy in the UK and the provision of large sums of public and governmental funding, since setting up security cameras was often seen as an easy-to-do and comparatively cheap way to appear to 'toughen up' on crime. The latter aspect in particular has been a recurring feature of political campaigning, including all major campaigns for the Major of London elections in the last twenty-five years. A compelling case in point may be offered by the most recent example, Sadiq Khan's re-election campaign for the 2024 London mayoral elections. Directly on the campaign landing page, www.sadiq.london, Khan's so-called manifesto for the city includes the point "tough on crime" in order to build a "fairer, *safer*, greener London" (my emphasis). The rapid expansion of an extremely dense CCTV network across its major cities has earned the UK the reputation as the most surveilled country in the world, although nowadays China has probably more than caught up with Britain regarding the density of CCTV coverage. Correct estimates of exactly how many CCTV cameras there are in public spaces is hard, as these records are generally not available, many doubting they exist at all. For the Square Mile area in the City of London, Coaffee gives the number of 1,500 operating surveillance cameras (205). For a more comprehensive history of CCTV in Britain in general, see Clive Norris and Gary Armstrong, *The Maximum Surveillance Society: The Rise of CCTV* (Routledge, 1999).

City of London which had been in place since the early 1990s following several attacks carried out by the Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA).[17] The extension of these security measures from the City of London to the Docklands area provoked the urban geographer Jon Coaffee to claim that the aforementioned 'Ring of Steel' had been transformed into an "Iron Collar" (205).[18] A series of riots in August 2011 as well as London's hosting of the 2012 Olympic Games contributed further to an expansion of architectural security efforts and deeply technophiliac urban surveillance (Fussey and Coaffee, "Olympic").

The metaphorical expression of the collar, as opposed to the ring, already indicates that the massive security measures were gradually experienced as constraining, possibly even suffocating – at least by academic commentators – and this critical sentiment will be reflected in the subsequent analyses of the texts. The overall development of fortress urbanism originated in the 1970s in Northern Ireland, where authorities used defensible spaces to disperse rioting groups and prevent terrorist attacks at the height of the Troubles, particularly in Belfast. Population control strategies developed in the Belfast "laboratory" (Coaffee 202) were then applied and transformed in the United States in the early 1990s, especially in crime-ridden Los Angeles. The image of 'Fortress LA' has hence proliferated in urban theory, popularised as it was by the theoretical writings of Mike Davis, who prophesied about the future of the City of Angels in the new millennium that it would become increasingly militarised.[19] After 9/11, similar rhetorics have become commonplace throughout Western societies, and London is a powerful illustration of this observation, even though the rapid fortification of urban spaces by means of defensible architecture and technologically managed surveillance after the attacks has often been judged an acceleration of ongoing developments in urban planning rather than a radical departure from previous trends. Moreover, as Coaffee cautions, "[t]he impact and counter-response to September 11th within urban areas has, of course, been spatially contingent, reflecting both the history and geography of different cities", although London's importance in the globalised network of capitalist flows has

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[17] The fact that the city's ANPR camera network developed to deter IRA terrorists has been used to set up a congestion charge area in central London in 2003, thereby "doubl[ing]-up as a 'central panopticon'" (Coaffee 209), demonstrates how quickly security technology is appropriated for more quotidian purposes. Vice versa, the promotion of extending the ANPR camera network as an attempt to beat traffic congestion provides the city authorities with a narrative that likely provokes less fear among the general public than a campaign focusing on the continued threat of terrorism. Thus, Graham draws attention to the fact that, in the same way as London's security zones became congestion zones, this dynamic of quickly morphing quotidian and military interests also works the other way around (*Cities* xxv).

[18] The term *Ring of Steel* originated in 1970s Belfast. When it was implemented in London in the 1990s, locals facetiously referred to roadblocks as a 'Ring of Plastic', for traffic was funnelled through rows of plastic cones. As such, "the City's ring of steel represented a far more symbolic and technologically advanced approach to security . . . in favour of less overt security measures" while demonstrating that "the City was taking the terrorist threat seriously" (Coaffee 204).

[19] Davis' writings in this regard include particularly *City of Quartz* (Verso, 1990) and *Ecology of Fear* (Metropolitan, 1998). However, it would be remiss not to acknowledge that, firstly, Davis's pessimistic prophesy was dominated as much by widespread fear of crime as by actual criminal activity and, secondly, other views of LA urbanism existed simultaneously (see e.g. the works of Edward Soja).

meant that "Central London over the last decade has become emblematic of the threat of terrorism as well as the overt and covert counter-terrorist responses" (202).

The most well-known building block of London's Iron Collar is arguably the extrapolation of its already quite extensive network of ANPR and CCTV cameras in the twenty-first century and the culture of constant visibility they produce (Fussey). This is coupled with the incessant appeal to citizens for constant vigilance, maintained for instance by alerting posters or campaigns such as the "See it, say it, sorted" one launched by the British Transport Police in 2016 to encourage passengers to report suspicious behaviour on underground trains or in stations.[20] When discussing these developments, it has become something of a common courtesy in surveillance studies to refer to Michel Foucault's metaphorical appropriation of the Bentham brothers' panopticon in *Discipline and Punish* (*Surveillir et punir*, 1975) as providing a theoretical framework for the disciplinary use of video surveillance.[21] Famously, Foucault drew upon Jeremy Bentham's architectural plans, which did not actually have a great impact on penal architecture but provided a salient image which "refuses to go away" (Lyon, "Search" 4), to argue that modern societies espoused a new mechanism of power, namely that of panopticism, where the individual was under constant coercion by the political elites to become docile and productive within the social system (Foucault, *Discipline* 195–228). The principles visible in the panopticon prison, in other words, were elevated by Foucault to a means of explaining contemporary social power structures.[22] While the ubiquity of the

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[20] The full slogan goes: "If you see something that doesn't look right, speak to staff or text British Transport Police. See It. Say It. Sorted." In this instance, what counts as "something that doesn't look right" is left as unclear as what sorting it actually means. However, the semantic logic behind the term *sorting* points to the maintenance of order. The campaign builds on previous TfL campaigns following the 7/7 bombings which appealed to passengers' vigilance, such as the "It's Up to All of Us" campaign launched in November 2005. In the accompanying press release, then-director of the TfL Jeroen Weimar is quoted as saying: "One of the best security measures we have is the eyes of our customers. We are asking everybody to remain vigilant". The new BTP campaign from 2016, which also asks passengers to remain vigilant and states that BTP "rel[ies] on you to be our eyes and ears" (British Transport Police), was thus almost exactly prefigured by Weimar already in 2005: "If you spot something suspicious, don't be afraid to tell a member of staff or a police officer. It's up to all of us to keep London secure" (Transport for London), raising the question of what has changed in terms of security in the intermediate 11 years. In July 2022, the BTP even launched a Railway Guardian app, which facilitates the reporting of suspicious behaviour by transport passengers, though the launch campaign primarily focussed on providing commendably easier reporting for sexual harassment attacks and other violence perpetrated against women and girls. Nonetheless, as Angharad Closs Stephens noted already in 2007, this preventive level of suspicion towards fellow passengers is alarmingly high "even for city standards" (167). Moreover, public vigilance appeals like this one by the BTP have attracted criticism for fostering criminal stereotypes, particularly racist ones (Jefferis, Tzani and Williams). For an extensive study of the mistrust and suspicion generated by the post-9/11 intensification of securitisation campaigns, see David Lyon, *Surveillance after September 11* (Polity, 2003).

[21] Emblematic for Foucault's omnipresence, Gilbert Caluya begins an article on the reassessment of the panoptic metaphor with the rather tongue-in-cheek remark: "So widespread is the literature on the panopticon that the very mention of the term in conferences immediately leads scholars to roll their eyes in boredom" (621).

[22] Kevin Haggerty has rightly warned against "reified one-paragraph summaries of Foucault's panopticon", because it "does not easily refer to a self-evident model of surveillance that can be applied to different contexts" (38). As the preceding reference hopefully demonstrates, my necessarily skeletal summary is based on a reading of the well-known chapter in *Discipline and Punish*, as this is where the central extension of the Benthamite architectural prison to social mechanisms of power occurs. It would be remiss, however, not to acknowledge that on the one hand Foucault's writings on discipline, power, and surveillance differ considerably in his later works – particularly after the introduction of the concept of biopower – and that on the other hand any understanding of panopticism has unavoidably been adumbrated by subsequently added layers of interpretation by other scholars, not least because if

panopticon as the leading paradigm in surveillance studies has increasingly come under criticism, the model retains its acuity for the subsequent assessment of urban fantasy's equation of magic with technology in the wake of extended surveillance practices in the early twenty-first century, though necessarily in updated form.[23]

The comparison of urban video surveillance to Foucault's panoptic theory is invited by the reduction of social contact to the visual and by the simultaneous principles of visibility and invisibility. Those under surveillance are constantly seen through the cameras but do not know who is watching them, as the CCTV operating rooms are located elsewhere. The direction of the cameras' gaze is, by default, unidirectional. Thus, contemporary video surveillance adheres to the panoptic key principles of visibility, unverifiability, and anonymity, as well as the normalisation of ubiquitous mechanisms of control and the seemingly permanent documentation via digital storage of surveillance tapes (cf. Koskela 252–53).[24] Moreover, the deterring effect of video cameras entails an absence of force, which the human geographer Hille Koskela notes as another panoptic principle in line with Foucault's argument that the watched internalise the control exerted by, in this case, the camera, and thus discipline themselves precisely through both the constant visibility of the controlling mechanism, which reminds the watched of their own visibility, and the simultaneous unverifiability of the watchers' presence (253). Those who know about the possibility of being caught on camera, in other words, wilfully abstain from unlawful or socially unsanctioned behaviour.

However, Koskela notes five crucial differences between Foucault's panoptic theory and its application to contemporary video surveillance, which complicate the power relations concerning urban surveillance (252). Firstly, people's presence in the city differs from the panoptic

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one works as an academic in the field of British literature and culture one usually comes to Foucault by way of an English-language translation rather than the original French (Haggerty 36–38).

[23] Criticism of the panopticon's unwavering explanatory potential usually points to Gilles Deleuze and Giorgio Agamben, among others, for a 'post-panoptic' theory (Boyne). Other scholars have cautioned that, appropriate though the metaphorical application of the panopticon to contemporary video surveillance practices might seem at first glance, it may be "no longer valid in its original reading", for "[s]urveillance itself no longer primarily serves the function of behavioural modification but the collection of data" (Fludernik, "Panopticisms" 20). In her examination of the metaphor, Monika Fludernik does not take sides in the debate but considers the possibility of the metaphor's continuing relevance when pointing out that "[b]y way of historical irony, computer technology has now perfected Bentham's model, though in a context that literalises the original prison metaphor and turns everybody into virtual delinquents and society as a whole into a site of potentially penal disciplining in the wake of inescapable surveillance" (20). Very much taking sides, in contrast, is the prolific surveillance studies scholar Kevin Haggerty, who laments that "Foucault continues to reign supreme in surveillance studies" (27) and exasperatedly cites numerous scholarly proposals for models which have mushroomed around the term as evidence for a "proliferation of opticons" (26). Haggerty then urges in a very martial manner that "it is perhaps time to cut off the head of the king" (27). It is important to note, though, that he does not reject the usefulness of the model *per se* but criticises the over-extension "to domains where it seems ill-suited" (23). It is in this spirit that I propose the usefulness of Foucault's interpretations of Bentham's ideas for understanding the importance of visual control in contemporary urban space, and more specifically representations of it, while acknowledging the model's limitations.

[24] In practice, the extent of the material generated does not allow permanent storage of all of it. Tapes are usually saved for a certain period of time, ranging from a couple of days to a couple of months depending on the location of the camera, and then deleted.

prison insofar as it is voluntary. People can, and do, move freely and leave the areas which are closely surveilled. From this follows, secondly, that the city is not a place of punishment, and therefore people do not see it as a space of coercion, but one of potential and leisure. Therefore, the disciplining capacity of surveillance cameras is diminished in comparison to prison surveillance. Thirdly, people in a city are not isolated, but experience endless encounters with others. Fourthly, the diversity of urban space complicates a direct correspondence between the panoptic prison space and the city. Objects and subjects of the surveillant gaze cannot be as neatly delineated as the relationships between prison warders and inmates are. Shops, for instance, use surveillance cameras to monitor the behaviour of customers and their personnel alike. Fifthly, whereas the disciplining ethos of the penitentiaries is part of an established legal system, "the forces that maintain urban discipline are not exclusively extensions of the state" (Koskela 252). Ownership of urban surveillance cameras is a complicated issue, and while extensions to the camera network are usually attributed to the state's increase of public security measures, the cameras are often owned by private companies. Lastly, I want to add to Koskela's list the fact that, while the unverifiability of the watcher's presence may inculcate internal discipline in theory, in the practical environment of urban space the anonymity of the camera and the fact that, indeed, no one may be watching do rather contribute to a feeling of insecurity. The camera's mere presence indicates a certain probability of unlawful action – why would one otherwise put a camera there in the first place? – but the possibility that no one may witness criminal activity comprises that neither may the crime be prevented nor may any victim receive appropriate assistance in time. Thus, confidence in the effectiveness of the camera is significantly eroded by the principles of anonymity and unverifiability.

This brief list of similarities with and differences from Foucault's panoptic principles that actual contemporary urban surveillance displays generates three key insights which have analytical purchase on an analysis of surveillance practices in contemporary urban fantasy. Firstly, the acuity of the model stems largely from its etymological roots: *panopticon* derives from Greek and literally means "the all-seeing". As I have noted above, visibility remains a central issue in surveillance studies. Secondly, Foucault's theory derives from Bentham's architectural plans a behavioural component which is largely absent from contemporary surveillance practices. Where the panoptic prison sought to discipline its inmates and help them internalise norms of social control, the ostensibly unequivocally deterring effect of video surveillance in an urban context has been disproven numerous times, with the cameras obtaining importance usually only *after* the crime (e.g. Fludernik, "Panopticisms" 19; Fussey and Coaffee, "Urban" 203). Thirdly, the complication of power relationships between surveillance technologies such as cameras, their objects, and their operators shifts attention to the question of who actually monitors whom and for which purpose.

As I will elaborate below, the two case studies selected for approaching these questions, Stroud's *Bartimaeus* trilogy and Jacka's *Alex Verus* series, present different positions on the issue. The introduction of magic further complicates surveillant power relations in all of the three areas I have just named. Magic is used in this sense as a tool, as a means of obtaining what is otherwise – one may be tempted to say 'normally' – not considered possible. Most notably in the context of surveillance, this realisation of the impossible through magic entails the achievement of true panoptic vision. Thus, I argue with regard to the two case studies below that magic is predominantly used in the *Bartimaeus* and *Alex Verus* novels as a technology to achieve total surveillance, thereby exacerbating existing technological developments in urban environments.

The prevalence of vision as an epistemological practice which underlies this form of surveillance has been linked by the historian Martin Jay, among others, to the scientific revolution during the Enlightenment period.[25] In his influential essay "Scopic Regimes of Modernity", Jay even lists Foucault's emphasis on the prevalence of surveillance as evidence for modern Western culture's ocularcentrism (3). Though he concedes that "the scopic regime of modernity may best be understood as a contested terrain, rather than a harmoniously integrated complex of visual theories and practices" (4), he maintains that "it is difficult to deny that the visual has been dominant in modern Western culture in a wide variety of ways" (3; cf. also Crary 29).[26] There is, of course, immense literary attention devoted to the manifold aspects to do with sight, vision, and the

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[25] Francis Bacon's empirical method, for example, as laid out in the *Novum Organum*, emphasises the pivotal role of "observations on the order of nature" at the very beginning of the Aphorisms – Book I. Furthermore, Jonathan Crary points to the *camera obscura* as an "epistemological figure within a certain discursive order", whose principles "coalesced into a dominant paradigm through which was described the status and possibilities of an observer" (31). Crary continues his observations with an argument on shifting perceptions on the constitution of the observer's subject position. Importantly, he links the apparently authentic objectivity of the mechanical camera with emergent constructions of human vision as increasingly fallible. Thus, Enlightenment thinking engendered a differentiation between the seemingly objective monocularity of technological apparatuses concerned with vision, which deal in systematised constants, and the imperfect binocularity of the human eyes, whose slightly different perceptions result in inconsistencies and irregularities (32–33), before, Crary contends, this paradigm collapsed in the nineteenth century and the body is re-centralised as "a visual producer" (35). From the late nineteenth century onwards, the expanding hegemonic status conferred to photography, in turn, "helped recreate the myths that vision was incorporeal, veridical, and 'realistic'" (43). I have, however, privileged my more concrete analyses of the various observers in the urban fantasy texts at hand over an extensive philosophical discussion of these principles and thus limit myself to cursory references to intellectual history here. The interested reader may instead be referred to Crary's more extensive study *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (MIT Press, 1990). Nicholas Mirzoeff's *The Right to Look: A Counterhistory of Visuality* (Duke UP, 2011) provides a decidedly decolonial framework for the epistemological dominance of vision in modernity and Andrea Brighenti's *Visibility in Social Theory and Social Research* (Springer, 2010) explores how what she calls intervisibilities generate significant sociotechnical and biopolitical impacts.

[26] The importance of sight for sense-making processes in, specifically, urban environments has received academic attention through writings on the *flâneur* (esp. Walter Benjamin), whose street-level perspective Michel de Certeau has supplemented by the view from high above the city, and in Georg Simmel's "Exkurs über die Soziologie der Sinne" (*Soziologie: Untersuchungen über die Formen der Vergesellschaftung*, edited by Otthein Rammstedt, Suhrkamp [1908]1992, pp. 722–42). Apparent in both Simmel and Benjamin's urban phenomenology is the idea that the changes effected by modernity are changes which relate to sight. The city as the epitome of modernity thus reflects this dominance of the ocular. This sentiment is carried forward in my subsequent analysis of surveillance practices in urban fantasy, and Benjamin's writings will play a more central role in my subsequent discussion of Kate Griffin's *Matthew Swift* series.

prevalence of the optic sense, but of specific interest here are two of them. The first aspect is the power relation associated with the act of looking and being looked at, that is, the relationship between the subject and the object of the gaze, which also permeates discussions of video surveillance.[27] At this point, suffice it to say that the subject position of the observer is widely identified with the more powerful position, because the action of observing is an active one. In contrast, being observed, as the grammatical structure reflects, is connoted as passive, and therefore inferior in terms of power positions.[28]

The second aspect concerns the introduction of magic into the literary storyworld, which obviously alters the dynamics of both the tools available for observation and the visibility of the observer and the observed. Magical practices such as scrying decouple observation from the availability of technical gear – working magic is usually a low-threshold practice and scrying requires at the most a reflective surface, which can be provided by water – as well as from any temporal and spatial constraints whatsoever. In terms of visibility, the observer is offered greater freedom with regard to the choice of revealing or concealing their presence. While security cameras, for example, may be well-hidden, their materiality dictates that they cannot be entirely concealed, and the fragility of their material may render them prone to failure or destruction. Magic does not operate under these material constraints, and magical surveillance devices may either be entirely undetectable or their detectability subject to the sole condition of someone being versed in the magical arts. On the other side of the same coin, magic offers to the objects of surveillance ways of concealing their presence to the observer; a classic invisibility spell immediately springs to mind. However, magical surveillance may also offer the possibility of entirely removing the unverifiability of the watcher's presence. Whereas real-world video surveillance rests on the condition that there is someone on the other end of the camera for it to be truly effective (Koskela 250), magical surveillance removes this uncertainty, because the watcher's presence is, by magical means, always ensured. The instrumental logic of magic can be understood here as a remedy to the technological shortcomings in the real world, as any existing human constraints can theoretically be simply magicked away.

In addition to the unceasing prevalence of vision, fantasy's proclivity for narrating the Manichaean conflict between good and evil generates a predominance of political structures which

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[27] "The abstract coldness of the perspectival gaze" (8), writes Jay, facilitates the observer's emotional distance to the object of the gaze. As a result, "[t]he participatory involvement of more absorptive visual modes was diminished, if not entirely suppressed, as the gap between spectator and spectacle widened" (8).

[28] To illustrate the forms this power imbalance can take, Laura Mulvey's examination of the gendered perspectives of what she termed 'the male gaze' may serve as a well-established case in point ("Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema", *Screen*, vol. 16, no. 3, Autumn 1975, pp. 6–18). The politics of gender have also entered surveillance studies, since video surveillance operators are predominantly male, thus opening up these practices for potential voyeurism (see e.g. Hille Koskela's paper with the highly suggestive title "Video Surveillance, Gender and the Safety of Public Urban Space: 'Peeping Tom' Goes High Tech?" (*Urban Geography*, vol. 23, no. 3, 2002, pp. 257–78)).

are demonstrably totalitarian, or at least authoritarian.[29] These structures demonstrate a penchant for attempting to keep their political subjects in line, thus reverting to surveillance practices for precisely the disciplinary purposes which Foucault deduced for panopticism from the Benthamite prison. In other words, the Orwellian nightmare of a totalitarian government spying on its people in order to inculcate obedience and punish political dissenters in a way that closely resembles Foucault's panoptical mechanism is more often than not the political order of the day in fantasy narratives, which then pit their protagonists against these oppressive governmental structures. This generic set-up also provides answers to the pertinent question of who surveils whom for which purpose. While the use of surveillance by governments intending to discipline their subjects prevails, the reverse use of surveillance practices by magically endowed individuals spying on the oppressive state is also possible. Indeed, it are precisely these two perspectives which are provided by the *Bartimaeus* trilogy, in which a totalitarian British government constantly monitors the unmagical population and where a pervasive atmosphere of mistrust also permeates the magical establishment, and the *Alex Verus* series, which narrates the individual struggle of its diviner protagonist, who is constantly forced to outsmart an oppressive government attempting to control him by obtaining information through watching the actions of his political adversaries.

I have suggested before that the specific analytical focus of this chapter will be on the police as an actor whose power is inserted into the fabric of the city. In these two case studies in particular, London assumes importance as the capital of the British state, and the police forces hence fulfil the dual role of urban and national authority. In the magical societies depicted in the two series, the real-world differentiation between the Metropolitan Police as London's local police force and the MI5 and the British Army as national forces is completely erased, and there is only one police force. The *Bartimaeus* novels depict an unquestionably totalitarian magical society where such a jurisdictional distinction is simply inefficient. The magocratic government comprises a Ministry of Internal Affairs, which handles investigations we might normally classify as relating to public

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[29] Both totalitarianism and authoritarianism denote oppressive and undemocratic structures of government in which the rulers demand unquestioning obedience from their subjects (Allison; Whitefield). In political theory, totalitarianism is usually conceived of as a particular form of authoritarianism which intends to regulate every aspect of state and private behaviour, whereas authoritarianism entails the possibility of being "authoritarian in some spheres while being more liberal in others" (Allison). Moreover, authoritarianism often works through excluding the people from political participation, while totalitarianism aspires to create a comprehensive political penetration and subjugation of all aspects of public and private life. Originally intended to describe fascist and communist regimes, totalitarianism has become associated with characterisations of Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union in particular, not least after Hannah Arendt's discussion of these two regimes as paragons of modern totalitarianism in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (Meridian, 1958). While the subsumption of far-right and far-left regimes under one rubric has not been without criticism, this issue is so marginal to my own discussion that I am not going to rehearse the arguments here. Since speculative fiction narratives heavily borrow idealised mechanisms of domination from these political systems for their worldbuilding, usually in order to draw on cultural connotations of political evilness, totalitarian and authoritarian regimes proliferate in the genre.

security, and a Police Department, whose chief is a member of the Prime Minister's cabinet.[30] As Nathaniel is employed in the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the political rivalry between the two departments is framed from his point of view, and Bartimaeus is frequently deployed on missions which allow him to be construed as a classic urban investigator character. In contrast, Jacka's *Alex Verus* series depicts its magical society as existing alongside London's nonmagical population. Such a setting suggests a rather limited number of magical subjects, who can be policed by their magical government – termed 'the Council' in Jacka's series – without the bureaucratic subdivision of forces. The Order of the Keepers, the Council's police force, are thus described by Verus at one point as "something like a cross between political investigator and military police" (*Hidden* 58). As this chapter will reveal, what unites the depictions of the policing institutions in Stroud's and Jacka's novels is not only their reliance on magically enhanced surveillance, but also their depiction as apparatuses, who do not operate according to a humane logic but rather as a cog in the wheel of the state. The policed communities, who are at the receiving end of police power, factor in the equation centred on maintaining public order as an anonymous mass which needs to be controlled by any means necessary, which extends the apparatus logic to the mesogeopolitics of the city.

6.1.1 London under Totalitarian Magocratic Control in the *Bartimaeus* Trilogy

Jonathan Stroud's *Bartimaeus* trilogy is set in a thoroughly dystopian version of early-twenty-first-century London, in which the ruling magicians have imposed an oppressive magocratic rule upon the nonmagical population. Much of the trilogy's menacing atmosphere is generated by the ubiquity of magical surveillance, which ensures the constant monitoring of the nonmagical commoners for the purpose of securing the magicians' totalitarian rulership.[31] As the novels' alternative history setting eliminates the inclusion of much contemporary technology, magic takes technology's place instead.[32] As I will show, these narrative arrangements provoke three further questions pertaining to the teleological appropriation of magic as technology in the series. The first of these questions revolves around the issue of privacy, a quintessentially English concern. In the trilogy, the constant visibility through ubiquitous surveillance assumes a classed character due to the unequal, hierarchical stratification of the nonmagical and magical parts of London's citizenry. I will argue

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[30] As the narrative gradually reveals, all members of the Night Police are werewolves and prove to be notoriously hard to control by the government, which does not contribute to lending them readers' sympathies.

[31] As discussed in footnote 29, totalitarianism and authoritarianism are usually distinguished on the basis of scale. In the *Bartimaeus* trilogy, the magocratic government is depicted as attempting to control virtually all aspects of life, including imperialist expansion beyond the confines of the British Isles, although these imperial endeavours are only referenced and never directly narrated. However, labelling the government totalitarian seems justified on these grounds as well as due to the fact that the magocratic government aspires to be perceived as beneficial by the nonmagical population it oppresses..

[32] Apart from cars, the only technology mentioned in the entire series are aeroplanes and computers, and these references are sparse – the word *computer*, for instance, occurs only five times in all three novels, that is, over a span of almost 1,000 pages – and are always made *en passant*, usually when office spaces are described. There is, in other words, a notable lack of technology for a contemporary London setting, and magic fills this gap.

that the novels expose how privacy has become a luxurious commodity only available to the powerful, which translates from the trilogy's fantastical society to our neoliberal, capitalist consensus reality. Secondly, the emphasis placed on vision and visibility in the series has engendered a society profoundly characterised by mistrust. While this affective reaction is showcased in the nonmagical population only by those individuals who have been able to escape the government's extensive propaganda efforts, the magicians carefully seek to protect their own position of power by carving out well-defended spaces of privacy in the city. Ultimately, the novels suggest, such a hermeneutics of mistrust is untenable as an affective basis for a functioning society, thus providing a powerful counter example to the emphasis on conviviality hitherto often identified in contemporary London urban fantasy.[33] Thirdly, the *Bartimaeus* trilogy calls attention to the dangers an extensive surveillance apparatus poses as soon as political structures are operated by groups with undemocratic ideologies. Owing to their narrative perspective, the novels rehearse the argument that surveillance is monolithically regarded as a threat due to the totalitarian regime operating it. In my examination of the series, I will therefore contend that the characterisation of surveillance measures as unambiguously menacing is closely tied to (in)security as a structure of anxious feeling around the novels' publication dates, 2003 to 2005, as London's surveillance network was extended considerably during this time. In this sense, this chapter continues the previous evaluation of Stroud's novels as presenting a pronounced anti-urbanist perspective on the British capital.

The *Bartimaeus* novels make clear quite early that the hierarchical organisation of society into magical and nonmagical strata is one that builds on class differences. As Nathaniel, and thus the reader, learns quickly, the magicians occupy the positions of power and thus form the wealthy part of the population, while the nonmagical commoners are left to perform manual labour or fill the positions in the service industry.[34] Moreover, the novels steadily reference the magicians' extensive surveillance network in the city which is intended to monitor the nonmagical population and keep them in check. Thus, the government's employment of surveillance constitutes a specific scopic regime which is marked by the same structures of power that govern society at large. The fact that the novels' plot climaxes in a political revolution is therefore also reliant on the changes effected upon this scopic regime.

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[33] Conviviality and other forms of communal solidarity will play a role in my examination of the *Rivers of London* and *Matthew Swift* novels in the second part of this chapter. For another discussion of the concept in Aaronovitch's series specifically, see Lethbridge.

[34] In chapter 4.2.1, I have examined how this classed stratification translates into a distinctively politicised urban spatiality in the novels.

Initially, however, this regime renders the nonmagical population constantly visible to the magicians' eyes while largely concealing the magicians themselves. Already in the first instalment, Nathaniel describes his impression of London's streets as follows:

> Despite the dark and the evening drizzle, they [the commoners] were out in surprising numbers, heads down, hurrying along like ants in his garden, ducking in and out of shops, or sometimes disappearing into ramshackle inns on street corners. Every house like this had its own vigilance sphere floating prominently in the air above the door; whenever someone walked below, it bobbed and pulsed with a deeper red. (*Amulet* 184)

This quotation is emblematic for three aspects that characterise the series' depiction of surveillance in London: the descriptions offered with regard to those being surveilled, the justification for extensive urban surveillance, and the issue of privacy.

Firstly, the nonmagical population is constituted as justified objects of surveillance through the dehumanising language the magicians employ in referring to them, with which Nathanial has been indoctrinated and which he uses in this passage narrated from his perspective. The overall designation as *commoners* implies both the magicians' elevated view of themselves and a logic of expendability, which is echoed in the brief passage by Nathaniel's surprise at their numbers. Moreover, people are likened to ants in a garden.[35] The image of a huge number of ants immediately invokes the impression of a menacing mass devoid of individuality, on which any attempt of exerting political control seems warranted. This feeling is intensified by the description of the houses as "ramshackle", which conveys the economic gap between the rich and the poor.

Secondly, the quote is taken from a passage which narrates one of Nathaniel's first ventures into the city, as he had previously been largely confined to the house of his master. Simultaneously, this is the first time that vigilance spheres as means of magical surveillance are mentioned in the novels, and the reference occurs even twice – once in the passage quoted above and slightly earlier in another description of the cityscape from Nathaniels perspective: "Nathaniel stared out of the window as the car cruised south. The countless glowing lights of London – headlamps, street lamps, show fronts, windows, vigilance spheres – flashed in quick succession across his face" (*Amulet* 183). Both of these quotations draw attention to the visibility of the vigilance spheres through colour: they are described as glowing, bobbing, and pulsing red. This visibility stands in stark contrast to the dark and rainy urban environment described in the first quote but taken together the aggressively red colour and the dim city streets construct a menacing atmosphere in *Bartimaeus*'s London.[36] Moreover, the vigilance spheres are not only described as immediately

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[35] The imagery of the city as antheap appears also in Kate Griffin's *Matthew Swift* series, where, as I have discussed in chapter 5.2.2, the Alderman Earle employs it in a similar dehumanising way. Matthew Swift, in contrast, appropriates the imagery and turns it into a positive evaluation of life in the city, which is entirely absent in this passage from the *Bartimaeus* trilogy.

[36] This colour contrast between the dark cityscape and the red vigilance sphere occurs throughout the novels (e.g. *Gate* 139)

visible through their colour, but, seemingly paradoxically, they are also perceived by Nathaniel as a normal feature of the cityscape and thus blend in. In the second quotation, the spheres simply constitute the last of five sources of light, the other four of which are entirely inconspicuous and mundane elements of urban environments: headlamps, street lamps, shop fronts, and windows. The spheres are just another part of this consortium of urban characteristics, as the first quotation also suggests. After all, "every house like this" (*Amulet* 184) is described as having a vigilance sphere, which normalises their presence. However, the very name of this magical surveillance device indicates its purpose. The spheres are vigilant, which etymologically refers to a state of being awake in the sense of being watchful against danger ("Vigilance"). Through the denomination of the spheres as *vigilance* spheres, its objects, the nonmagical population, are constructed as a threat, more precisely, a threat to the political order in which the magicians are in positions of power. The surveillance conducted through the spheres thus becomes a magical tool of control in order to maintain a specific political system.

The perception of vigilance spheres as magical surveillance tool with the purpose of exercising political control is corroborated by a similar passage narrated from the perspective of Kitty Jones, a nonmagical teenager. Sitting on the upper deck of a bus, "she could see the sinews and tendons of the magicians' rule running up and down the London streets. Night Police strolled among pedestrians, vigilance spheres drifted on every corner" (*Gate* 89). In contrast to Nathaniel, who is brought up as one of the ruling magicians, Jones's perspective is one of being oppressed and thus the narrative perspective is more explicit in pointing out the political implications of the spheres' ubiquitous presence, which are not only unambiguously linked to "the magicians' rule" but also to the patrolling police forces. As an executive organ, the police constitute another actor exercising political control, and as I will demonstrate below, the specific depiction of the police in the trilogy contributes further to the dystopian aspects of totalitarian control. The interpretation of Jones's perspective is not left to any speculation, as the narrative immediately follows the quotation above with its own explanation of her thoughts: "Ordinary people went about their business, keeping their eyes carefully averted from the watchers all around. . . . the government's power was too complete, too obvious to allow dissent. Commoners alone could do nothing, that much was clear" (*Gate* 89). The ubiquity of the government's surveillance measures is clearly denoted here as the "watchers all around", which disciplines the nonmagical population into obedience, as expressed by the downcast gazes. Jones's hopelessness as to the potentiality of political rebellion serves to further indicate the completeness of the magicians' totalitarian control of London in general and of the city's nonmagical population specifically.

Interestingly, Jones's and Nathaniel's accounts of London's streets are united by another characteristic: both descriptions are given from the interior of a vehicle. However, whereas Jones

is sitting on the upper deck of a bus, a public means of transportation, Nathaniel travels in a private car. On the first glance, the respective vehicles separate both individuals equally from the scenery they describe on the streets and may even shield them from the watchful gaze of the vigilance spheres. On the second, however, as a public transport vehicle, the bus harbouring Jones is a much more open space than the magician's car. Buses can be accessed easily, whereas cars represent demonstrably enclosed spaces. This observation points to the third aspect I want to discuss with regard to surveillance in *Bartimaeus*'s London: the issue of privacy.[37] The difference in transportation already indicates that the magicians can largely afford privacy on the basis of both economic wealth and the ability to perform magic, whereas the nonmagical population – being poor and, well, nonmagical – are left without protection against the government's prying gaze.

There are two noteworthy aspects to the issue of privacy as it is discussed in the novels, both of which rest on the magicians' practice to deploy not just vigilance spheres but also the spirits themselves for specific surveillance or reconnaissance missions: firstly, the deployment of spirits for general security purposes against the nonmagical population, and secondly, their deployment against specific political rivals in the magicians' own ranks. Both of these aspects are predicated on a general hermeneutics of mistrust, which necessitates surveillance in the first place, and a system of partial (in)visibility that is closely tied to how the supernatural works in the *Bartimaeus* storyworld. Understanding this concept first is therefore key to the rest of my argument.

In the novels' storyworld, reality is re-organised into different planes of perception. The total number of planes is never specified – the largest number given to the reader is seven – but it is implied that there are more. Bartimaeus describes the effect of several reality planes to the reader as follows: "They overlap each other like layers on a crashed mille-feuille" (*Amulet* 10) and "each reveals certain aspects of reality" (*Eye* 2). Only the first plane is visible to the 'normal' human eye, but the magicians have a kind of technological aid, special contact lenses which enable them to

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[37] Privacy is understood here primarily in the sense of being "free from public attention, . . . interference or intrusion" ("Privacy"). Professor of Law Raymond Wacks point out that this desire has been demonstrated by anthropologists to have existed already in primitive societies and, crucially, is tied to a specific space where we can "be left alone, free to be ourselves – uninhibited and unconstrained by the prying of others" (30). Moreover, the very configuration of the private sphere presupposes a contrastive construction of the public as "an institutional structure" (31) which governs the individual's relationship with society. As Wacks explains, this binary construction of public and private spheres emerged in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as a result of political and legal developments which led to the emergence of nation states and theories of sovereignty, which in turn "generated the concept of a distinctly public realm" (33). The state thus becomes the custodian of the public sphere, whereas the individual constructs the private sphere very much in opposition to this governmental custodianship. Private spaces are therefore symbolically loaded with notions of intimacy which we are prone to protect from outside intrusions. The home, which I will discuss below, subsequently becomes the epitome of a private space and thus warrants special protection, especially in surveillance states where the public sphere is suffused with watchful gazes. Lastly, any notion of privacy is strongly tied to the extent to which individuals have control over the disclosure or withholding of personal information. As David Lyon observes, in our contemporary technosocial environment, where "[t]ime and space no longer restrict visibility in way they once did", the notion of privacy has shifted from "being 'let alone'" towards "trying to control the flows of information" (*Culture* 44). Such an element of privacy strongly points to aspects of data protection, which implies in the very definition of the concept that it is somehow always under assault. This aspect, however, is not the focal point of my discussion.

perceive magical activity on the planes two and three (*Amulet* 70–71, 116–17). Planes four and higher, however, are hidden entirely from human perception and can only be perceived by the spirits. Depending on their rank, the spirits are able to disguise their appearance on several planes and can take almost any form, frequently appearing as animals. This system of partial invisibility thus allows the magicians to use the spirits as spies on both the nonmagical population and rival magicians, as the nonmagical population cannot perceive the spirits at all and the magicians have difficulty seeing through inimical spirits' magical disguises without the help of their own spirits.

The deployment of the spirits as spies against the nonmagical population highlights the use of magic as a tool in particular.[38] This connection is made by the narrative itself, as the following quotation – taken from an episode of introspection narrated from Nathaniel's point of view – illustrates:

> Since Gladstone, magicians had observed a basic rule. The less commoners knew about magic and its *tools*, the better. Thus, every slave, from the scrawniest imp to the most arrogant afrit, was ordered to avoid unnecessary exposure when out on his master's business. Some utilized the power of invisibility; most went in disguise. So it was that the myriad demons thronging the streets of the capital or rushing above its rooftops went, as a rule, unnoticed. (*Gate* 71–72; my emphasis)

This quotation highlights several aspects about the conceptualisation of magic in the series simultaneously. To start with, there is the connection made between magic and its use as signalled by the word *tool*. The fact that the magicians conceive of the spirits' magic in teleological terms, that is, as a tool to wield for their political purposes, is reinforced by the nature of their relationship with the spirits, which, as in the quotation above, is continuously referred to as enslavement. The magicians exploit the spirits for their ability to perform magic, whereas the magicians' own magical capability only lies in summoning the spirits from an alternative dimension to Earth.

Another aspect worth highlighting in the quotation above is that of invisibility, which can be achieved either by true invisibility or disguise, both strategies resting on magic. This melange brings about a situation that the quotation's last sentence aptly summarises: London is populated not only by magicians and the nonmagical population, but also by an enormous number of spirits who are forced to do the magicians' bidding, in this case spying on the nonmagical population from whose perception they are concealed. This situation thus is one marked by the constant visibility of the nonmagical population to the magicians, whereas both the observers and the precise way by which magic is performed remain hidden, albeit not the existence of magic *per se*.

The magical surveillance practices described here on the level of the story can be likened to the extensive surveillance network in the public sphere in our extradiegetic consensus reality,

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[38] That the practices described in the following paragraphs are politically conceived of as surveillance is also addressed directly in the narrative (e.g. *Eye* 109). This is thus not a label imposed by me for analytical purposes but one that originates directly from the text.

specifically London's blanket CCTV coverage. As the sociologist Clive Norris notes, "CCTV has become a 'normalized' feature of British urban life" (252). "Within urban areas", he continues,

> CCTV has become ubiquitous, and not just on city streets. It is now routinely found in parks, commons and cemeteries; on buses, trains and taxis; on the roads and at sea or at airports; in restaurants, bars and cafes; in kindergartens, schools and universities; in factories, offices and warehouses; in hospitals, health centres and maternity clinics,

which leads him to a pointed conclusion: "Citizens of urban Britain are watched over from cradle to grave" (252). Norris's account of British CCTV coverage resonates profoundly with the description of the magicians' magical surveillance network in the *Bartimaeus* trilogy. In both the novels and our consensus reality, the public sphere is marked by a scopic regime that demands constant visibility of the watched while concealing the watchers. The nonmagical population in the trilogy is only dimly aware of being surveilled but not of the specific surveillance mechanisms. While in our consensus reality we do notice the cameras as well as the signs pointing to CCTV in operation in certain areas, we do not know who is *actually* watching us, for operation rooms are spatially dislocated.

Literary representation performs a critical function here by way of drawing connections between the imagined fantasy world and our consensus reality. The criminologist Mike Nellis argues that "surveillance stories *both* legitimate our suspicions and also hint, rather reassuringly, that, in our fumbling quest to understand who our masters are, we are at least on the right track, even if we cannot be certain about their exact organisational forms, or their capabilities and reach" (197; original emphasis). If read as a surveillance story, the *Bartimaeus* trilogy is quite explicit about "our masters" as well as their "capabilities and reach". The novels depict a dystopian society in which a decadent and corrupt rulership enslaves magical beings for the purpose of oppressing the working population. The *Bartimaeus* trilogy, hence, presents a rather unsubtle and unambiguous condemnation of extensive surveillance under the pretence of public security and even suggests that this pretence can be dangerously close to totalitarianism as a political system. The emotional guidance provided to readers in the novels firmly aligns their sympathy with the two oppressed groups, the nonmagical population and the spirits, and paints the magicians in unsympathetic, unscrupulous, and outright dangerous colours.

This conclusion is strengthened by the outcome of the novels' political story arc. The nonmagical population ally themselves with the spirits and successfully overthrow the magicians. The prerequisite for such a *coup d'état* is a biological defence mechanism: the exposure to magic over centuries builds up a growing resistance to it in the nonmagical population. Significantly, in some individuals this natural resistance also takes the form of being able to penetrate the spirits' invisibility. The episode I have referenced above, in which Nathaniel contemplates the teleological use of magic as surveillance tool, subsequently continues as follows:

> So it was that the myriad demons thronging the streets of the capital or rushing above its rooftops went, as a rule, unnoticed.
> This was no longer the case.
> Each week brought new accounts of demonic exposure. (*Gate* 72)

I have included in the quotation the line on which the previously one ended in order to make visible the change in the status quo the narration highlights. Something that had been established for centuries – the fact that the magicians' deployment of the spirits as spies in and on the general population had been concealed – is now no longer the case. In other words, the scopic regime governing the magicians' teleological use of magic is under threat. The spirits are exposed, as the narration makes clear, that is, the scopic regime of invisibility is now made visible. Such a change in the status quo can be read as the utopian imagining of rebelling against an oppressively totalitarian government, whose existence and means render the depicted world dystopian in the first place. Recalling Nellis's observation, where we in our consensus reality may be uncertain about the identity of those watching us, their capabilities and goals, the *Bartimaeus* trilogy provides unambiguous answers and in its revolutionary impetus even a tangible sense of empowerment.

I have already said that the hermeneutics of mistrust not only governs the relationship between the magicians and the nonmagical population in the novels but also extends to intra-magician relations. They are narrated as a group of individuals greedy for power, and thus constantly anxious to lose the political position they hold while scheming about advancing up the career ladder. From this follows that among the magicians, no one trusts anyone else, and everyone is careful to conceal their secrets. In effect, where the nonmagical population is characterised by a pronounced lack of privacy due to their magical powerlessness, the magicians can not only afford the magically commodified privacy but rely on it for egoistical purposes. This sentiment translates to the spatial configuration of London as it manifests in the fortification of the magicians' homes against magical intrusion, which, in the way that this practice is narratively depicted, is reminiscent of the protection of the home as a sphere of privacy in urban gated communities in our consensus reality.[39]

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[39] The magicians' concern for privacy is also repeated on the level of their very identity. In the trilogy's storyworld, it is common practice that young magicians are trained by their masters in their own houses, away from the public. As names hold magical power, the children's birth names are deliberately forgotten and they must choose new names for themselves before they can enter the public sphere as magicians. That Nathaniel's birth name is not forgotten but retained, and that the spirit Bartimaeus gains knowledge of it, constitutes an anomaly and levels for them the usual power discrepancy between magician and spirit as it renders them business partners who have to strike a bargain in their mutual interest rather than being slave and master. The narration itself mirrors Nathaniel's identity development from boy to magician back to his 'true self' by addressing the character either as Nathaniel or by his given name, John Mandrake. Towards the end of the second instalment, the transition has reached an apex, as Bartimaeus makes clear to the boy: "'I see you more as Mandrake now. The boy who was Nathaniel's fading, almost gone'" (*Eye* 563). The name Nathaniel choses for himself is a telling name, one that reflects the urge for protective privacy. The prename, John, is a run-of-the-mill name that offers a sense of anonymity, redolent of the placeholder name John Doe. Thus, it mirrors the magicians' motto "Safe, secret, strong" (*Amulet* 67), which links strength and security to secrecy. The surname, however, exposes the magicians' corruptive influence on one's identity, which Nathaniel's story arc narrates. The mandrake is a poisonous plant, whose roots are often used in

The example I have chosen for clarifying this point is constituted by an episode taken from the trilogy's first instalment, in which Bartimaeus is instructed by Nathaniel to steal a magical artifact, the titular Amulet of Samarkand, from the magician Simon Lovelace's house. The fact that Nathaniel is unaware of the amulet's magical value and pulls off the heist merely to spite Lovelace, who has humiliated him before, illustrates aptly everything I have previously said about the mistrustful pettiness of the magicians' relationships among each other. Of much more interest, however, is the way in which Bartimaeus describes his break-in into Lovelace's villa in Hampstead.[40] One of Bartimaeus's first observations is that "[n]o fewer than three villas along the street had magical protection", which he takes as an indication of "how nobby an area we were in" (*Amulet* 10). This casual commentary points to the commodification of privacy in the series I have previously declared but not shown how it is anchored in the text. The ability to protect one's home magically is named here explicitly as an indicator of a wealthy habitus, which makes sense in terms of how British society is depicted in the novels. The magicians occupy the well-paying jobs, whereas the nonmagical population perform mainly manual labour and work in the service industry. Correlating magic with wealth is thus logical in the storyworld, but it also facilitates the translation of the analogy to our extradiegetic consensus reality, where wealth is not an indicator of magical ability but of economic privilege. Simultaneously, the scopic regime at work in both the storyworld and our consensus reality dictates that being able to protect one's home from the constant gaze characteristic of the public sphere renders privacy a luxurious commodity.

Bartimaeus's subsequent description of Lovelace's defence measures makes clear that the protection of privacy in the storyworld necessitates a veritable fortification of the home. The spirit reports to the reader that the magician has "rigged up a defence nexus", a magical device which is rendered visual by a botanical analogy: "it shone like blue gossamer all along the high wall" (*Amulet* 10). The next element of note is the nexus's dimension: "it extended up into the air, over the top of the low white house, and down again on the other side, forming a great shimmering dome" (*Amulet* 10). The defence nexus is located on the second plane and could thus be theoretically perceived by other magicians through their lenses, thereby serving not only as an active defence mechanism but also as a deterring element. Security and privacy are here not just practiced but, more importantly, also signalled, which underlines their commodified status. Lovelace uses the fact that he is able to magically protect his private home from scrutiny as a way to advertise his power and position. In addition to the nexus, Bartimaeus also spots "three sentries prowling around in

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folklore as the basis for hallucinogenic or narcotic potions. Incidentally, the name has also been adopted for a facial recognition system installed in the East London borough of Newham in 1998, though I do not want to go as far as suggesting Stroud named his character deliberately after this system.

[40] For a thorough understanding of the subsequent descriptions it is necessary to point out here that in the trilogy's storyworld, spirits are forced by the existing laws of physics to take a material form. They can, however, alter this form as they please. For the burglary, Bartimaeus takes the form of various animals: a blackbird, a mole, and a fly.

mid-air" (*Amulet* 10) on the fifth plane, extending the measures undertaken to fortify the house to moving patrols which are only perceptible to other spirits such as Bartimaeus.

After the survey of the house's defence mechanisms, Bartimaeus briefly recounts how he is able to bypass them and enter the house unseen.[41] The first sentence of the chapter dealing with the house's interior continues the emphasis placed on vision in the episode, as Bartimaeus describes what he sees in the form of a fly through "my multifaceted eyes" (*Amulet* 15). The entomological form thus provides in the ocular plural a pointed subversion to the defence's purpose: the first defence of Lovelace's privacy has been pierced and the house's interior is now no longer concealed but rendered visible. Consequently, the narration continues with a relatively detailed description of the room entered by Bartimaeus, as the following quotation illustrates:

> There was a thick pile carpet, nasty striped wallpaper, a hideous crystal thing pretending to be a chandelier, two oil paintings that were dark with age, a sofa and two easy chairs (also striped), a low coffee table laden with a silver tray, and, on the tray, a bottle of red wine and no glasses. The glasses were in the hands of two people. (*Amulet* 15)

The people, the magicians Simon Lovelace and Amanda Cathcart, are described with the same meticulous attention to detail (*Amulet* 15–16), all of which illustrates the fact that the house and everything in it is now entirely exposed and subject to Bartimaeus's surveillant gaze. As the spirit ventures further into the house searching for the amulet, he encounters more defence mechanisms which are also relayed to the reader primarily in their capability of watching their surroundings, such as a magical spy "with unpleasantly bulbous eyes" (*Amulet* 18), which Bartimaeus is able to pass by "obscuring its vision" with "thick oily vapor" (*Amulet* 18). When he reaches Lovelace's treasure room, it is one that has no windows (*Amulet* 19), indicating that windows are a signifier of penetrating vision, which is a sign of weakness in the novels.

When Bartimaeus then seizes the amulet from its protective glass cabinet, a magical alarm is sounded and "[t]he time for stealth was over" (*Amulet* 21). Indeed, the dynamics of visibility are now reversed, as it is Bartimaeus whose intrusive presence in the house has become known. Consequently, the narration now conceals further security measures Lovelace has implemented from both the djinni and the reader: "As I ran for the door", Bartimaeus reports, "I noticed out of the corner of my eye a portal suddenly open in mid-air. Inside the portal was *a blackness that was immediately obscured* as something stepped out through it" (*Amulet* 21; my emphasis). Thus concludes a narrative stretch of two-and-a-half chapters that is concerned with (in)visibility and the protection

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[41] It does not have any relevance for the argument, but to the curious reader it may be specified that the defence nexus does not extend underground. Bartimaeus is thus able to dig his way into the dome by becoming a mole, and subsequently enters the house as a fly through an air vent.

of the private home tied to these concerns, for the rest of the chapter follows the rather generic pattern of heist stories and focuses on Bartimaeus's escape from Lovelace's villa.[42]

Bartimaeus's description of the house and its interior as well as his own role as a burglar draws attention to the structures of visibility, invisibility, and surveillance which permeate the private home of the magician Simon Lovelace. There is, more precisely, a stark contrast of the magical security mechanisms employed to render everything outside of the house, everything not pertaining to it, visible – such as the defence dome – while simultaneously obscuring everything inside the house or belonging to it – such as the sentinels and even the toad-like security camera-spirit. According to the *Oxford Dictionary of Word Origins*, *home* "is an ancient word related to a Sanskrit term meaning 'safe dwelling'" ("Home"), and therefore etymologically reiterates the notions of security and control already discussed above in relation to the meaning of privacy. Thus, the house as the epitome of a private home is a space that is deeply interwoven with concerns for its dweller's security, usually defined as protection from outside harm and in control over the circumstances.

This kind of protective rhetoric is also mirrored by the semantics relating to breaching the home's security, which is usually framed as intrusion or even invasion of this private space. Particularly the latter term, *invasion*, carries strong military connotations. About the potentiality of home invasion, Zygmunt Bauman notes:

> Contrary to the objective evidence, it is the people who live in the greatest comfort on record . . . who feel more threatened, insecure and frightened, more inclined to panic, and more passionate about everything related to security and safety than people in most other societies past and present. (*Fear* 130)

Bauman's observation has been taken up and developed further by Rowland Atkinson and Sarah Blandy, who argue that any wealthy urban neighbourhood in any city in the Global North "reveals a world of relative secrecy, high security and what can only be described as a kind of fortification" (1) relying on increasingly advanced technology, thus betraying the same classed structure at the root of home security that I have previously pointed out with regard to the social fabric in *Bartimaeus*'s storyworld. Developments in home security in our extradiegetic consensus reality in the early twenty-first century are thus taken up by the trilogy, fictionalised, and imbued with magic in order to account for technological progress yet unpredictable beyond the present at the time of writing. While I would suggest that *The Amulet of Samarkand* seeks to criticise the fortification of the homes of the wealthy and powerful, leaving, as I have previously pointed out, the poor defenceless against the magically enhanced surveillance of the state, Bartimaeus's successful heist

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[42] During his escape Bartimaeus performs one last magical stunt which renders him invisible, of sorts. When he leaves the house, he is of course spotted by the three sentinels patrolling in the garden. Thus, he "cast[s] an Illumination of the brightest kind", as a result of which "[t]he sentinels' eyes were dazzled" (*Amulet* 26).

renders Lovelace's anxiety-ridden defences against home invasion justified, and thus somewhat undermines the novel's potential criticism in this regard.[43] Notwithstanding this irony, the example clarifies how Lovelace constitutes an individual actor who performs surveillance himself and thus becomes compliant as an agent of surveillance in a society which is built on surveillance practices at large.

In summary, Stroud's *Bartimaeus* trilogy offers a fictionalised account of what has been described as an urban "culture of fear" (Atkinson and Blandy 2) bound up with the progressing technologisation of urban life at the beginning of the twenty-first century. The novels represent these developments artistically and use magic as a means of expressing future technological developments by exacerbating existing conditions. Magic is displayed as a technology in the way the magicians use the spirits to wield their magic for their political ideologies. On the one hand, the ubiquitous magical surveillance of London's nonmagical population as well as the magicians' own ranks creates the impression of a truly panoptic, Orwellian city in the trilogy which echoes public anxieties revolving around the extension of London's CCTV coverage at the turn of the century. While the concerns for public security have to a certain extent been proven valid by terrorist attacks during the 2000s, in London most notably the 7/7 bombings (G. Norris), the series cautions against urban-wide surveillance by narratively realising the potentiality of undemocratic exploitation of these surveillance networks. The unambiguously totalitarian magocratic government of the series uses its 'technological' means, that is, their ability to perform magic with the help of spirits, to subjugate the nonmagical population. Extensive magic surveillance is therefore ubiquitous in *Bartimaeus*'s London, thus creating an environment of constant visibility for the nonmagical population. In the novels' panoptic London, visibility accompanies the use of force as a tool of population control, and both are magically augmented beyond the possibilities currently afforded by the extradiegetic consensus reality.

On the other hand, the magicians themselves are narrated as displaying a heightened concern for their invisibility and privacy, which sets them apart economically from the nonmagical population. Privacy, in this sense, becomes a commodity in the series, "yet another marker of class privilege as powerful groups secure spaces of comparative privacy for themselves" (Haggerty 30),

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[43] Although Atkinson and Blandy argue that "[f]ear has been democratised" with regard to issues of home security and home invasion, their caveat that "*where resources exist to do so*, the sense of concealment, protection and defence is more apparent in the designs and adaptations now being deployed" (1; my emphasis) reveals an economic component in the equation which, in *Bartimaeus*'s storyworld, is expressed through the ability, or lack thereof, to magically protect one's home against magical intrusion. In our consensus reality, this economic component is, of course, economic wealth. The wealthier homeowners are, the more likely they perceive themselves to become the victim of a burglary or similar intrusions, and thus the more money they invest in home defence. The quotation above by Zygmunt Bauman suggests that this development is somewhat contrary to evidence; however, the deterring effect of home security technologies are hard to factor into burglary statistics, because if the homes of the wealthy are better protected, this will inevitably influence the rate of successful intrusions into these homes and thus impact burglary statistics.

which can only be afforded by those considered wealthy in economic terms. In the storyworld, this denotes those able to perform magic and so protect their homes against magical invasion. The example of Simon Lovelace's villa constitutes a narrativisation of what Atkinson and Blandy have identified as "an increasingly emphatic retreat by homeowners into fortified dwellings" (2). The successful heist carried out by Bartimaeus on Lovelace's villa, however, exposes these concerns – paradoxically and ironically – as futile and justified at the same time. Bartimaeus's intrusion into the house validates its fortification in the first place but also proves it to be insufficient.

It is particularly the panoptic visibility of the nonmagical population in the series which lends to the governmental structures in Stroud's trilogy a distinctly totalitarian veneer. As Maria Los observes, the "Panopticon principle is simultaneously totalizing and atomizing" (16) in the way that the surveilled subjects are subject to total visibility as a controlling mechanism and, in Bentham's original prison conception, kept separate and discouraged from collective activism. As an abstract "figure of political technology . . . polyvalent in its application" (Foucault, *Discipline* 205) in addition to its architectural form, the Panopticon thus provides a blueprint for a totalitarian society, to which the principle is inextricably linked in the cultural imagination. Stroud utilises this link not only as critique on the twenty-first century extension of London's CCTV network but also as a worldbuilding device for the *Bartimaeus* trilogy in the literary tradition of George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. The technical power to discipline through magical surveillance is legalised in the novels through the magicians' unquestioned political supremacy, which also naturalises their power to punish any deviation thus observed. To borrow from Los's critical reflections on surveillance in two political systems considered by Hannah Arendt as the paragons of totalitarian societies, Stalinist Russia and Nazi Germany, "[t]his represents . . . a generalized surveillance based on a growing penetration of the whole social body by mechanisms of discipline that are increasingly capable of fulfilling productive and normalizing . . . functions" (17). In the trilogy, the omnipresent gaze communicates a clear disciplinary hierarchy of power, which "contribute[s] to and enforce[s] a particular type of order" (17), namely that of the magocracy which requires its different subjects, the nonmagical and magical parts of the population, to partake differently in the system of power and thereby reproduce it. The totalitarian magocracy is therefore also itself a result of a panoptic surveillance system realised through magic as technology. At the same time, the governmental structure *in the narrative* is characterised as undesirable and evil by virtue of the cultural connotations evoked by its totalitarian elements *outside the narrative*, precisely because these connotations recall oppressive ideologies of the past and stand in remarkable contrast to the values cherished in Western liberal democracies.

Therein now lies the critical potential of Stroud's trilogy, which illustrates the dystopian potential of developments in twenty-first-century security technologies by exacerbating them

through magic and linking them to totalitarianism. This connection builds on the assumption that "state surveillance itself is a marker for a drift to a totalitarian state", which has led surveillance studies scholars to proclaim a "global turn to authoritarianism" (Murakami Wood 357–58).[44] As David Murakami Wood points out, one of the major concerns of this contemporary turn of the surveillance society to more totalitarian governmental structures "is that readily available technologies allow far easier surveillance of greater numbers across space and time" (361); a concern which is narrativised in the *Bartimaeus* trilogy through the equation of magic and technology. I will more specifically discuss in the next chapters that surveillance, as Murakami Wood does not fail to point out, "is not in itself malign in intent or bad in outcome" (364), but the analysis of *Bartimaeus*'s panoptic London has already helped understand how surveillance practices are always bound up with political structures. In the series, surveillance is indeed imbued with a hermeneutic of mistrust and malign in intent, but not in and of itself, but because it is practiced by a government villainised through the cultural connotation of totalitarianism. Moreover, because the narrative firmly places reader sympathy with the nonmagical resistance fighter Kitty Jones, the subjugated spirit Bartimaeus and, to a certain extent, Nathaniel – who becomes the morally corrupted magician persona John Mandrake before eventually reverting back to an ostensibly good-natured 'true self', which is associated with his birth name – the government relying on magical surveillance as disciplinary power mechanism is simultaneously villainised in the affective response provoked by the novels.

Stroud's trilogy hence diagnoses consensus reality developments around urban public security in the form of increased public surveillance, as well as the concomitant movement towards defended privacy for those who are able to afford the necessary technologies, as a social problem. In doing so, the novels provoke reflection upon the readers' own relationships to mundane surveillance practices through their artistic estrangement of these systems of social control. Through the different characters, who become subject constructions, the series variously enacts resistance to surveillance practices (Kitty Jones), emphasises complicity or participation in them (Nathaniel), or exposes them in order to increase transparency (Bartimaeus). Ultimately, these different levels of engagement are drawn together in the trilogy's conclusive revolutionary battle,

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[44] Although Murakami Wood's editorial has the term *authoritarianism* in its title, and the special issue of *Surveillance & Society* which the editorial opens does as well, he also draws on Hannah Arendt to link authoritarianism and totalitarianism by seeing the latter "as a mode of ordering which combines pre-modern and modern: authority with surveillance" (358). Subsequently, Murakami Wood presents a surveillance-based model of state forms, in which totalitarianism in its true form receives the label of "panoptic autocracy" on account of there being "no limits on what the state can know about the citizen, indeed, to be a citizen of totalitarian society is by definition to be known entirely". Moreover, "[t]here is no accountability or openness from the state and all epistemological premises are determined by the state itself" (362). I believe this aptly describes the situation in which the nonmagical population in the *Bartimaeus* trilogy find themselves. The magicians, in contrast, can almost universally be identified with the state, which prompts the slight alteration of Murakami Wood's terminology to fit my analysis of the panoptic magocracy.

which unites Kitty Jones and Bartimaeus as well as reconciling Nathaniel with his ostensibly essential identity, which also allows him to make amends to the djinni. As representatives of their respective social groups, the trio is able to overthrow the magocracy, weakened as it is from its own corruptive influence, and pave the way for a possibly better future beyond the narrative's conclusion. The *Bartimaeus* trilogy, ergo, imagines a collective uprising against an oppressive government operating magically enhanced surveillance throughout the city. That London is almost entirely burned to ground as a *tabula rasa* gesture in the climactic battle reveals how inextricably the novels see surveillance concerns interwoven with the city as a space of surveillance and exposes their anti-urbanist sentiments.

In the next chapter, the focus will also be on surveillance practices by a government perceived as undemocratic in the *Alex Verus* series – albeit not as unambiguously totalitarian as the one depicted in the *Bartimaeus* novels. However, instead of imagining collective action as resistance against this government, Jacka's series casts its eponymous protagonist as an individualist libertarian who is able to employ counter surveillance measures in his fight for political freedom.

6.1.2   London as a Political Battleground in the *Alex Verus* Series

In Benedict Jacka's *Alex Verus* series a thematic emphasis is also placed on vision, but the issue is framed from the individual position of the series' main protagonist, Alex Verus, instead of through the eyes of the authorities as in the *Bartimaeus* trilogy in the form of Nathaniel and Bartimaeus as his agent. As a diviner, Verus is able to foresee potential futures and his power places him under constant pressure from both adversary groups of the series, the government and so-called dark mages led by his former master Richard Drakh. As every action is potentially monitored, the issues of vision and surveillance are thus implicated in processes of obtaining information and using it for manipulative purposes. By raising questions about trust, power, and vigilance, the series explores the tension between the need for security and the preservation of individual freedom. Within this sociocultural formation, Verus is not protected but threatened by the government, and is responsible for his own security. Thus, he takes the stance of a libertarian individual who uses both technological and magical surveillance practices in order to secure personal liberty.[45] In doing so, the series imagines a sense of freedom that stems from fighting back in a world that is controlled by increasingly powerful institutions.

In Jacka's novels magic both exists alongside modern information and communication technologies (ICT) and augments them. As a result, both ICTs and magic are used for surveillance

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[45] In reference to Allison's survey of the differentiated meanings as well as Mack's historical contextualisation of the term *libertarianism*, I understand Alex Verus's libertarian philosophy to be primarily characterised by his belief in free will, his rejection of extensive state power, and his readiness to use violence as a means of defending what he holds to be inalienable rights of the individual against whoever attacks these rights, including the state.

purposes in the series. Jacka's protagonists use mobile phones to track people, or are being tracked through theirs, use the internet, and spy on others through magical means. Alex Verus as well as his political adversaries, both from the ranks of the British magical government and dark mages, frequently engage in surveillance practices to collect information in order to gain political advantages. In spatial terms, this configuration also produces a panoptic urban society in which every move is potentially monitored similar to the construction of London in the *Bartimaeus* trilogy. Like in Stroud's novels, London features in Jacka's series particularly as the state capital, which becomes the battleground for political schemes and intrigues. The novels also present the home as a private space opposed to the public realm of the city in terms of the scopic regime which governs this space. Since Verus's home is the one that features most prominently in the series, the narrative perspective from inside a private space which needs to be defended against outside intrusion provides an interesting contrast to Bartimaeus's perspective as the intruder into Simon Lovelace's villa.

As I have pointed out, the ubiquitous culture of surveillance is produced by the different political groups constantly engaging in practices which are directed at monitoring others in order to obtain valuable information. Surveillance is presented here as an epistemological practice which rests on the equation that knowledge is (political) power.[46] On the one hand, Verus's former master Richard Drakh presides over an extensive spy network, which lends him an uncannily omniscient characteristic. He is thus able to manipulate both the magical state and Verus according to his political plans, which aim at overthrowing the government. As the series progresses, the narrative perspective from Verus advances to a state of paranoia where the protagonist recurrently questions whom he can trust and who is secretly working for Drakh, as his old master seems to be able to anticipate his every step (e.g. *Burned* 285; *Marked* 111). On the other hand, the British magical government, 'the Council', supplies a much more systematic approach towards surveillance. Since for narrative purposes Drakh's precise operations are concealed from Verus, and thus the reader, the Council's surveillance practices shall be the analytical focus before turning to Verus's own surveillant permutations, as he engages with both the government and Drakh's dark mages.

As the primary state institution, the Council's surveillance practices are spatially re-inscribed into the state capital, particularly in the literal meaning of the word; *surveillance* means *to watch from above*. Consequently, some of London's high-rise buildings are reconfigured as spaces of surveillance in the series. The Council member Levistus, the main antagonist in *Forged*, may serve as a case in point here. Levistus employs his own intelligence gathering services and has built a "data centre" (*Forged* 98) on top of Heron Tower in central London, which does not run on magic

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[46] As shall be demonstrated later in this chapter, this maxim is not one that exclusively characterises the actions of the series' villains, but also of its protagonist Alex Verus, who tells the reader outright that "I've always believed in the power of knowledge. Any problem can be solved if you understand it well enough" (*Fated* 53).

per se but technological artificial intelligence – or "synthetic intelligence" (*Forged* 96), as the novels call it: "It is a thinking, conscious mind . . . designed to interface with machines, and in particular computer and communications systems", which it "intercepts, decrypts and searches" (*Forged* 96). *Forged* was published in 2020, that is, well after whistleblower Edward Snowden informed the public about American intelligence services' data collection practices, and the novel even makes this connection explicit for the reader: "Effectively, Levistus has a small, private version of the British government's GCHQ, or the American NSA, able to collect and sort vast amounts of electronic intelligence" (*Forged* 96). The location at Heron Tower reinforces the literal meaning of surveillance spatially, as from the tower's top one can easily look out over London (*Forged* 132). Access to the well-suited location is dependent on Levistus's political position, which allows the semi-private data centre to still be construed as representing the government while simultaneously demonstrating the undemocratic tendencies government agents in the series exhibit.

However, the Council also maintains an official "monitoring centre", which "[t]racks calls and video feeds, runs surveillance, sends dispatch requests" (*Fallen* 288) to the police headquarters. Although the monitoring centre is located underground, the information which is collected there originates at more heightened positions. Cell phone reception signals are intercepted from cell phone towers and CCTV cameras provide the visual imagery of video feeds. The semantics here are those of gathering information for the purpose of rendering the city observable and knowable to control society, thus representing a law-and-order approach which rests on surveillance practices. Although underground, the monitoring centre is called 'the Eyrie', which in English is the denotation for the nest of a bird of prey. This designation not only betrays its conceptualisation as the centre of a scopic regime which relies on high observation points, but also the evaluation of state surveillance by the narrative, which tends to deny through its protagonist the legitimacy of these practices on the basis of the government's ethics. It is thus not the gathering of information *per se* which is criticised, but the uses to which information is put by the people who have both access to it and the power to act on the information they can collect and access.

The idea that the police as a state actor need to surveil London's public space in order to "keep the peace in magical society" (*Hidden* 81) is reinforced throughout the series, most notoriously when Verus briefly joins the Council's magical police force, the Keepers (e.g. *Veiled* 49–50). It is during one investigation he does for the Keepers that the coterminous existence of magic and technology for surveillance purposes in the series becomes most evident. The impetus for the investigation lies in the fact that Verus found a magical item on the platform of a DLR station and is tasked with finding out how it got there. Pondering how best to gather the information he needs, Verus considers both magical and technological means: "If I wanted to find out what had happened at that station, how would I do it? The easy answer was time magic. Time

mages can look back into the past of their current location, playing out the events before their eyes like a video recording" (*Veiled* 71). However, a time mage is unavailable to Verus, who then resorts to the nonmagical equivalent:

> That just left the mundane way. What would I do if I wanted to find out what had happened at a particular place and time and I *wasn't* a mage?
>
> The obvious answer was CCTV. London has the dubious distinction of being the most spied-upon city in the world, with more security cameras per person than anywhere else on the planet. I couldn't remember if the station had had any cameras, but logic suggested that the answer was yes. (*Veiled* 71; original emphasis)

The passage illustrates neatly how technology and magic are taken to be not very different from each other in Jacka's series. When no magic is available, technology is the next best thing. In passing, the excerpt also provides commentary to real-world surveillance practices in London, which are evaluated here as dubious. CCTV in London is so ubiquitous, Verus suggests, that when in doubt if a particular location has CCTV surveillance, one can logically suppose that a camera is there. The link between magic and CCTV also suggests that the dissolution of spatial and temporal boundaries narrated through magic is equally true for CCTV. I do not want to contend that the series suggests technology *is* magic, but in this instance, technology is very much shown to operate *like* magic.[47]

The installation of a monitoring room linked to the police as an ordering force in the public sphere as well as the ubiquity of surveillance technologies in London form a nexus of urban fortification, which in the *Alex Verus* series is reinforced by a conspicuously military rhetoric. The underground location of the Eyrie is within a set of tunnels below Westminster, which are nicknamed 'the War Rooms'. This tunnel system was conceived as a "military centre of government" from the start, which "would be harder to attack [and] easier to defend" (*Veiled* 208) than a location above ground.[48] In addition, the Keepers are described by Verus to the readers as "something like a cross between political investigator and military police" (*Hidden* 58). The proliferation of such a military rhetoric describing the political institutions in London indicates the extent to which discourses of war and security are increasingly revolving around urban spaces. As Steven Graham points out, in conjunction with "deeply technophiliac state surveillance projects", which are articulated in magical and technological terms in the *Alex Verus* series, these developments "translate longstanding military dreams of high-tech omniscience and rationality into

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[47] There is another instance in the series which confirms this observation. When Verus and his associate Anne Walker are unjustly charged, and thus outlawed, by the Council in *Burned*, they decide to flee Britain. Chapters 15 and 16 in the novel revolve entirely around the Council's attempts to detain Verus and Walker by magical and technological means around the world, while the two mages manage to escape by equally resorting to their magical prowess and technological knowledge (*Burned* 340–60). Magic and technology thus operate on the same level in the series.

[48] In keeping with the metaphorics urban fantasy uses to denote the importance of London as a political centre, which I have examined in chapter 5.1.1, the location of the War Rooms is referred to as being "in the heart of the City" (*Veiled* 208).

the governance of urban civil society" centred on "the task of identifying . . . an extensive range of ambient threats from the chaos of urban life" (*Cities* xi–xii). The widespread use of war as the dominating metaphor in describing urban spaces, Graham continues, is indicative of a paradigmatic shift "that renders cities' communal and private spaces, as well as their infrastructure – along with their civilian populations – a source of targets and threats" (xii). While he still warns of blurring "the juridical and operational separation between policing, intelligence and the military" (xv), these boundaries are already erased in Jacka's series, where an unchecked magical government combines judiciary, legislative, and executive power and is equipped with both the technological and magical means of monitoring the entire population under the pretence of providing order and security, as the examples of Council member Levistus's semi-private Heron Tower data centre and the Eyrie as an official monitoring room indicate.

The *Alex Verus* series engages with this kind of military urbanism from the perspective of its protagonist. As Graham has observed, private spaces are increasingly framed as a source of threats under the militarised doctrines of an urbanism governed by the maxim of security, for private spaces secluded from the all-perceiving gaze may harbour potential security hazards. Thus, a removal of private spaces of potential invisibility is on the agenda of public security initiatives, while simultaneously public urban space undergoes fortification measures (*Cities* xii). Jacka's series portrays this notion through repeated attacks on Verus's home in the borough of Camden. The series thereby constructs the home as the protective space of the individual, which the homeowner intends to fortify to keep out the preying eyes of a government intent to control its subjects through the disciplinary aspect of surveillance. The final attack on Verus's flat, which leaves it devastated and the protagonist homeless, occurs in *Burned* at a stage in the series when the infiltration of the government by dark mages has progressed to a point where the two groups have become indistinguishable. The identity of the attackers is never fully clear to Verus, but due to the conflation of his adversaries it does not really matter either. The description of the defence mechanisms on which Verus draws conveys the extent to which he has fortified his flat for exactly this contingency. Moreover, the novel explicitly frames attacks on the home as an inimical intrusion from the outside into a protective space: "Out of all the possible threats, one we kept coming back to had been the night raid, with *enemies infiltrating our homes while we were alone and helpless*" (*Burned* 105–06; my emphasis).

The chapter in *Burned* which narrates the attack on the flat begins with Verus waking up in the middle of the night because his divination precognition forewarns him of an immediate danger. With military precision, Verus then outlines the next steps for the reader: "I thought fast, assigning priorities. First, call for help; second, get a weapon; third, fight. I grabbed my phone from the side table, clicked it to mute and typed in a code" (*Burned* 105). Step one and two illustrate the

confluence of magic and technology in the series, as Verus uses a pre-established panic code signal to alert his friends to his predicament, who will then use gate magic to travel to his flat.[49] Moreover, he equips himself with both magical items and guns, as his attackers also draw on both means. The house itself is also fortified with magical and technological means, although the defence mechanisms ultimately fail to prevent the attack. As the chapter proceeds, Verus mentions magical wards, magical items, fortified walls, forcewalls, a safe room, body armour, and a bulletproof, fireproof, and magic-proof front window, which all together are designed to protect Verus inside his own four walls.

While the intrusion into Verus's safe space fails in killing him, it succeeds in destroying his home and thus rendering the character homeless. This sense of homelessness translates into vulnerability and the loss of security that the flat had previously offered, as I have argued in chapter 4.1.1 with regard to the nostalgic responses it triggers. In addition, the short passage illustrates other characteristics of Verus, to which I will return intermittently throughout the rest of this chapter: the indiscriminate, pragmatic use of magic and technology as well as his *lex talionis* mentality, which he phrases as follows: "my philosophy tends to be that you're justified in using an amount of force that is equivalent to the amount directed at you. So, as a general rule, I tend to think that it's okay to roughly match the level of aggression and/or violent intent of whoever attacks you" (*Burned* 109). Below, I intend to extend this mentality to the practice of surveillance, which Verus employs to fight back against what he takes to be an unjust government infiltrated by the series' villains. In doing so, the novels portray Verus in the style of a libertarian individual, who believes in his personal liberty to respond to perceived injustices in a commensurate manner.

Verus's frequent engagement in surveillance practices, which mirror those of the government, thus contributes significantly to the culture of surveillance that permeates the entire series. While the episode at the DLR station I have referenced above showcases Verus's ability to make use of London's technological surveillance infrastructure, I have read it as an act of state-sanctioned surveillance, since Verus was working for the magical police at that time. I will now turn to Verus's diviner precognition, which allows him to discern immediate futures, which arguably constitutes the most prominent means of magical surveillance at his disposal. In the first instalment, Verus describes his magical ability as follows:

> what does seeing the future mean? Most people think it's like reading a book. You skip a few pages ahead, see what's going to happen. That's impossible, of course. You reach a fork in the road: do you go left or right? You might go one way; you might go the other. It's your choice, no one else's. What a diviner sees is probability. In one future you go left; in another you go right; in a third, you stop and ask for directions. A hundred branches, each branching again and again to create thousands, for every one of the millions of people

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[49] Gate magic works like teleportation: great spatial distances can be bridged in the blink of an eye.

living on this earth. Billions and trillions of futures, branching in every way through four dimensions like a river delta the size of a galaxy. (*Fated* 39)

The emphasis on probability entails that seeing the future means, essentially, sorting through a vast amount of information in as short a time as possible and anticipate possible outcomes to reduce their threatening potential. In this, Verus's divination ability comes close to the work digital algorithms perform in our extradiegetic consensus reality to predict probable events. However, Verus is very much human, and thus has to cope with the amount of information presented to him and develop a method that allows him to do so. Earlier in *Fated*, Verus has already described to the reader all magical ability primarily in visual terms: "A mage's sight isn't really sight – it's more like a sixth sense – but the easiest way to interpret it is visually" (*Fated* 15). It seems only logical, then, that this predominance of vision is particularly true for Verus's own ability to *see* the future, which he describes as follows: "Everyone develops their own code, a way of interpreting the information. To me, futures appear as lines of light in the darkness. The stronger and more likely the future, the brighter the glow" (*Fated* 40).[50] Verus's description of brighter and darker colours echoes visualisations of contemporary data streams, for which the neon green computer code rain of the *Matrix* series as a way of representing the activity of the simulated reality environment of the Matrix on screen has morphed into one of the most widespread signifiers. This imagery is called up here by Verus's description of bright-glowing branches of probability against the dark. The character's magical ability of sorting through probable futures may therefore be linked to the work performed by digital algorithms in our extradiegetic consensus reality, which sort through real-time surveillance data – time being the obvious difference in this analogy. However, both Verus and the algorithms look out for conspicuous signs as a form of anticipatory seeing, which help them to focus their attention more specifically on this piece of data and then act upon the gathered information. The intention of both Verus's magic diviner power and surveillance algorithms is future-oriented and rests on the logic of probability. The series' depiction of magic therefore only augments real-world technological developments.

In addition to likening Verus's ability to sorting through surveillance data, the way his divination magic is construed in the novels also impacts the type of character Verus is. Verus routinely utilises the insights he gains from divination to mould his actions on the future with the best possible outcome *for him*. His surveillance is thus not a passive collection of data, but the active attempt to control his environment to the best of his ability for personal profit. Furthermore, the nature of divination magic as it is described feeds into the conceptualisation of him as a prototypically isolated, cynical private detective, who straddles the boundaries between abiding by

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[50] This visual description with reference to different intensities of light is repeated several times throughout the series (e.g. *Cursed* 6; *Chosen* 7; *Fallen* 247; *Risen* 341).

the law and bending it for his own sake (*Bound* 157). Thus, Verus is extremely reminiscent of urban fantasy's early PI characters like Jim Butcher's Harry Dresden, to whom the first novel also provides a brief intertextual reference (*Fated* 3).[51] Verus describes isolation as "a diviner's natural state", since "[d]ivination magic is solitary by nature" (*Burned* 268). This essentialist conception of his own position in society hints both at Verus's world-weariness – another prototypical characteristic of the hard-boiled noir PI – and the trust issues the character exhibits. Verus makes clear that "[d]ivination tends to encourage a state of hyper-vigilance – you're always watching and looking ahead, whether for opportunities or for danger" (*Marked* 50). This habit, he continues, permeates every waking moment, as hyper-vigilance "makes it really hard to relax" (50). The overall culture of surveillance in the series to which Verus is very much party engenders an atmosphere of constant mistrust, which in turn affects the character psychologically and leads to his withdrawal from the public sphere and subsequent isolation in the social environment of the city.[52]

While Verus's position at the centre of the narrative arguably serves to align reader sympathies with him, the fact that the novels are narrated from his perspective also implicate the reader in Verus's surveillance practices. Positioning a diviner, who can see the future by magical means, as first-person narrator creates a peculiar narrative perspective somewhere between the limited position of first-person focalisation and an omniscient perspective, which I want to term panoptic narrator in order to highlight the similarity of Verus's divination and contemporary surveillance practices. Moreover, the designation of Verus's narration as *panoptic* in opposition to the more prevalent *omniscient* accentuates that the information related to the reader is still filtered by the character's perspective. The state of information is the one available to the narrator, who occupies a position similar to the panoptic security guard in Bentham's model. The entire narrative discourse of the twelve-instalment series can then be identified as panoptic, as indeed no other perspective as Verus's is given, and his narrative discourse is frequently interspersed with passages in which he surveils all possible futures to determine the most profitable line of action.[53] In doing so, Verus engages in similar practices as the government. In the novels the parallel is visually and spatially communicated by the elevated rooftop position, as Verus also frequently climbs up to the roof of his own shop in order to survey the city below him (e.g. *Burned* 62) or perform his

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[51] Jacka's very obvious modelling of Alex Verus on Harry Dresden is further underlined by Butcher's endorsement of Jacka's series. The editions by Orbit sport on their cover a testimonial by Butcher, who tells readers that "[b]ooks this good remind me why I got into storytelling business in the first place".

[52] Verus acknowledges several times in the series that he has had no friends prior to acquiring a stereotypically loyal motley band of misfits over the course of the novels. The development of working friend- and relationships with other people is part of his character development and counters at least superficially the atmosphere of mistrust that the novels conjure up as the general structure of feeling in London's society.

[53] The only exception to this statement is the epilogue of the final instalment, which is narrated from the perspective of Verus's apprentice Luna Mancuso. The switch in narrative perspective has the implication that Verus has told his story rather than providing a counter-perspective on events.

divination magic, thus recalling Levistus's observation centre at the top of Heron Tower and the implication of spatial elevation in the designation of the government's data centre as the Eyrie.

The reader has hence no other option than to succumb to Verus's filtered panoptic perspective. Implicitly, the novels thus sanction Verus's surveillance practices as justified, while explicitly condemning those of government agents. The narrative perspective and the novel's plot structures entail that Verus's surveillance is condoned as libertarian justice against either the villains or what is perceived as an unjust government or both. Individual villains are clearly identifiable and instances in which Verus makes his personal contempt of the Council clear to both characters and readers also abound in the series (e.g. *Fated* 57; *Hidden* 141; *Veiled* 230). Against this background, it seems only consequential that both the Council's monitoring centre and Levistus's data centre are destroyed in the series, the latter by Verus personally in an undercover operation during which he uses his magical prediction ability several times in order to outsmart Levistus and find out how to bypass the centre's security measures (*Forged* 122–62).[54] As Verus is detected during the operation on Heron Tower, his activities there are immediately framed as a "terrorist attack" (*Forged* 132) in order to employ London's nonmagical police forces, thus conflating the boundaries between magical and technological policing in a similar way as the AI running the centre blurs the distinction between magical and technological intelligence gathering, thereby illustrating once more that in Jacka's series, magic and technology exist comfortably alongside and work to augment each other.

In summary, Benedict Jacka's *Alex Verus* series imagines London as a surveillance city in which conflicting and competing political groups as well as individual magicians, such as Levistus or Verus himself, employ technological and magical surveillance practices in order to gather information on their opponents which they strive to use in their manipulating political schemes. In this environment, the protagonist's home is construed as a secure space of privacy, which ultimately cannot hold against the constant attacks from the menacing environment surrounding it. This imagery takes up both the notion of the city as the centre of political power and contemporary security developments in the extradiegetic world which have been aimed at fortifying and securing London against potential threats, such as terrorist attacks. Steven Graham has characterised these developments as military urbanism, and Jacka's series amplifies them through the novels' fantastic mode. In contrast to Stroud's *Bartimaeus* trilogy, magic does not replace the role of technology in public space but exacerbates the technophilic securitisation of the urban realm through their combination.

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[54] The operation also involves Verus bonding with the AI in Levistus's centre, which is called November. The AI seems to be imprisoned and exploited by Levistus, and is very clearly imagined in feminine terms. Jacka's series thus aligns with other popular culture narratives revolving around 'rescuing' feminine AIs from their masculine exploiters such as the films *The Machine* (2013) and *Ex Machina* (2015).

The series clearly attempts to criticise the concentration of too much controlling power in the hands of the governments on the basis of its unsympathetic depiction of the people who have access to the extensive governmental surveillance apparatus and the power to act on the information thereby gathered. The *Alex Verus* series invariably portrays politicians as egotistic, power-hungry maniacs, whose juridical, legislative, and executive monopoly evokes an Orwellian nightmare of a seemingly democratic but oppressive government run by unscrupulous individuals. In response, the novels strive to reverse the unidirectional gaze of government surveillance through the protagonist. Verus's divination magic allows him to foresee the immediate future, an ability that is described in the series in a visual rhetoric akin to sorting through surveillance data, the difference being that Verus sees the future while surveillance data consists of information about the past and the present. Divination thus becomes a form of counter surveillance, which provides Verus, and thus the reader, with an empowering scopic regime of anticipatory seeing. In conjunction with Verus's panoptic first-person narration, this scopic regime works to challenge the Council's narrative of security and control, which is the justification for extensive surveillance practices in the series, much like real-world governments tend to emphasise a law-and-order perspective in security discourses.

However, Verus's perspective increasingly assumes that of an individualist libertarian, whose acuity of judgement must be called into question, as he does not shy away from responding to violence with violence. The individualisation of resistance is presented as an ostensibly democratic imagining of civil disobedience in the face of an unjust government and ill-willing individuals in the form of the dark mages but does not consider that democratic values are not informed by answering like with like but predicated upon dialogue. Thus, while the novels attempt to portray Verus as a heroically democratic character, the practices in which he engages are decidedly undemocratic. In consequence, the series does not acknowledge Verus's own surveillance practices as equally harmful but condones his counter surveillance as legitimate, individual resistance against adversaries who threaten his individual liberty. In privileging individual anxieties over a collectivised structure of feeling, any valid concerns the series attempts to address, such as the proliferating exacerbation of urban surveillance, are therefore subdued by the limiting perspective of Verus's panoptic narration.

6.2   London as an Information City

In chapter 6.1, the emphasis has lain on public and private surveillance practices in order to gain information for political scheming, to control the population or one's political adversaries, and to prevent crime. The analytical lens has been one informed by surveillance studies as focused on military urbanism and dystopian representations of controlled urban environments, under whose

scrutiny both the *Bartimaeus* trilogy and the *Alex Verus* series have been found to exacerbate current technological trends with the narrative freedom offered by the fantastical mode in order to tell – differing – cautionary tales about surveillance in contemporary London. The focus of this chapter will shift away from the more or less overt militarisation of public urban space under the pretence of increasing public security towards seemingly more innocuous surveillance practices conducted through urban governance as a form of public administration. Although the administrative processes involved in policing also play a role here, this chapter asks what happens to people if networked urban environments and informational data are brought together by urban institutions who follow a logic of capitalist entrepreneurialism in their approach to governance. In doing so, I do not want to substitute physical urban space with electronic replicas but investigate how London urban fantasies make sense of the permeation of urban space with communication technologies beyond those employed for security purposes. The concrete aim of analysis is to take a look at how the fantastic urban imaginary negotiates the process of interweaving ICTs into the social, economic, and political functions of London's space.

While the lens to be employed for such an endeavour may equally easily be a dystopian and cautionary aspects of the stories under investigation are highlighted, the emphasis will be on more positive imaginings to counter the suspicion with which surveillance is commonly regarded and which have also dominated the first two case studies. While such a reading foregrounds what may colloquially be termed the 'good' aspects of surveillance, I must acknowledge that it also inevitably contributes to the very normalisation of surveillance my reading seeks to criticise in this chapter. Surveillance technologies tend to be perceived as beneficial wherever they help to increase efficiency, productivity, convenience, and comfort, but this also obscures the contribution to and curtailment of risk by surveillance practices (Lyon, "Sorting" 18–19). Moreover, the aspects I have listed as the perceived benefits of surveillance are unanimously values upheld by neoliberalism. In other words, the perceived benefit of surveillance technologies may only become visible from a neoliberal point of view, which is decidedly not the point of view which I want to take. Nonetheless, as I have emphasised in chapter 6.1, one of the crucial tenets of my analysis is that surveillance technologies are not 'good' or 'bad' essentially, but that they are embedded in cultural practices which employ them for problematic or commendable purposes, and sometimes both at the same time. Thus, I seek to give priority to the negotiations of individuals' agency in conducting surveillance for administrative purposes as they are reflected in Ben Aaronovitch's *Rivers of London* and Kate Griffin's *Matthew Swift* series respectively.

In contemporary Western societies, public administrations perform a plethora of services and are very information-intensive due to their central role, their scope, and the size of the populace to be administered. Thus, administration can be regarded as having "a surveillance function" on

the basis of the "large bureaucratic machine" it has built for processing information and electronic infrastructure investments "to modernize surveillance through enhanced technological practices" (Webster 313), such as databases and eGovernment services. Since Western societies rely on extensive public administration apparatuses to function, information processing and the use of technical infrastructure has become as much a part of our everyday (urban) life as, for example, taking public transport to go to work. Due to the ubiquity of these practices, the surveillance studies scholar C. William R. Webster argues for the importance "to see public administration not just as the administration of public services and policy but also as surveillance" (313). Since surveillance in this respect is understood as "a set of practices and cultural norms" (318), it is apt to say that we have become so accustomed to it that surveillance in urban spaces is something ordinary and normal, something of which we are unafraid – whether we are entering a shopping mall, taking the aforementioned underground train, or presenting proof of personal identity in dealings with administration services.[55]

Public services in the modern understanding developed after the Second World War and originally were designed "to provide large-scale universal services to all eligible citizens, including services associated with healthcare, welfare, education and taxation" (Webster 314).[56] For the fair delivery of such services to citizens, large hierarchical bureaucracies were organised to collect and survey a vast array of information. With the increasing digitalisation and interconnection of society at large, these previously paper-based bureaucracies adopted technological means of collecting and processing ever more information in a shorter period of time. In this sense, surveillance by public administrations has become a constitutive feature of modernity, for "[i]t is the information intensity of our relations with the state, embedded in and reflected by the provision of new surveillance technologies, that determines and characterizes the nature of modern society and the extent to which society is dominated by surveillance relations" (319). According to Webster, this development has resulted in two contrastive narratives. Public administration practitioners and public policy advocates propagate that new ICTs provide a sort of panacea to deliver more effective and cheaper services to citizens, whereas "[t]he alternative view to this utopia is . . . an Orwellian nightmare where the very same technologies are used primarily for tracking and controlling citizens", the surveillance function of public administration being "enriched by technological enhancements" (316). This quote illustrates the extent to which surveillance studies is enmeshed

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[55] I do not want to suggest that all of these practices are exclusive markers of urbanity. Where I have discussed the spatial distinction between the city and the countryside as different imaginaries in chapter 4, I must acknowledge here that administrative surveillance practices are also implemented beyond urban boundaries. Nonetheless, my analysis focuses on their representation in London as an urban-specific environment in such a way as it contributes to a Londonness that is indicative of (in)security as a structure of anxious feeling.

[56] For a comprehensive history of the history of what he terms 'the information state', see Weller. See Ogura (esp. 272–77) for an excavation of "five socio-historical layers" (272) in the development of contemporary surveillance.

in a fantastical register, that is, a language that employs the utopian and the dystopian, albeit without using their critical prowess to the fullest.

Since this chapter focuses on the managerial role of the police in fantastical urban narratives, it is probably not surprising that the police are at the centre of this 'Orwellian nightmare', as they are one of the institutions tasked with providing public security and thus have a vested interest in keeping taps on possible threats emerging from the general population. Moreover, the police are presented in police procedural stories as an institution with a managerial aspect, that is, the police's role of administrating the city is mirrored in the inner workings of police administration. In this respect, Webster further clarifies:

> The argument is not that all eGovernment services and related databases are automatically surveillance technologies, but that they have the potential to be utilized for surveillance purposes – because they are essentially about the processing of personal information – and that they are a necessary perquisite of contemporary surveillance societies. (316)

While surveillance norms, for which technological progress provides the electronic infrastructure necessary to escalate the scale of traditional bureaucratic and administrative processes, are thus "embedded in citizen-state relationships" (319), it is important to note in this respect that much of the dystopian nightmare derives from both a widespread fear of crime and terrorism in the twenty-first century and the scope of measures undertaken by public authorities to combat these challenges. As the introduction to chapter 6.1 has illustrated, while cities are by no means the exclusive spaces in which crime and terrorism occur, Western metropolises – and London among them – have been at the forefront of terrorist attacks and consequent anti-terrorism measures especially, as security and risk management has become a primary political objective. That being said, the focus now shifts from the police as a security force to the police as a part of administrative urban governance. The police thereby also function as an urban-specific actor within a larger administrative service network that extends to the macro-level of the state.

The premise for denoting public administrations as performing surveillance practices is spelled out by David Lyon, who defines surveillance as a system that "obtains personal and group data in order to classify people and populations according to varying criteria, to determine who should be targeted for special treatment, suspicion, eligibility, inclusion, access, and so on" ("Sorting" 20). The collection of population data is, as I have briefly outlined, closely tied to the idea of the modern nation state which defines and manages both a population and a territory. In order to define who belongs and who does not, information is necessary. The second aspect of Lyon's definition, the targeting of specific parts of the population for special treatment, has a dual origin in both the welfare system – determining who is and is not eligible for state welfare – and the capitalist logic of consumer marketing, where obtaining information about potential customers is a crucial step for targeted advertising. As Lyon subsequently makes clear, the obtaining and

classification of data in contemporary society "sieves and sorts for the purpose of assessment, of judgement" and thus "affects people's lifestyle choices . . . and their life-chances" ("Sorting" 20) – hence his terminology for this practice: social sorting.

The logic of surveillance as a sorting, ordering principle has also filtered into police administration in a time where classifying and assessing risks and personal profiles has become a necessary precondition for attempting to protect the population through crime prevention. The work of the police, in other words, has shifted from being primarily concerned with *solving* crimes, that is, becoming active after the fact, to *preventing* crimes, and thus to one of managing the population as much as policing it in the traditional sense. This aspect is also emphasised by Steve Herbert in *Policing Space*, who defines bureaucratic regulations as one of the six normative orders underlying the police's spatial strategies fundamental to their role as an urban actor (3).[57] Each of these normative orders, Herbert argues, "contributes crucially to the ways that police officers conceptualize the areas they patrol and how they mobilize to control those areas, how they *make* and *mark* space" (5; original emphasis). In other words, conceiving of the police as an urban actor who rely on technology, and magic in the case of urban fantasy, for administrative purposes – in contrast to the more militarised function of the police's use of technology examined in chapter 6.1 – is key to understanding the police's spatial practices in urban environments.

To be clear, I do not want to suggest that solving crimes is not part of daily police work or that no crimes are happening nor am I deluded to think that the maintenance of public order has not always been within the professional scope of the police. Nonetheless, the role of police has undergone a change insofar as the emphasis is placed more on the logic of prevention than solution – what is termed actuarial justice – which has been affected by the technological possibility to collect abstract data on members of the population, such as biometrics, in order to produce and assess personal profiles and risk categories.[58] Moreover, due to the sheer amount of information that this process generates, it has increasingly been automated by codes and algorithms to increase efficiency and speed. However, as there is no denying that profile creation and coded automation increase stereotypes, this raises questions about the human subjects who are sorted by surveillance practices (Lyon, "Sorting" 13).

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[57] The other five are law, adventure, safety, competence, and morality, but they are not of relevance to my argument and thus do not receive further attention.

[58] Much of the surveillance studies literature that discusses the shift towards actuarial justice refers at this point to *Minority Report* – either the novella by Philip K. Dick (1956) or the film adaptation by Stephen Spielberg (2002) or both – which again demonstrates the extent to which surveillance studies deals in dystopian imaginations. *Minority Report* envisions an unquestionably dystopian society which employs 'PreCrime', a system that uses psychics called 'precogs' to predict and prevent murders before they occur, leading to the arrest of potential perpetrators. The protagonist, Chief John Anderton, becomes a fugitive himself when the precogs foresee him committing a murder, prompting him to uncover the flaws and ethical issues within the system.

At the same time, it is necessary to ponder briefly on the distinctive geography produced in Western cities by late capitalism. Urban development processes since the late 1970s and early 1980s, which significantly involve rethinking the roles of urban actors such as the police and other governance institutions, haven been characterised by what David Harvey has identified as a shift from managerialism to entrepreneurialism. In order to tackle economic problems posed by the urban crisis of the 1960s, "urban governments had to be much more innovative and entrepreneurial, willing to explore all kinds of avenues through which to alleviate their distressed condition and thereby secure a better future for their populations" ("Managerialism" 4). Harvey's arguments for this shift have been formulated in 1989, but ring true with a haunting accuracy also for the impacts of the 2008 financial crisis:

> There is general agreement, of course, that the shift has something to do with the difficulties that have beset capitalist economics since the recession of 1973. Deindustrialisation, widespread and seemingly 'structural' unemployment, fiscal austerity at both the national and local levels, all coupled with a rising tide of neoconservatism and much stronger appeal (though often more in theory than in practice) to market rationality and privatisation, provide a backdrop to understanding why so many urban governments, often of quite different political persuasions and armed with very different legal and political powers, have all taken a broadly similar direction. (5)

Harvey draws attention to how economic crises provide incentives for urban actors to transfigure their approach of governance from one that manages the city in the best interests of its population to one that privileges an economic logic of capital accumulation and entrepreneurial projects. "The new urban entrepreneurialism", he writes, "typically rests . . . on a public-private partnership focussing on investment and economic development with the speculative construction of place rather than amelioration of conditions within a particular territory as its immediate (though by no means exclusive) political and economic goal" (8). Neoliberal policies of deregulation, privatisation, decentralisation, and market and competition orientation in city governance went hand in hand with a geographical rescaling of social responsibility and political competence. In the process, the role of cities and urban areas was intensified by shifting legislative powers to the local level, recognising urban qualities as key location factors, and emphasizing 'the urban' as a central feature of social identities, which significantly contributes to the implementation of a neoliberal ideology in urban governance. The negative impacts of such a neoliberalist entrepreneurial logic have prompted urban governance actors to lose sight of the needs and desires of the urban population for which they are responsible in any democratic society that elects urban governments. Instead, urban governments focus on the attraction of monetary investments to define the quality of life in

cities according to the standards of capital, not those of the people, thereby raising the question of what constitutes a city and the denizens' right to it.[59]

This is now the point where the fantastic enters the equation, as what I have described so far sounds relatively similar to the rather dystopian impetuses of chapter 6.1 and the esteemed reader may wonder wherein the more positive aspects I have previously indicated actually lie. I argue that in my two case studies, Ben Aaronovitch's *Rivers of London* series and Kate Griffin's *Matthew Swift* series, the fantastic serves as a semantic placeholder for the nonfilable and nonclassifiable in the technologised databases of urban administrations, chief among which is the police.[60] The fantastic defies the categorical thinking demonstrated by a logic that is dictated by automation and computer codes, thereby exposing the dangers that lie in such classificatory thinking. This thinking is revealed as providing the basis for an urban entrepreneurialism which is only interested in keeping the population at bay as to not endanger London's attractiveness on the international capital market for investment.

On the one hand, the removal or obstruction of automated technology by magical means tends to return the novels to a blissfully nostalgic time, where policing meant catching the culprits by good, honest legwork. On the other, and more importantly, the existence of the fantastic forces the protagonists in the two series to acknowledge the impact of surveillance as social sorting on the lifestyles and life-choices of those subject to it, and thus renders visible what are, in our extradiegetic consensus reality, largely invisible effects. In both series, exposing the entrepreneurial logic underlying these surveillance practices is predicated by an understanding of the relation between magic and technology. In doing so, administrative institutions are challenged by the protagonist's attempts to return urban governance to more managerial practices which do not sustain and deepen hegemonic capitalist notions of urban development but foreground the potential for transformation into a progressive urban corporatism, equipped with a sharp spatio-political sense for building alliances and connections. In the *Rivers of London* novels, which are narrated from the point of view of a member of the Metropolitan Police, this compels the protagonists to reflect on the role of the police as an actor in an urban ecosystem whose mesogeopolitics are governed by the values upheld by the neoliberal risk society and which cater to the logic of providing a sense of security at all costs to assuage real or imagined anxieties of

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[59] The phrase 'the right to the city' goes back to Henri Lefebvre's book of the same name (*Le droit à la ville*, 1968), which describes a future society liberated from the alienated everyday life of modernity, fostering self-determination and diversity. Lefebvre emphasised transforming everyday life, believing it held the potential for a profound revolution that could overcome the unequal and oppressive conditions of capitalism. David Harvey takes up Lefebvre's ideas and develops them further in *Rebel Cities: From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution* (Verso, 2012).

[60] The use of the fantastic as a semantic placeholder for Otherness is well-established in fantasy studies (e.g. Jackson). The case I am proposing here is similar, yet different, as in this case the fantastic does not replace individual dimensions of identity which are deemed Other to the hegemonial Western affluent, white, male, heterosexual self, but evades the automated logic of technologised surveillance.

insecurity. In doing so, the novels strongly campaign for a police approach that foregoes any sense of actuarial justice in favour of the consent of those being policed. In the *Matthew Swift* novels, the point of view is not that of an administrative institution itself but that of an urban outsider, Matthew Swift, whose perspective is characterised by his celebration of the enchanting potential of the city's quotidian aspects and his acknowledgement of the inextricable interconnection of technology and magic in the urban space. Swift's frequent struggles with the magical urban government of London, the Aldermen Council, are defined by the clash of the Aldermen's techno-entrepreneurial approach to governing and policing London and Swift's insistence on the importance of human relations for any administrative purposes in order to provide London's population not just with a sense of security but an actually habitable environment.

6.2.1   London as a Space of (Dis)Order in the *Rivers of London* Series

The *Rivers of London* series links technology to policing as the means to gather information and knowledge. The police's use of technology firmly relies on the incorporation of scientific insights from the nineteenth century onwards, which represents both policing and science as ordering systems. In contrast, magic and crime – or, mostly, magical crime – introduce elements of chaos that challenge these systems of order and, thus, have to be reined in. The slightly contradictory relationship between magic and science in particular, which relates to my claims in chapter 2.2.1 that the supernatural is contingent on modern science as a category, sets up the supernatural as the domain which cannot be grasped by science and therefore not filed in technological databases. This entails that in this chapter, the notion of surveillance will be less that of stereotypical CCTV camera footage, but be closer to David Lyon's definition of surveillance as a system that "obtains personal and group data in order to classify people and populations according to varying criteria" ("Sorting" 20).

While at the beginning of the series, the protagonist Peter Grant claims that "becoming a wizard is about discovering what's real and what isn't" (*Rivers* 154), he quickly realises that things are much more complex than that. As the series progresses, Grant learns to work in the interstices of these dichotomous domains, to draw them together, and can thus be read as a liminal character, who becomes the advocate for a more humane and consensual approach to policing that challenges the logics of actuarial justice. While the seemingly stable dichotomies produced by science and technologised policing are geared towards appeasing anxieties of instability and insecurity in the risk society, Grant conflates ostensibly separate categories and thus questions the epistemological potential of neat divisions. By way of the fantastic, he introduces chaos to systems of order and thus becomes an agent of change. As the introduction of magic into the narrated storyworld challenges both his and the reader's expectation of reality, which is expected to work within the boundaries of the principles established by the natural sciences, its chaotic, disruptive potential lies

in defying ordered and ordering categories such as science and technologised, bureaucratic police work.

The series portrays magic as a chaotic force that is opposed to systems of order, as "'slippery stuff'" (*Homes* 341), although it can be taught and learned, and thus controlled to some degree. As Grant is instructed by Nightingale, he gradually discovers underlying principles of magic over the progress of the series, but he also learns to live with the, sometimes frustrating, acknowledgement that even though magic "was all about thought and control" (*Values* 228), its practice held unforeseeable surprises. Thus, as Grant is often forced to improvise and adapt his use of magic, he applies these lessons to the job of being a magical police officer and increasingly challenges the bureaucratic principles on which policing in twenty-first-century London seems to rest. This mindset motivates him to question the conduct of police business, especially since magical crimes have to be kept secret and are therefore often exempt from regulatory practices that are supposed to guarantee police oversight.

The Folly's official motto, *scientia potestas est*, epitomises the approach to magic within the series as being opposed to systems of order. The knowledge that is being referred to here is at the core of both science and police work. Like science, Grant claims, "[p]olicing is about moving from the unknown to the known and then further – to the provable" (*Value* 281). In this sense, the motto also relates to Michel Foucault's term power-knowledge, which encapsulates his argument that knowledge and power determine one another, that "there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations" (*Discipline* 27). Power-knowledge, then, is at the heart of disciplinary systems as a technique for "the ordering of human multiplicities" (218) and for producing what Foucault terms "docile bodies" (136). In short, knowledge is the powerful force which creates some sense of order within systems. As two such systems Foucault identifies modern science, as it was developed in the Enlightenment period, and the police, which in its institutionalised form was also created at the beginning of the nineteenth century (214–22). Science and the police, in other words, produce knowledge, and thereby power, in order to fulfil their function as an ordering – "disciplinary" in Foucauldian terminology – system. In the *Rivers of London* series, this ordering principle of the two systems is emphasised repeatedly, but also always challenged by the supernatural's chaotic character. While science and the police seem to claim that, indeed, *scientia potestas est*, the supernatural resists the attempts to be disciplined and controlled by these systems. I will therefore first elucidate the contradictory relation between magic and science in order to explain how science produces "regimes of truth" (Foucault, *Biopolitics* 18) and to make more accessible the supernatural's antithetical role in Grant's daily police-work, which relies to a large degree on contemporary technology as the current scientific state of the art to manage the

information and knowledge gathered about London's citizenry. To understand the supernatural as nonfilable by technologised databases allows for the supernatural to challenge bureaucratic police practice and thereby question its geopolitics in the city.

As a scientifically interested person, Grant constantly experiments with magic in order to determine how it works in scientific terms and applies the insights he so gains to his daily job as police officer. However, he quickly has to accept that he will only ever be able to approximate magic scientifically, but never to determine how it works reliably and exactly, which propels him into questioning the dichotomous logic of social sorting with which his superiors present him at work.[61] Well aware of the constructive character of science, which leads to it producing not the ultimate truth, but always ever an approximation, Grant adopts "a particular type of discourse and a set of practices" (Foucault, *Biopolitics* 18) that is guided by the empirical principles of Popper's critical rationalism.

Central to my argument is the relationship between the supernatural and technology, which in Grant's pseudo-scientific experiments revolves around repeated attempts to combine magic with twenty-first-century technologies. I want to showcase this relation with two brief examples: Grant's experiments on the effect of working magic on microchips and the efforts to measure sensory traces left by magic, so-called *vestigia*. The deleterious effect of magic on all devices powered by microchips is at the centre of a series of scientific experiments with magic that Grant conducts very early in his apprenticeship. By happenstance, Grant detects at a crime scene that magic reduces microchips to a powdery white sand, which he describes by his tactile sensations in such meticulous

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[61] Modern magic in the *Rivers of London* storyworld is linked directly to the emergence of modern science during the Enlightenment as it was advocated by Sir Isaac Newton. In the series, besides his famous *Philiosophiae Naturalis Principia Mathematica*, Newton has written a second book, the *Philiosophiae Naturalis Principia Artes Magicis*, which is often just referred to as *The Second Principia*. As the titles suggests, it lays down the rules of modern magic use, particularly the use of spells, which consist of a combination of a Latin tag and a mental magical form called *forma*. To cast more complex spells of higher orders, practitioners of magic have to combine basic *formae* and increase the complexity of the Latin tag syntax by adding inflections, which can be written down in a form of spell notation. Harold Postmartin, the Folly's archivist, calls this process of combining *formae* with Latin tags "the 'Newtonian synthesis' to emphasise the fact that Newton did not so much invent magic as find the principles that underlie its practice" (*Lies* 131). The common history of science and magic that goes back to the Enlightenment entails that, before the Newtonian synthesis divided them in the storyworld, magic and science might have been the same thing, and Grant is well aware of this connection (*Tree* 79–80). Grant's view of science thus approximates a regime of truth. He regards science as being "marked by the articulation of a particular type of discourse and a set of practices, a discourse that, on the one hand, constitutes these practices as a set bound together by an intelligible connection and, on the other hand, legislates and can legislate on these practices in terms of true and false" (Foucault, *Biopolitics* 18). This highlights two aspects simultaneously: that the system of science is a construction, and that scientific knowledge is always necessarily preliminary. The first insight, science as construction, draws on the basis of constructionist thought which postulates that knowledge of the world cannot be obtained beyond human and social constructions. Accordingly, as Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann have argued in their seminal *The Social Construction of Reality*, both knowledge and reality are ultimately human and social constructs (1). The second insight, the preliminary character of scientific knowledge, bears resemblance to Karl Popper's principle of falsifiability, according to which scientific theories are only ever hypotheses, which count as true so long until they are proven false. Popper's principle is opposed to the principle of verifiability, which seeks to provide evidence *for* instead of evidence *against* a given hypothesis. Bost arguments are explored within the series with the help of magic, as its chaotic potential poses a question to both scientific classification and empirical experiments.

detail that it is more reminiscent of lab reports than of crime scene inspections, thereby illustrating how fluid the boundary between the two domains of science and policing is regarded in the series (*Rivers* 129–39). Shortly after the examination of the microchip, Grant discovers the same effect on his mobile phone after magic practice and concludes that "most of the useful technology since I was born" (*Rivers* 173) is affected by magic. Grant's examination of the powdery substance to which chips are reduced in his mobile phone is conducted as one of the most scientific practices of observation: the look through the microscope. The microscope allows to magnify the atomic structures of the material world to a point at which the unobservable becomes observable. Pointedly, this function is used here to make visible the effects of invisible magic and prefigures one of the tentative definitions of magic that Grant later adopts: Magic means "[t]he creation of physical effects through the casting of spells" (*Tree* 109). Even though Grant does not produce observable results right away, the experimental set-ups that he describes throughout the series testify to his empirical approach by adhering to standard procedures of verifiability: measurement of parameters, consistency in variables, meticulous check for results (e.g. *Rivers* 196–97). As is often the case with problem-oriented research, thinking over the negative experiment results for a bit finally leads to the "breakthrough" (*Rivers* 198): Magic destroys chipsets only, when they are powered on. Besides protecting his mobile phone from that moment onwards, Grant applies the insights he gains from the experiments with magic and microchips then to his actual job as a police officer. In *Rivers of London*, he is able to explain a fire at a crime scene, which is vital to the case's progress; in *Foxglove Summer*, Grant uses cheap mobile phones dispersed over a wide area as a surveillance mechanism for magical activity; and in *The Hanging Tree*, he weaponises the effect into a spell to disable modern cars used as get-away vehicles.

The desire to measure the intensity of *vestigia* creates another series of experiments of approximating magic with scientific methods whose results are then used in police work throughout the series. *Vestigia* denotes the traces that all uses of magic leave, which are retained by inanimate objects. They correspond to sensory impressions and can be sensed by practitioners of magic. Doing a *vestigia* sweep at a crime scene is therefore usually the start of all cases to which Grant is called, as their presence indicates that the crime was perpetrated with the involvement of magic, thus making the Folly the responsible police unit. The problem that Grant spots early on is that Nightingale and he have nothing to measure *vestigia* with. Again, the observation of a problem is immediately linked to scientific history through one of Grant's frequent 'lectures' for the reader (*Moon* 34). Because *vestigia* manifest as sensory impressions, they create palpable effects that can be sensed and described. As he infers from this and other observations, magic seems to work "within the same framework of physical laws as everything else" (*Moon* 7). Hence, by the reasoning of the natural sciences, their methodology should be able to create scales of measurement for magic,

because, as Grant aptly observes, "[t]he story of how we measure the physical universe *is* the history of science itself" (*Moon* 34; original emphasis). Consequently, he attempts to measure *vestigia* by using a short-haired terrier, Toby, who belonged to one of the murder victims in *Rivers of London* and whose contact with magic seems to have rendered him sensitive for the presence of magical traces, to develop a measurement scale: "I had jokingly developed my own scale for *vestigia* based on the amount of noise Toby made when he interacted with any residual magic. I called it a yap, one yap being enough *vestigia* to be apparent even when I wasn't looking for it" (*Moon* 35). Even though Grant claims that the development of the 'Yap Scale' is a joke, the narration suggests otherwise, as he immediately refines the scale with scientific rigor: "The yap would be an SI unit, of course, and thus the standard background ambience of a Central London pub was 0.2 of a yap (0.2Y) or 200 milliyaps (200mY)" (*Moon* 35).[62] From the beginning of *Moon Over Soho* onwards, the Yap Scale is used throughout the series to indicate the intensity of *vestigia*. While the example again serves to highlight how Grant applies knowledge gained from his scientific experiments to police work, the overall absurdity of the process already indicates the ultimate incompatibility of magic's chaotic character and scientific rigour and exactitude.

Whereas Nightingale warms only slowly to Grant's eagerness to experiment, the latter finds a like-minded spirit in Dr Abdul Haqq Walid, the Folly's physician and pathologist. Like Grant, Dr Walid is interested in the science behind magic due to his profession and the enthusiastic conversations between the two form an important catalyst for Grant's experimental progress. The conversations also force to admit a wide margin of error and accept the tentativeness of all scientific knowledge, and even more so of the 'science of magic'. Nonetheless, the resistant character of magic to scientific methods of knowledge production initially irritates Grant (*Moon* 198; *Foxglove* 297), before he eventually accepts the limitations of scientific methodology in the face of the fantastic:

> [t]he magical tradition I belong to exists in the gap between the observable universe and the rational clockwork creation of the Enlightenment. There's this power. We don't know where it comes from or why it follows the rules it does, but it definitely exists and there are definite ways to manipulate it. Further advances of science have done little to help our

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[62] SI units make up the International System of Units, the modern form of the metric system, which is the only system of measurement that has official status in almost all countries around the world. It comprises seven base units and twenty-two derived units: second (time), metre (length), kilogram (mass), ampere (electric current), kelvin (temperature), mole (amount of substance), and candela (luminous intensity). In 2019, all SI unites have been defined by fixing the exact numerical value of fundamental constants, which have "no uncertainty" (*International* 127–28). Despite the fact that the fixation of invariable constants for all SI units was declared eight years after the publication of *Moon Over Soho*, the construction of the Yap Scale as the fictitious eighth unit in the SI system suggests the magnitude of the effect that quantifying magic would have for the modern scientific community in the storyworld.

understanding, except to add a growing temptation to attach the word "quantum" to everything.[63] (*Value* 53)

In the storyworld of the *Rivers of London* series, the link between quantum theory and magic suggests that magic proves a similarly fundamental change to the conduct of science as quantum theory in our consensus reality, since magic also "introduce[s] an unavoidable element of unpredictability or randomness into science" (Hawking 73). Magic produces observable physical effects, which work "within the same framework of physical laws as everything else" (*Moon* 7), but which nonetheless are "difficult to explain within our theoretical framework" (*Value* 126). Thus, in Grant's words, magic occupies the "gap between the observable universe and the rational clockwork creation of the Enlightenment" (*Value* 53), a liminal space between observable empirical effects and the limits of explainability currently offered by the natural sciences. The theoretical framework's explainability ends with quantum theory, whose element of probability is, in a way, the mathematical description of chaos. In this sense, in the storyworld magic illustrates the boundaries of modern science and highlights that scientific truths are merely hypotheses which stand until disproven. While modern science attempts to structure and to order the universe by measuring it and so produces Foucauldian regimes of truth, magic proves to resist these ordering principles and represents an unavoidable element of chaos. As demonstrated by Grant, the sensible thing to do when confronted with the recognition that absolute certainty is impossible and a certain

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[63] In the quotation, Grant makes clear once again that magic is positioned as simultaneously following rules that can be observed and described by the rational scientific framework developed and established during the Enlightenment era and resisting the very same framework. The set of practices of scientific observation works, but at the same time can only be applied with a crude approximation of scientific accuracy. This resistant character of magic with regard to a scientific framework is likened to quantum physic multiple times during the series (e.g. *Moon* 153). On the level of the story, the alleged link between quantum theory and magic is telling with regard to chaos as an inescapable aspect of science. Quantum theory based on Werner Heisenberg's uncertainty principle "introduces an unavoidable element of unpredictability or randomness into science" (Hawking 73). The uncertainty principle determines that one cannot measure exactly the position and the velocity of a particle at the same time, thus pointing out that, ultimately, "one cannot . . . measure the present state of the universe precisely" (72). The departure from completely deterministic physics that follow from accepting uncertainty at the micro-level of particles encompasses consequences for the macro-level, which are popularised by Erwin Schrödinger's famous paradox thought experiment. Schrödinger declared that a hypothetical cat in a closed box with a small amount of toxin, whose release depends on the uncertain state of a subatomic particle, may be simultaneously alive and dead; certainty as to the cat's state can only by obtained by observation, or measurement. Significantly, quantum theory "does not predict a single definite result for an observation" (Hawking 73) but gives the probability of outcomes. The moment of observation then collapses all probabilities into the observed result. Schrödinger's cat may be, hypothetically, dead and alive at the same time – that is, there is a 50% probability for either result – until one opens the box. Since, as Grant has pointed out, "[t]he story of how we measure the physical universe *is* the history of science itself" (*Moon* 34; original emphasis), introducing uncertainty into measurement shook one of the foundations of modern science and also provides a theoretical basis for the probability approach of risk assessment in the risk society. On a different note, as a literary scholar I would be at fault not to note here that the somewhat obscure link between magic and quantum physics provides Aaronovitch with an easy way out of the logical conundrum of explaining how magic works in his series. By having his protagonist not understand magic thoroughly and by connecting it to a branch of science that would not only make Grant's brain trickle out of his ears but likely those of most of his readers, too, Aaronovitch offers a solution that signals acknowledgement of the theoretical incompatibility of magic and modern science in the extradiegetic consensus reality, but, at the end of the day, the novels are still fiction, so fictitious explanations are acceptable. After all, as a German police officer remarks in *The October Man*: "Well, if you knew how it worked it wouldn't be magic, would it?" (118).

amount of chaos inevitable is to resort to empiricism nonetheless and formulate and test hypotheses to approximate absolute certainty as closely as possible while not mistaking it for some objective 'truth'.

More importantly than recognising the limits of science in the face of the supernatural, Grant is also aware of the harmful consequences of scientific experiments and classification, as the series illustrates with regard to the nomenclature on supernatural beings, which brings to the fore how science actually produces regimes of truth, how they affect people, and how they can change. Over the course of the series, it becomes clear from 'academic' literature on supernatural beings that the scholars working in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were obsessed with their classification:

> The wizards of the Folly, or the Society of the Wise, . . . have never really got the hang of the demi-monde – that strange collection of people and things-that-are-also-people tied to the magical world. Following the predictable mania for classification that gripped them during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, they spent a lot of time talking about proportions of human and good- and bad-faerie blood and then assigning names to the results. (*Tree* 62)

The terminology that resulted from this 'classification mania' stuck despite its inaccuracy (*Tree* 62). Consequently, when Grant begins employment at the Folly, the official denomination for all supernatural beings is *fae*, which, as Nightingale admits right away, "is just a term like 'foreigner' or 'barbarian,' it basically means people that are not entirely human" (*Whispers* 148). The catch-all character of the term *fae* illustrates two issues at the same time: firstly, it implies the arbitrary character of nomenclature *per se*, and, secondly, it points to the consequences that scientific regimes of truth can have for those who are subject to them, which also has implications for their policing, as I will demonstrate later.

The arbitrariness of terms used for classification is a recurring topic in the series. Grant complains more than once that "[i]t didn't help that . . . everybody . . . in the demi-monde couldn't agree on terminology" (*Lies* 29) and determines that "what we needed was some bloody agreement about nomenclature. An EU directive perhaps, looking to harmonise the terminology appropriate to the uncanny on a Europewide basis" (*Whispers* 388–89).[64] That does not happen, of course, due to the secrecy surrounding the existence of magic, and Grant, Nightingale, Dr Walid, and others go on making up their own denominations, thus illustrating that all of them have to be established – or imposed – at some point.[65] The arbitrariness between the designation and the designated is of

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[64] Obviously, *Whispers Underground* was written and published before the EU referendum in 2016. Moreover, as I have illustrated in chapter 4.2.2, the novels take a noticeable pro-European stance, which is also recognisable here despite Grant's tongue-in-cheek tone.

[65] The preliminarity of the existing nomenclature is also pointed out by Dr Jennifer Vaughan, a Welsh pathologist hired by Dr Walid in *The Hanging Tree*, who "had taken one look at the various cataloguing methodologies for the

course inherent in language itself, as Saussure's distinction into signifier and signified has shown. However, when words are used as designations in a classification system, they produce a regime of truth in the sense that the designation determines how the designated is perceived.

This issue is addressed explicitly when Grant and May interview Zachary 'Zach' Palmer, a member of the supernatural community with fairy ancestry, as one possible informant to lead them to their primary supernatural suspect for the murder investigation in *Whispers Underground*. During the interview, Palmer challenges Grant's denomination: "'You know, you guys are the only people that say "fae,"' said Zach. 'Out there we don't call people fae. Not if you want to keep your teeth'" (*Whispers* 342). As the interview proceeds, Palmer emphatically argues for the right to self-naming:

> "The Rivers said you were half goblin."
> "Yeah, I ain't going to say nothing against the Rivers, but they aren't half a bunch of stuck-up cunts, aren't they?" said Zach, getting loud at the end. . . .
> "Is your friend Stephen a goblin, then?" asked Lesley.
> "You shouldn't go around calling people a goblin unless you know what the words means," said Zach, his voice back to its cheery cockney geezer normal. But I could hear the agitation underneath. Plus he'd started drumming his fingers on the tabletop.
> "What should we call them, then?" asked Lesley.
> "You," said Zach, pointing at me and then at Lesley, "shouldn't be calling them anything at all – you should be leaving them alone." (*Whispers* 342)

The emphasis on Palmer's emotions during the interview – the loudness of his voice, the agitation, the restlessness of his fingers – clearly demonstrates that terminology is a sensitive subject in the supernatural community and likely to stir up emotions. His point that the wizards of the Folly should not be calling supernatural beings anything lays bare the historically problematic issue behind classification and sorting that ignores the perspective of those who are classified and sorted.[66] Subsequently, Grant is aware of the fact that "[y]ou've got to be careful when applying concepts like speciation to human beings, or before you know what's happening you end up with forced sterilizations, Belsen and the Middle Passage" (*Foxglove* 21) and starts to argue against the classification of human – or humanoid – beings in general on the basis of the questionability of the Folly' existing nomenclature. The fantastical setting of the novels is thus used to express the idea that classifying and socially sorting sentient beings on the basis of abstractly gathered knowledge without asking their opinion on the designations is always problematic and will possibly lead to

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fae", decided "that they were bollocks" and "been threatening to devise her own system ever since" (*Lies* 66), which she eventually did, "reclassifying everything" (*Lies* 29).

[66] Both the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century obsession with biologism and Nightingale's off-hand usage of "foreigner" and "barbarian" (*Whispers* 148) as explanatory references, which are 'explained' by his socialisation in the racist British Empire, strongly suggest that there are obvious racist undertones in the Folly's nomenclature for supernatural beings, which are elucidated to problematically carry "all the scientific rigour of phrenology" (*Foxglove* 21) and "misinterpreted Darwinism" (*Lies* 29).

inhumane ideologies such as Nazism and inhumane practices such as the eugenic movement and slavery.[67]

While the issue of classification is addressed in the series, as I have shown, it is never entirely resolved. Outright disturbing in this respect is Dr Walid's enthusiasm for collecting tissue samples of nearly every supernatural being that crosses his path (*Tree* 268); an enterprise in which Grant takes part despite his reservations to speciesism. Together they even consider "setting up a database of 'interesting' DNA samples, but apparently there were legal issues. Patient confidentiality and human rights and all that" (*Foxglove* 303). Grant wryly comments that, "for solid historic reasons, I'm not comfortable with dividing people up into groups. But the medical profession cannot sleep easy until it has a category for everything" (*Lies* 66). Thus, the problem that science produces regimes of truth by collecting, sorting, and classifying data that can be harmful to living beings is ultimately justified under the auspices of the medical profession and presented as necessity arising out of a modern sentiment governed by the logic of setting up databases for information storage.[68]

In summary, the fantastical mode of the series is used to interrogate the boundaries of science as an ordering principle. Firstly, magic is shown to possess a chaotic potential that highlights the constructivist character of science, because it resists scientific classification categories. Interestingly, the introduction of magic into what is otherwise a representation of our extradiegetic consensus reality with verisimilitude does not provoke in the characters a renunciation of a rational scientific mindset but a reinforcement of empirical practices. In this sense, Grant proves the model Enlightenment subject, by using his own *ratio* in true Kantian fashion. In addition, the series depicts science as struggling with the problem of categorising supernatural beings in order to understand and, ultimately, control them. As I have shown, the issue is not resolved by the *Rivers of London* series, but Grant's general ethical argument about the dangers of classifying sentient beings points

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[67] Grant drives home this point when Dr Vaughan explains her new classification system. The new system makes use of the three categories of supernatural beings that Palmer had proposed to Grant during his interview in *Whispers Underground* (345–55): beings born supernatural, choosing to be supernatural, and made supernatural. Dr Vaughan uses these three categories and attaches surnames to them that begin with the same letter as the first three letters of the Greek alphabet. Being the Folly's second pathologist, she is usually confronted with supernatural beings when they are dead and unidentified. In addition to the surname, each supernatural individual that lands on her table is given a male or female forename in alphabetical order, thus leading to designations such as "Charlotte Green" or "Barry Brown" (*Lies* 66). Beings in the third category are "[s]ubjects that are not the product of modification, or at least modification of their phenotype" (*Lies* 67), but Vaughan calls them "Green . . . [b]ecause I didn't want to use Gamma as a category name" (*Lies* 66). With his usual tinge of sarcasm, Grant points out that, like the previous system, Dr Vaughan's proposed changes also ignore the perspective of the supernatural beings classified and requests the surname for the third category to be changed to Greenwood, because Green is still too obviously referring to biologic defects caused by gamma radiation. Moreover, Grant points out that "one day we might want to share this data" with the supernatural community and having a nomenclature aware of these issues "will be slightly less embarrassing" (*Lies* 68). This last remark already points to Grant's efforts to open up police practice for community participation, a point to which I will return later.

[68] Similar to the police in this respect, the medical profession is also concerned with risk management and prevention, though focussing on the individual body and not society at large. That there is a certain metaphorical proximity between individual bodies and an imagining of society as an animated organism has been the subject of analysis in chapter 5 and shall therefore not be discussed further at this point.

clearly to the fact that one should be wary of what is justified in the name of science. Taken together, the two aspects of science – its constructivist nature and the questionability of classification systems – that are pointed out with the help of the supernatural in the series can be read as cautioning against a dogmatic belief in scientism, proving instead an argument for an ethical science that is aware of its own limitations and retains the flexibility to adapt if either circumstances or ethics demand change. An element of chaos in the ordering system of science, therefore, is not only unavoidable but desirable. These insights are continuously applied to Grant's approach to policing, thus resulting in similar conclusions about the relationship between those being policed and those doing the policing.

Similar to the natural sciences, the police seek to bring order to otherwise chaotic environments in solving crimes, which are per definition disruptions and violations of a norm, and maintaining public order in general. The police's purpose to solve crimes, that is, to discover 'the truth' at the heart of what happened when a crime was committed, has led to the incorporation of scientific practices since the inception of police forces. Thus, a certain overlap between a scientifically inclined mindset and police work is a *sine qua non* of the profession. However, since the shift in policing from merely solving crimes to attempting to prevent them from happening – a task which can only be achieved with the extensive gathering of information – the meticulous attention to detail necessary for scientific experimentation also shows in the increasing bureaucratisation of police work. It is thus in these two areas where the novels' premise that the supernatural is largely incompatible with scientific classification principles takes effect with regard to the daily work of a police officer. I want to begin with examining the intersection of scientific practice and detection in the area of forensics before proceeding to the bureaucratic aspects of policing and examine each area with respect to its treatment of the supernatural as nonclassifiable in the series.

Grant explicitly acknowledges the role of the police as a political urban actor in its function to "[m]aintain the Queen's peace" and thus "[b]ring order out of chaos" (*Rivers* 16) very early in the series.[69] He views his profession as a calling whose purpose transcends the mundane aspect of earning money. Highlighting Grant's naïveté at the beginning of the series and simultaneously foreshadowing the series' plea for deconstructing binary views of the world, this notion is immediately undercut by the response of Grant's colleague Lesley May: "'What makes you think there's any order?' she said. 'And you've been out on patrol on a Saturday night. Does that look like the Queen's peace?'" (*Rivers* 16). The irony in May's statement hints at the fact that order and chaos are mutually dependent, there is not one without the other. If there were no chaos to measure

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[69] The idea of maintaining the Queen's peace as an activity that brings order out of chaos is taken up repeatedly in the series (e.g. *Moon* 23; *Tree* 48).

order against, how would one identify it in the first place? What is more, May contrasts the idealist idea of a profession as a calling with the, sometimes brutal, reality of the job of being a London copper. Being out on patrol on a Saturday night in central London, she implies, can put one's idealism to a severe test. It is this ambiguity of Grant's profession as a police officer that reinforces the claim the series makes for an equilibrium between binary opposites, as I have already argued with regard to the negotiation of the role of science. Akin to science in this regard, policing is concerned with gathering knowledge and information in the form of evidence to produce another Foucauldian regime of truth, in this case a regime that serves to apprehend and convict perpetrators of crime. Both science and policing are shown to be systems that seek to order an otherwise chaotic reality and both systems come to their limits when dealing with the supernatural, emphasising chaotic improvisation over ordered protocol in the process. The focus on police work in the *Rivers of London* series in combination with the fantastical setting works to transform the elements incorporated from crime fiction into urban fantasy, provides chaotic elements that challenge the otherwise heavily regulated bureaucratic administration of the police apparatus, and poses the question of how to encounter the supernatural population.

One of these elements which revolves around the production of knowledge through gathering information is the importance of forensic science for police investigations, a profession that is practiced by Dr Walid in the series. As the literary scholar Heather Worthington points out with regard to crime fiction, "forensic techniques for collecting evidence have become a staple element" (39), and so also found their way into urban fantasy. Worthington further explains that the increased importance of forensic science and other technology in police work is driven by the importance of evidence in order to assert 'the truth':

> Evidence is . . . a vital part of crime fiction. From the early days of the genre, when evidence was, if unreliable, simple and straightforward, relying on witnesses, aberrant behaviour, the appearance of guilt or force of circumstance, to modern crime fiction with its access to the complexities of forensic science, the drive to discover the facts of the case and correctly apportion guilt and prove innocence has in a sense structured crime narratives and the genre itself. (40)

As the Folly's pathologist, Dr Walid not only considers setting up ethically and legally dubious databases but his autopsy reports of both supernatural beings and victims of lethal use of magic are vital to the progress of the investigations conducted by Grant and Nightingale. In the series, the overuse of magical power is harmful to the human brain, a phenomenon that Dr Walid terms "hyperthaumaturgical degradation" (*Moon* 201).[70] When first encountering a "brain on magic",

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[70] The word *thaumaturgy* stems from the Greek θαῦμα, thaûma ("miracle" or "marvel"), and ἔργον, érgon ("work"), and entered the English language in the sixteenth century ("Thaumaturgy"). It is used in various popular culture works (e.g. *The Dresden Files*) as synonymous with *magic* to give it a more scientific sound, which is perfectly in line with its use in the *Rivers of London* series.

Grant describes it as looking "shrunken and pitted, as if it had been left out in the sun to shrivel" from the outside and "like a diseased cauliflower" from the inside, which Dr Walid then explains in medical terms as "extensive degradation of the cerebral cortex and evidence of intracranial bleeding" (*Rivers* 69), resulting in death by overusing magic. Dr Walid's autopsy examinations for signs of hyperthaumaturgical degradation are featured in all novels in the series and, besides confirming the jurisdiction of the Folly on the case, often generate leads that Grant and Nightingale can follow up in their investigation.[71] The collection of medical data on magic use, and the enthusiasm of the series' forensics in this regard, illustrate the importance of knowledge for daily police work that urban fantasy has borrowed from traditional crime fiction.

In addition to the importance of forensic science for police work, the production of knowledge with accuracy and rigour is reflected in the implementation of tenacious plans of procedure, codes, and best practices. The *Rivers of London* series' fantastical permutation of the crime fiction elements can be roughly described as the supernatural version of a classic police procedural, which is for a large part concerned with the bureaucracy of the job as a police officer (Messent 45; Worthington 72). This sentiment is expressed in Grant's assessment of the daily routine: "Police work is all about systems and procedures and planning" (*Rivers* 261). The fight between the river spirits in the first instalment, for instance, is initially relayed through police radio as "a group of IC1 males dressed in jeans and donkey jackets fighting with an unknown number of IC3 females on Riverside Road" (*Rivers* 96), and its distinctive jargon reminds of the scientific urge for nomenclature and classification.[72] Moreover, references to Grant writing reports and filing evidence abound in the novels. However, nowhere is the need for bureaucratic order through classification clearer than in Grant's description of the Metropolitan Police's information technology system HOLMES 2 (Home Office Large Major Enquiry System), which is used for collecting and processing all the information collected during the investigation of a case: "Everything related to a major investigation is kept on the system, allowing detectives to cross-reference data . . . detectives could now attach evidence photographs, document scans and even CCTV footage directly to what's called a 'nominal record' file" (*Rivers* 21–22). The process is

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[71] The generation of leads through correct autopsy results requires a similarly meticulous medical attention to minute detail as Grant has demonstrated with regard to the experimentation on magical degradation of microchips. Another example of this scientific character of a forensic examination is provided by an episode in which Dr Vaughan takes over the autopsy of a supernatural being from Dr Valid. During the procedure, she directs Grant and Nightingale's attention to relevant aspects: "If you look at this close-up here – see where the brain looks spongy? These are indications of tiny points of tissue damage to the brain" (*Tree* 40). The choice of words – close-up, indications, tiny – communicates the detection work done by a forensic pathologist, which is to uncover what is normally hidden to the eye and retrospectively piece together the information in order to come up with a plausible explanation. The examination of the sometimes harmful consequences of magic through scientific practice underlines once more that magic in the *Rivers of London* storyworld is approximated by a scientific register.

[72] Identity codes (IC) are standardly used by British police during radio communications and describe the apparent ethnicity of a suspect prior to the assessment of that suspect's self-identification. IC1 is the code for white, IC3 for Black people.

dictated by specific regulations, as the data "had to be input in the right format and checked to make sure any relevant details had been highlighted and indexed" (*Moon* 81) in order to be useful. In this sense, Grant describes HOLMES as "a great big computerised mincing machine into which your investigating officers shovel information" (*Foxglove* 83), which illustrates the sheer scope of data and knowledge that is generated during a police investigation. The generation and collection of information data is fuelled by the police's mission to create order out of chaos, that is, to move "from the unknown to the known . . . to the provable" (*Value* 281), which is usually done by gathering as much knowledge as possible in the twenty-first century, as Grant explains: "criminals are mainly caught by systems, not individuals" and "[m]ost of these systems are officially sanctioned and come with virtual folders full of regulations and best practice" (*Lies* 70). Thus, these organisational systems, of which the police are but one example, rely on bureaucracy. Bureaucracy "breaks the complexity [of society] down into a series of interlocking systems", and from the complexity of modern society follows that "[t]he more diverse the functions performed by an organisation, the more complex the interlocking systems and subsystems become" (*Rivers* 286). As a police procedural, the *Rivers of London* series thus constantly draws attention to the bureaucratic aspects of daily police work, which confronts Grant with the tasks to write reports about his activities and file the data he collects.[73]

However, despite the generic emphasis on procedure that comes with borrowing heavily from crime fiction tropes, and despite Grant's well-groomed proclivity for protocol (e.g. *Tree* 51), the series makes clear that bureaucracy is not the ultimate solution for everything but can lead to a bunch of unnecessary tasks instead that actually run counter to their primary intent. "[I]nertia", Grant notes, is "another key characteristic . . . of bureaucracy" (*Rivers* 288). Explaining how tasks are assigned in HOLMES, Grant complains to the reader that

> [t]he police never saw a noun they didn't want to turn into a verb, so it quickly became 'to action,' as in you action me to undertake a Falcon assessment, I action a Falcon assessment, a Falcon assessment has been actioned and we all action in a yellow submarine, a yellow submarine, a yellow submarine.[74] (*Foxglove* 83)

Grant's reference to the well-known chorus of the Beatles' song "Yellow Submarine" illustrates both the repetitiveness of data entry work and its low intellectual demands, which are easy to fulfil if one just remembers the base rhythm. In addition to being simply ineffective, those bureaucratic

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[73] Stefan Ekman makes a similar point in *Urban Fantasy*, when he argues with reference to Anthony Giddens that the reliance on bureaucracy exemplifies urban fantasy's representation of modernity (177–82).

[74] In the storyworld, 'Falcon' is the official call sign for the Folly in use since the 1970s (*Foxglove* 33). Structurally, the branch is an Operational Command Unit (OCU), if only "because nobody knew how else to drop it into the Met's organisational chart" (*Rivers* 286). As such, the Folly is part of the Economic and Specialist Crime Unit, "an admin basket for a load of specialist units" (*Rivers* 32), which is later renamed to Specialist Crime Directorate (SCD). By the time the events in *Broken Homes* take place, it is listed as a Special Assessment Unit (SAU) within the SCD 9 (83). The reorganisation of the Folly within the Metropolitan Police reinforces the impression that the supernatural is difficult to reconcile with mundane classification systems.

systems of everyday policing that Grant describes can "butt[] up against boundaries . . . [and] the official linkages can clog up or break down or just plain fail to exist at all" (*Lies* 71). When faced with the breakdown of official systems and procedures, what is needed according to Grant are "complex webs of interpersonal relationships and traded favours . . . as the quickest way to get the job done" (*Lies* 70–71). For all the merit of orderly procedure, this assessment implies that effectiveness sometimes requires improvisation and the emphasis on the error-prone and thus chaotic human factor over the supposedly more orderly mechanical.

The realisation that bureaucracy is prone to causing inertia and can become stuck in its own rigorous procedures is reinforced by the introduction of the supernatural into the storyworld, which poses serious classification problems for the Metropolitan Police's databases and practice regulations. In relation to Folly investigations, the deleterious effect of magic on technology thus helps understand the underlying argument for "interpersonal relationships" (*Lies* 71) that is advocated by Grant as an alternative of purely bureaucratic procedure. While magic has very tangible consequences on anything that runs on a chipset, the implication behind Grant's reasoning is that the Metropolitan Police's procedures and the reliance of investigations on HOLMES data will inevitably fail in investigations of supernatural crimes. While the "mundane [part] of the inquiry" (*Moon* 121) finds its way into the database, its supernatural aspects must be kept off for two reasons: firstly, because the existence of the supernatural in the storyworld is kept secret, and secondly because it does not fit the categories created by computerised databases. Therefore, while Grant asserts that "criminals are *mainly* caught by systems" (*Lies* 70; my emphasis), not all of them in fact are, and those who are not tend to fall under Folly jurisdiction. Thus, where technology fails, the human element of the investigation – that is, the officers – have to step in and fight crime the 'old-fashioned' way. This special status of the Folly within the Metropolitan Police, partly exempt from rigorous "systems and procedures and planning" (*Rivers* 261), is further underlined by the emphasis on the doubling of reports throughout the series: one official and one supernatural. Even though it is "bad procedure", Grant explains that he has two sets of notes, "the ones that go in my Moleskine and the slightly edited ones that go into my official Met issue book . . . because there are some things the Met doesn't want to know about officially" (*Homes* 84). In addition to the doubling of reports, Grant also has to edit his official case statements, as he exemplarily explains to the flabbergasted local police in Herefordshire during a child abduction case in *Foxglove Summer*, after he and his local contact officer, DC Dominic Croft, have found the missing girls and are about to be statemented:

> [I]t wasn't unusual that me and Dominic had to give statements immediately. What was unusual was that I had to first meet up and discuss exactly what we were going to leave out of the statement. We had that meeting out on the terrace, because then it could be explained away as a cigarette break.

> "We normally do two statements," I told [DCI] Windrow who looked horrified. "One with all the difficult bits left out and one that goes into our files so we have a complete record." (*Foxglove* 207–08)

The horrified look on DCI Windrow's face clearly indicates the status of the Folly within the Metropolitan Police, which challenges and counters the official procedures despite its efforts to adopt official police methodology to its jurisdiction, the "things that fall outside the parameters of normal policing" (*Foxglove* 35). Ever the bureaucratic civil servant, however, Windrow accepts this deviation from normal procedure as yet another established way of doing things: "'If that's the way it's done,' he said, 'that's what we'll do'" (*Foxglove* 208).

Even though the Folly has to do things differently than the rest of the Metropolitan Police and needs a certain degree of flexibility, Grant discovers eventually that "the current Folly operational structure was archaic and not fit for purpose" (*Tree* 202). He has this realisation in common with Deputy Assistant Commissioner (DAC) Richard Folsom and Lady Tyburn, the *genius locus* of the River Tyburn, who both work together to modernise the Folly, albeit on their own terms. These terms mean, in plain language, either a disbanding of the Folly altogether or, if that is out of the question, at least putting constraints on their rather impromptu operating standards. Contrary to Tyburn and Folsom's plans, though, Grant attempts to reconcile the Folly's methods with the chaotic supernatural and the orderly procedures the Metropolitan Police prescribes its members, and draws on his scientific experiments with the supernatural for the knowledge to draw the two seemingly incompatible domains together. Over the course of the series, he escalates from bodging together "a standard form for ghosts . . . on an Excel spreadsheet" (*Whispers* 20) to writing an entire best-practice guide for "*Procedures Relating to Serious Falcon Incidents* a.k.a. *How to Deal with Weird Bollocks*" (*Tree* 177; original emphasis).

Grant's transformative ability to navigate the pitfalls presented by the Metropolitan Police's organisational structure and power hierarchies are exemplified during an administrative meeting after one of the Folly's operations has caused a house in Mayfair to collapse, which DAC Folsom attempts to pin on "the current operational bottleneck caused by lack of suitable Falcon capable resources" (*Tree* 200). Detecting Folsom's own motivation to declare the Folly's members not fit for service and abandon the unit, Grant explains his plans at length in best administrative jargon:

> The Special Assessment Unit has recently instituted a programme of capacity expansion in order to build greater operational robustness and provide a more efficient service to our partner OCUs when dealing with both Falcon and pseudo-Falcon incidents. The first phase of which . . . [involves] [s]trengthening our specialist support, particularly in the forensic and medical area, with a view to providing a continuous on-call service to investigation teams that might need them, coupled with the development of a best-practice guide for use in dealing with suspected Falcon related incidents and investigations . . . In tandem with phase one implementation, the SAU is also developing a consultation document that will

be sent out to all priority Falcon stakeholders prior to being submitted to the commissioner's office for approval. (*Tree* 201)

The clash between the highly coded administrative jargon that Grant uses just for its own sake and the equally coded word *Falcon* lays bare the limits of the administrative structure of the Metropolitan Police whose proponents grapple for control in the meeting. Folsom represents the modern institution which attempts to regulate and control the operations of its units with bureaucratic prescriptions to the point of inflexibility. The absurdity of regulation culminates in the use of an administrative jargon that, if exaggerated to the point of satire as aptly demonstrated by Grant, is rendered almost devoid of meaning. Embedded in the jargon of the Metropolitan Police in the quotation above is the equally coded word *Falcon*, whose concomitant signified in the series is the supernatural. Outside of the text, however, *Falcon* is an empty signifier, as there is no referent in the extradiegetic world. Thus, the supernatural occupies a gap of meaning, that which the bureaucracy of the Metropolitan Police can neither comprehend nor represent because it has no meaning to its procedures. The institution seeks the standardised style, disliking that which does not conform and thus threatens to be not controllable. Consequently, the rest of the administrative jargon Grant uses turns satirical and unveils that the regulation and control that administrative practices appear to convey can also be used to mask over-regulation as an attempt to battle the loss of control. The supernatural resists the control the Metropolitan Police attempts to implement by classifying supernatural crime and fitting it into its operational structure, to which the police administration responds with even more over-regulation. As such, the future conduct of the Folly's investigations discussed at the meeting represents precisely one of these moments when the official system "butts up against boundaries . . . [and] the official linkages can clog up or break down" (*Lies* 71). At this point of breakdown, Folsom then fails to acknowledge the importance of "complex webs of interpersonal relationships . . . as the quickest way to get the job done" (*Lies* 70-71), whereas Grant does recognise them and therefore seeks to modernise operational procedures less radically by reconciling a certain degree of regulated bureaucracy with interpersonal relationships necessary to deal with the supernatural community.

The claim that the Folly's structure is archaic and unfit to fulfil its purpose in the modern world is reiterated directly after the administrative meeting by a member of the Counter Terrorism Command (CTC) (*Tree* 207).[75] Notwithstanding the truthfulness as to the Folly's outdated

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[75] In the conversation Peter and Nightingale have with the CTC officers, magical crime is linked to terrorism thrice: firstly, to "all the new Islamist franchises springing up", secondly, to "the hardy perennials on the far right", and, lastly, to "the unrepentant Fenians" (*Tree* 204). In the prologue of *Lies Sleeping*, DAC Folsom even assesses the threat the magical practitioner Martin Chorley poses "to the Queen's peace" to "match that of the 7/7 bomb attacks" (3). With the outspoken link to international terrorism in the twenty-first century, the discussion of controlling the use of magic at the expense of freedom within the Metropolitan Police mirrors the discourse surrounding the infringement of civil liberties after 9/11 and the 7/7 bombings in the United States and the United Kingdom in the name of public security. These observations also resonate with the findings presented in chapter

structures, Grant and Nightingale realise that the supernatural, regardless of how much Folsom and the CTC would like it to, cannot be pressed into the Metropolitan Police's rigid operational structures, but demands and warrants flexibility. The focus, this suggests, should be on the outcome, not on adhering to procedures just for their own sake. Lesley May makes this point very clear when she accuses Grant of actually following procedure blindly without questioning the logic behind it: "You find out there's a whole world full of weird shit, and you want to make a form for it. A form? Like you can control gods by ticking off boxes. Like you can make a procedure for dealing with monsters. You're so blind" (*Lies* 94). However, at this point in the story Grant has developed from the naïve and unquestioning officer to a critical member of the Metropolitan Police who does challenge procedures when they seem illogical, pointless, or even harmful. May's ignorance of his actual point of view on the matter is quickly exposed by the rest of their exchange which revolves around the horrible death of a baby, Harry Coopertown, during the events in the first instalment, when Coopertown's father threw him out of a window under the possession of the same revenant who later possessed May (*Lies* 94–95). Both May and Grant were horrified by the experience and questioned the meaningfulness of their work, but contrary to May, who eventually chose the way of rogue criminality, the experience led Grant to fulfil his duty to the Folly by the desire to improve things and quell his (scientific) thirst for knowledge, as he explains to Nightingale right after the murder of Harry Coopertown:

> "I've just seen a man kill his wife and child," I said. "If there's a *rational* reason for that, then I want to know what it is. If there's even a chance that he wasn't responsible for his actions, then I want to know about it. Because that would mean we might be able to stop it happening again."
> "That's not a good reason to take on this job," said Nightingale.
> "Is there a good reason?" I asked. "I want in, sir, *because I've got to know.*"
> Nightingale lifted his glass in salute. "That's a better reason."[76] (*Rivers* 72–73; my emphasis)

As this exchange between Nightingale and Grant illustrates, the mere aim to prevent crimes of magic will not make working for the Folly a particularly fulfilling job. Eventually, this is the reason why May turned away from the Folly and joined Martin Chorley, because the inability to prevent supernatural crimes as such and her unwillingness to try to *understand* supernatural beings and the community they are part of caused her to fall prey to Chorley's fanatic vision of a better Britain in

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6.1 that magic can be used as a representational substitute for technology, here for the purpose of combatting terrorism. At the same time, the indiscriminate connection between magical crime and very different kinds of terrorism demonstrates that the supernatural constitutes a semantic placeholder in the storyworld, whose meaning is attempted to be fixed by approximation to known signifiers.

[76] It testifies to the ironical undertone of the series that Grant comes to realise that the rational reason he wants to discover "is often that a wizard did it" (*Foxglove* 35).

which she starts to eventually believe.[77] In contrast, Grant is motivated by curiosity and an understanding for 'the bigger picture' that May never possesses, though she is empathic enough to sense it in Grant from the start of their probationary period (*Rivers* 17).

Ironically, Grant's ability to "see stuff that isn't there" (*Rivers* 17) allows him to navigate the Metropolitan Police as a member of the Folly to an extent that even Nightingale cannot manage. As illustrated by Grant's performance at the administrative meeting, which I have quoted above, he believes that the Folly can indeed work within the operating structure of the Metropolitan Police, if it is only modernised and transformed into a twenty-first-century institution. He advocates for police control of the supernatural community, but measured and controlled itself through the very community which it polices, to whom it is responsible, but who "have no say whatsoever in our conduct of operations", which he criticises as "unsustainable" (*Lies* 148). This argument for community participation has already shone through Grant's uneasiness with the nomenclature imposed on the supernatural community but is now extended to the basis for policing at large. When Nightingale responds that the public does have a say, "in a general sense … through the office of the Commissioner and, beyond him, the Home Office", Grant objects that "[t]hat is not accountability" (148). Nightingale, who is so used to doing things entirely off the record, worries about whether "the general public would make good decisions", whereas Grant recognises that "[t]hat's not the point" (148). Rather, he notices the problems that come with "[t]he secrecy surrounding magic" and "the lack of statutory authority" (148), such as having to let suspects go because legal prosecution cannot be effectuated on the grounds of magical offences (cf. *Tree* 114–15). It contributes to his transformative role in the series that Grant is able to relate to both the necessity of control, regulation, and power in modern police institutions and to the flexibility in procedure that the chaotic nature of the supernatural demands.

In effect, the supernatural is presented as a phenomenon through which the series' claim for flexibility and its rebuttal of overly rigid, controlling structures and categories are articulated. However, the *Rivers of London* series is able to take its argument a step further and also demonstrates the necessity to apply the law from case to case instead of standardising procedures too far and ignoring any instance of individuality. The novels do so by examining the question of human rights and their scope of justice regarding supernatural beings, as I want to demonstrate by way of a brief example. In *Moon Over Soho*, Grant encounters a group of sisters who feed off magic; "an uncharacterised category of thaumovore" (*Moon* 335) in Dr Walid's medical

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[77] The argument I have presented in chapter 4.2.2 focuses more sharply on the nostalgic yearnings which fuel Chorley's, and May's, fanaticism.

classification.[78] At the end of the novel, Grant and Nightingale discuss what to do with the sisters, whose appetite for magic has resulted in mutilations and deaths over the years. Grant points out that his "duty as a sworn constable under the Human Rights Act" prevents him from using deadly force against the sisters if it is not "absolutely necessary" (*Moon* 361), claiming that simply killing the jazz vampires cannot be the solution here: "You can't just off someone because it's more convenient" (*Moon* 362). While Nightingale objects that this line of reasoning presupposes "[a]ssuming that you expand the definition of human being to vampires", Grant reminds him that "it's not our place to make that decision . . . We're just coppers" (*Moon* 361). Instead, he proposes to "get a judgement from the courts or better still have Parliament clarify the law" because "we just can't pretend that the law doesn't exist" (*Moon* 361). Grant's stance here is one that is favourable of an ethical law that protects lives universally. Consequently, he regards Nightingale's argument that the jazz vampires' victims "also had their human rights" (*Moon* 361), and that thus some sort of unofficial death penalty is justified, as unethical.[79] "Either we're the law or we're not" (*Tree* 144), Grant declares, making clear that he regards the law as a binding framework for all living beings, which is not only threatened by supernatural crime but also by a *modus operandi* of the police that favours off-the-record decisions by the executing officers over jurisdiction and accountability. Grant's concern over the lack of statutory authority and public oversight, which he voices more nuancedly in *Lies Sleeping* (148), aptly demonstrates the fundamental problem the Metropolitan Police is presented with by the existence of the supernatural: how can the law be applied and enforced if law enforcement itself cannot be held accountable before the law due to the need for secrecy?

Grant and Nightingale are faced with this question of the law's scope of justice throughout the series. An encounter in *Broken Homes*, when Sky, a young tree nymph, is killed by acolytes of Chorley at Skygarden Estate, presents one last example in my line of argument which further

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[78] Because the three sisters consume magic, Grant, Nightingale, and Dr Walid suspect that they may be similar to a vampire. As jazz music is their favourite source of magic – a connection that is unimportant here – Grant terms them "jazz vampires" (*Moon* 203).

[79] The ends to which the idea that supernatural beings do not possess human rights can lead is rather unsubtly outlined in *The October Man*, which is set in Germany and centres on Tobias Winter, an officer with the *Abteilung KDA*, the German equivalent to the Folly. When Winter's liaison officer Vanessa Sommer is shocked by the fact that the *KDA* does not follow the commonplace risk society logic of keeping taps on all supernatural beings in the population "in case they're a problem" (126), Winter offers an account of the same argument he has had with his director years ago. The director had pointedly asked Winter what he intended to do with the information generated by such an extensive surveillance apparatus: "We keep files on them? Or why not make it simple and require them to carry papers or perhaps sew a symbol on their coats. A scarlet pentagram perhaps. Would that satisfy you?" (126). The obvious analogy to the antisemitic Nuremberg Laws and the Holocaust in a novella set in Germany is used to drive home the point that putting a certain section of the population under general suspicion by virtue of their difference to a perceived norm will inevitably lead to inhumane ends. Instead of such a policy of prevention, Winter answers to Sommer's question what happens when these "ordinary people . . . do extraordinary things" that, in this case, "[y]our boss calls my boss" (126). Policing, Winter argues, begins *after* the crime, not before it, which encapsulates the stance the entire *Rivers of London* series takes with regard to the purpose to which any extensive gathering of information should be put.

elucidates the implications of the thought experiment that the introduction of the supernatural into police procedures proposes. Neckinger 'Nicky' Thames, the young *genius locus* of the River Neckinger, has befriended Sky and upon her death demands retribution:

> "I want them dead," she said. "Dead, dead, dead."
> "No," said Nightingale.
> "That's the law," shouted Nicky, her little hands clenched into fists, her head pushed forward. "Life for a life." (*Homes* 271).

Nightingale's objection to Nicky's call for vigilantism shows how much he has been transformed by working with Grant at this point, since Nicky's argument echoes Nightingale's own reasoning at the end of the events in *Moon Over Soho* concerning the jazz vampires, which took place roughly one year before the events in *Broken Homes*. He and Grant have to enforce a law that in their eyes may apply to all beings, but that parts of the supernatural population deny being subject to, as Oberon, Nicky's guardian, makes unequivocally clear to them (*Homes* 271). I have said before that the series advocates the respect of individuality before the law against depersonalised standardisation, thus demanding an examination of individual cases over general ruling. In the confrontation with Oberon and Nicky, who question the authority of British law in their case and demand vigilantism, Nightingale presents himself as an officer of the law and invokes his personal authority to settle the matter where the system – the law – is not recognised:

> "We will find them and we shall bring them to justice," said Nightingale. "That is the agreement."
> "I am party to no such contract," said Oberon. . . .
> "There will be justice done in this matter," said Nightingale. "My oath as a soldier on it."
> Oberon hesitated and Nicky, sensing the change, turned on him. . . . He looked back at Nightingale. "Your oath as a soldier?"
> "Yes," said Nightingale.
> Oberon nodded . . . "Nightingale," he said by way of farewell, and then he was gone. (*Homes* 271–72)

In this exchange, Nightingale gives a face to the system and thus demonstrates that the law provides a framework that needs to be filled out by actual people; people who, in the end, can be held responsible. He offers Oberon a middle ground between the chaotic system of vigilantism where punishment is delivered without any legal authority and the seemingly impersonal system of modern law.[80] Unfortunately, while Oberon honours the agreement with Nightingale, Nicky is yet

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[80] The opposing stance of Nicky and Oberon on the one side and Grant and Nightingale on the other is reminiscent of Thomas Hobbes's social contract theory. Nicky and Oberon represent what Hobbes called humans' natural state, in which, famously, "*homo homini lupus* [*est*]" ("Epistola" 3). Left unchecked, Hobbes argued, humans will wage war against each other; a state which he called "*bellum omnium contra omnes*" ("Praefatio" 4). To prevent this state of permanent civil war, a society requires a form of government to which people transfer some of their rights by a social contract, for example, the right to commit violence. While Hobbes thought of this position as a single person, an absolute sovereign, in modern states the government represents this function. As officers of the law, Grant and

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too young to understand the abstract concept of the law and social contracts and drowns Sky's murderer as an act of vengeance.

Nicky's disregard for the law enrages Lesley May when she and Grant identify the drowned victim's body at the crime scene, foreshadowing her subsequent defection to Martin Chorley, because she is losing faith in the legal and policing system, claiming that "the law doesn't apply to her [Nicky], or to her mum or to any of these fucking people". The frustration with the perceived unfairness prompts May to ask: "And if it doesn't apply to them, then why does it apply to us?". Grant's answer in this exchange is firm: "Because we're the police" (*Homes* 276–77), which illustrates that, between the three of them, May, Grant, and Nightingale represent different aspects of the police as an actor within the legal system. At the beginning of the series, Nightingale is, as May rightly points out to Grant, "not beyond the occasional human rights violation when it suits him" (*Homes* 277), apparent, for instance, in his willingness to kill the jazz vampires in *Moon Over Soho*. However, Grant's intervention on the side of an ethical law that seeks to protect lives transforms Nightingale to the point that he is willing to offer his own word as an agent of the law to protect the life of a criminal, as the negotiation with Oberon in *Broken Homes* demonstrates, because the alternative that Oberon and Nicky demand, vigilantism, is even less lawful and less ethical. Grant's firm belief in the legal system despite its imperfections and his willingness to apply it case by case testifies to his awareness that even though ordering principles have their boundaries, they should nonetheless provide the framework for encountering different chaotic phenomena such as criminality or the supernatural. However, he recognises the social construction of these phenomena in the first place as well as the necessity to try and test this framework individually time and again, much like he does with his science experiments, because only with an awareness of the system's limitation comes its improvement. May, in contrast, loses her belief in the system altogether when she sees it failing and choses unlawfulness to even the playing field, at least from her point of view. Her unwillingness to look for the middle ground, for the ways in the gaps that the supernatural opens, illustrates one extremist response to the uncertainty created by magic; the other end of the scale is the over-regulation that DAC Folsom attempts to impose on the Folly.

To conclude, the Folly's liminal status within the Metropolitan Police makes it simultaneously part of the modern police apparatus and allows a certain operational freedom. Consequently, Zachery Palmer points out to May and Grant that they are "the Isaacs . . . and that ain't quite the same thing" (*Homes* 260) as the Metropolitan Police. Palmer's identification of the Folly members as "Isaacs" points to the scientific notion that clings to magic and emphasises that, in addition to being "the magic police" (*Tree* 281), Grant, Nightingale, and, at least initially, May

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Nightingale are representatives of the state and call on their monopole to violence, even though Oberon initially claims that he and Nicky are "party to no such [social] contract" (*Homes* 271) and Nicky demands retribution by a primordial law of individual responsibility.

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also seek to advance their understanding of the workings of magic in the scientific tradition of Sir Isaac Newton. The conjunction of science and policing around the supernatural in the *Rivers of London* series serves to enhance the supernatural's potential to challenge boundaries, thus exposing and disturbing the neat binary between a desirable state of order and one of undesirable chaos on which both science and policing rely. Because the supernatural is only rendered meaningful within the text – it has no referent outside of it and remains an empty signifier – it opens up a semantic gap that challenges the framework of scientific, social, and legal designations that govern our everyday lives. However, the series carefully points out that despite these imperfections of the framework that the supernatural brings to the fore, be it scientific or administrative, this framework is still better than any alternative, though it needs constant testing and, if necessary, reformation. This becomes especially clear with regard to the Folly's archaic organisational structure and Grant's motivation to transform it into a swiftly operating unit instead of disbanding it altogether.

Grant's transformative efforts are geared towards making London a better place to live. In particular, he devotes himself to negotiating the needs and desires of the different fantastical factions which have a claim to life in the city. Emblematic for Grant's approach of conviviality is an episode at the end of *Broken Homes*, when the two hitherto rivalling factions of Father and Mama Thames, whose territorial dispute Grant has been able to resolve on his terms without interference by official Metropolitan Police procedures, hold a positively convivial joint Spring Court in the Bernie Spain Gardens on the South Bank. The atmosphere portrayed is one of giddiness and communal festivity, to which all supernatural beings of London are party.[81] When the festivities are over, the way Grant describes the next morning points to a new beginning in the relationships among London's fantastical population: "I woke up in the back seat of the Asbo and, despite that, I felt surprisingly good. Fucking wonderful in fact. I got out of the car and stepped into warm early morning sunlight" (*Homes* 150). Besides the cultural connotations of a new beginning that sunrises hold, it is the transformation of the motto of the Metropolitan Police on its crest – Working Together for a Safer London – which communicates most profoundly the sense that a new era of communal conviviality in London is about to begin, one that is marked by social rules to which everyone is bound and which are policed consensually:

> Lesley tapped me on the shoulder and pointed up at our official Metropolitan Police crest with the reassuring slogan in script. Only someone had altered it while we slept. Someone with some proper skills, because if I hadn't known it had changed I would have assumed it had always read – *Metropolitan Police: Working Together For A Stranger London*" (*Homes* 150; original emphasis).

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[81] I have examined the specifics of the Spring Court festivities with regard to their construction of Englishness in chapter 4.2.1.

'Working Together for a *Stranger* London' is the appeal to incorporate chaos into order and to bear the uncertainty that this involves. The necessity for an equilibrium between chaos and order is characterised by negotiating a middle ground between extremist positions, thereby suggesting that the solution to conflict can only lie in the evaluation and constant adaptation of positions and procedures, not in over-regulating practice for its own sake. Grant's predilection for cooperation and community participation seeks to make London not only safer, as the Metropolitan Police's true motto states, but also stranger – thereby indicating that safe policing does not necessarily entail safety for everyone but is flawed by the power imbalance between the policers, and those they represent, and the policed. In doing so, Grant is able to transform at least the branch of the police which is tasked with responding to supernatural crime. The Folly recognises its role as an actor within a communal urban ecosystem and subsequently subscribes to geopolitics which abandon actuarial and vigilante justice in favour of securing community consent.

6.2.2   London as a Re-Enchanted and Collective Space in the *Matthew Swift* Series

Kate Griffin's *Matthew Swift* series also engages with the culture of surveillance in London through the eyes of its main protagonist, Matthew Swift. As the plot gradually entangles and disentangles over the course of the four novels, Swift remains in firm opposition to London's supernatural institutional bodies, such as the Court of Aldermen and the Minority Council, a sort of urban shadow cabinet, which are implicated in surveillance practices. Although Swift's perambulatory gaze in the series also constitutes a form of watching, this practice is vehemently opposed to the structural surveillance done by the Aldermen and the Minority Council. In doing so, the series rejects the individualising gaze of the institutions in favour of Swift's indiscriminating perception of all aspects and people of the city, including those usually going unnoticed. Thus, Swift's re-enchantment of the technologised urban environment is not just presented as a viable alternative to the entrepreneurial, technocratic perspective on London which indulges the reverie of perfect control but also provides a path towards a sense of urban collectivity lost under neoliberalist capitalism.

To begin with, Swift's perspective throughout the series remains that of an outsider figure, despite his inauguration as the Midnight Mayor in the series' second instalment, which technically puts him in charge of the Court of Aldermen. The Aldermen, however, make it abundantly clear that they regard Swift's appointment as their head a rather temporary arrangement and routinely disregard his instructions (e.g. *Mayor* 331–35, 347–48; *Court* 178–81, 201–03; *Council* 16–23, 93). More importantly, Swift's entire existence positions him as an outsider, as someone who is but from the institutions' perspective should not be in the city, and by this very paradox he earns the credentials of observing that which escapes the administrative elites. Firstly, having been murdered before the narration of the first instalment commences and having been resurrected only by the

fusion of his body with the mind of the blue electric angels, Swift's very existence is something that challenges how things should normally be, as he should be dead but is not. Moreover, the unity of his human consciousness and the supernatural angels within his body posits him as a member of both the human and the supernatural communities. Secondly, he never has a home nor a permanent place of address throughout all of the four novels, which puts him in the marginalised position of someone who is homeless (cf. *Madness* 13).[82] In this respect, Swift is consistently able to negotiate with other marginalised communities in London, such as the Whites (a loose coalition of misfit magicians, who mainly use graffiti to perform magic), the Downers (a subterranean clan drawing their magic from the hidden things at night), the Tribe (magical outcasts who gain their magic from disfiguring themselves), and the beggars.

In this respect, Swift can be construed as a representative of the figure of the *chiffonnier*, or ragpicker, as it has been theorised in modernist and postmodernist thought. As a figure of thought, the ragpicker should not be conceived of as someone literally picking rags, but, while emerging from this profession, someone who has come to represent an outcast perspective on the city more generally.[83] In this sense, the ragpicker has become an "epistemological and scopic metaphor" (Parsons 2), the "vagrant counterpart" to the paradigmatic figure of the bourgeoise *flâneur* who "register[s] the city as a text to be inscribed, read, rewritten, and reread . . . as a scavenger, collecting, rereading, and rewriting its history" (Parsons 2; cf. also Krause 34). The eminent modern urban theorist Walter Benjamin explicates this relationship between the ragpicker and the urban writer in reference to Charles Baudelaire's poem *Le Vin des Chiffonniers* in a much-quoted passage from *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*: "the poets find the refuse of society on their street and derive their heroic subject from this very refuse. . . . Ragpicker or poet – the

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[82] The marginalisation of the homeless has been theorised extensively, e.g. from a historical perspective by Alistair Robinson's *Vagrancy in the Victorian Age: Representing the Wandering Poor in Nineteenth-Century Literature and Culture* (Cambridge UP, 2022). Moreover, Kathleen Arnold has proposed to view the homeless in contemporary cities as "uncanny neighbour[s]" (55) by virtue of representing a familiar urban other to the social and politico-economic values of neoliberal capitalism. Homelessness, Arnold writes, posits an unresolved relation to the political and economic norms of the home as capitalist property, thus positioning the homeless "as the opposite of qualities valued for citizens" (55) under capitalism. This sense of alterity as simultaneously possessing aspects of strangeness and familiarity allows her to theorise homelessness through the lens of the uncanny. Similarly, Matthew Beaumont asserts in his history of nightwalking in London that homelessness was seen in the nineteenth century, and to a certain extent continues to be seen, as "a means of uncovering the dark side of the city" (9), which "became uncommon" at night as it "acquired the lineaments of a landscape both intimately familiar and strange" (10). Beaumont's book traces the history of the nocturnal wanderer through the centuries, from the criminalised, homeless vagrant to periodical journalists and proclaimed authors such as William Blake and Charles Dickens, who "adopted the outcast associations of the nightwalker and took to the streets of the city at night" (9). In *Strategies of Fantasy*, Brian Attebery provides a short reading of Megan Lindholm's *Wizard of the Pigeons* (1986), a precursor of urban fantasy, which also revolves around a homeless character who can do magic (133–41; cf. also Ekman, *Urban Fantasy* 76–81).

[83] Barbara Thums has rightly pointed out that the social and historical significance of the ragpicking profession had first to be diminished in the nineteenth century in order to turn the ragpicker into the aesthetic figure of thought it has become (549).

refuse concerns both" (79–80).[84] While the *flâneur* apparently translates the plenitude of signifiers of "the chaotic and fragmentary city into an understandable and familiar space" (Parsons 2) from his hegemonic, bourgeoise, and rational position, the ragpicker seems the more astute observer of the postmodern city as a "signless place of directionless nomads" (9). The ragpicker, in other words, offers a distinctive poetology of the postmodern metropolis, one of fragmentary experience which favours the disparate and the kaleidoscopic in order to acknowledge the impossibility of narrating stringently the illimitability of contemporary cityscapes. In contrast to the *flâneur*, the ragpicker is positioned to narrate that which is usually exempted and excluded from observations of the metropolis, which in this way "re-enters culture as a sign in the literary text" (Jaekel 225; my translation).[85] The ragpicker's proximity to the *flâneur* thus becomes first and foremost a methodological one. Both are figures who *walk around* in the city and who, in their aleatory wanderings, proffer their ambulatory gaze as a phenomenological method.[86]

The theoretical lens of the ragpicker helps grasp Matthew Swift's perspective on London in Griffin's series. Swift's perspective on the city is that which Michel De Certeau has identified in his famous essay on "Walking in the City" from *The Practices of Everyday Life* as that of the walker, who individuates the city text through the necessarily selective practice of picking a pedestrian route through the urban space (De Certeau 100–05; cf. also Löffler 40). Consequently, page-long descriptions of Swift's diurnal and nocturnal perambulations through London abound in each instalment of the series (e.g. *Madness* 40–44; *Mayor* 158–61, 200–02; *Court* 99–103; *Council* 140–

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[84] In Baudelaire, one reads: "On voit un chiffonnier qui vient, hochant la tête, // Butant, et se cognant aux murs comme un poète // Et, sans prendre souci des mouchards, ses sujets, // Epanche tout son coeur en glorieux projets". The 1954 translation of the collection in which the poem appeared in 1901, *Les Fleurs du Mal*, by William Aggeler (*The Flowers of Evil*, Academy Library Guild) translates this passage as follows: "One sees a rag-picker go by, shaking his head, // Stumbling, bumping against the walls like a poet, // And, with no thought of the stool-pigeons, his subjects, // He pours out his whole heart in grandiose projects". Michel De Certeau draws a similar connection between the act of walking in the city and the act of writing a text by referring to speech act theory when he proclaims "walking as a space of enunciation" (98), eventually concluding that "[t]here is a rhetoric of walking" (100). The quotation by Benjamin provides the link between the homeless and the ragpicker, on which I am drawing here, as it positions the ragpicker – like the homeless – as an outcast figure (see in this regard Benjamin's review of Siegfried Kracauer's novel *Die Angestellten* (*The Salaried Masses*), which is titled "Ein Außenseiter macht sich bemerkbar" and thereby draws explicit attention to the marginalised position of the ragpicker). The poet, especially if peregrinating at night, occupies the same scopic level, as the association is between the nocturnal vagrant and an outsider perspective that can be creatively appropriated by journalists, poets, and novelists.

[85] See also in this regard Walter Benjamin, who writes about the methodology of his *Arcades Project*: "Method of this project: literary montage. I needn't *say* anything. Merely show. I shall purloin no valuables, appropriate no ingenious formulations. But the rags, the refuse – these I will not inventory but allow, in the only way possible, to come into their own: by making use of them" (460; original emphasis). The narrative voice in the *Matthew Swift* series creates a similar impression of appropriating every aspect of the city for its urban poetology, including, for instance, graffitied tags on the walls in different fonts (e.g. *Madness* 16–17; *Mayor* 14).

[86] This observation positions the ragpicker and the *flâneur* as figures of thought in the vicinity of psychogeography, "a tool to explore the nexus between the human psyche and the geographical environment" (Löffler 42). The method owes much to Raymond Williams's observation in *The Country and the City* that perceptions "of the modern city had been associated, from the beginning, with a man walking, as if alone, in its streets" (233). Developed by members of the Situationist International, Guy Debord proposed the *dérive* (drift) as psychogeographic variation of *flânerie*. For an introduction to psychogeography, see Merlin Coverley's influential *Psychogeography* (Pocket Essentials, 2006). The mode of narration in *Matthew Swift* owes some of its features to the method, but I am not intending to undertake a psychogeographic reading here.

46). However, due to the sheer size of contemporary London, walking is no longer the only, nor the most efficient, method available for movement. Although Swift is by far the character in all of my corpus texts who moves the most on foot, his wanderings are interspersed with episodes in which he takes the Tube, and these episodes are narrated in a similarly fragmented style as his pedestrian ambulation (e.g. *Court* 76–80), which redresses the notion that Tube journeys are purposeful movement and walking alone is aleatory.[87] Thus, in the *Matthew Swift* series, the protagonist's preferred forms of moving through London are imbued with the same scopic qualities, that is, the perspective of the peregrinating walker on the street.

In "Walking in the City", De Certeau contrasts the perspective of the walker at street level with the voyeur, who views the city from above, and it is this distinction which can also be found in the *Matthew Swift* series. The view from above is that of the city planners or cartographers, who "must disentangle [themselves] from the murky intertwining daily behaviors and make [themselves] alien to them" (De Certeau 93) in order to attain a totalising perspective on the city. De Certeau describes this view as a "panoptic" or "god-like" vision, "the exaltation of a scopic and gnostic drive" (92), which allows one not only to see the city as an abstracted whole but also – precisely because the city appears as a coherent and organised space from this vantage point, where complexities and nuances of daily human activity are simplified into patterns and structures – constitutes a position of control which relies on the abstracted knowledge provided by the visual position of power.[88] Later in the same essay, De Certeau returns to the question of urban control and addresses the affective qualities of an urban space whose complexities have been reduced by technocratic managerialism through the metaphor of light and darkness:

> the city . . . is transformed for many people into a "desert" in which the meaningless, indeed the terrifying, no longer takes the form of shadows but becomes . . . an implacable light that produces this urban text without obscurities, which is created by a technocratic power everywhere and which puts the city-dweller under control (under the control of what? No one knows). (103)

De Certeau suggests that the source of terror in urban environments no longer lies in the fear of the unknown and unknowable which lurks in the metropolis's shadows, but arises from the attempts at achieving total control of the population through knowledge gathered by technology. Written in 1984, this passage eerily predicts the route towards the ubiquity of urban surveillance

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[87] Throughout the four novels, Swift rarely travels by car, and if he does, it is always as passenger in someone else's car. In general, journeys by car through London are closely connected to figures of municipal authority across all of my corpus texts. Consequently, Peter Grant and Thomas Nightingale, as police officers, prefer and own cars in the *Rivers of London* series, and Nathaniel also is assigned a car and driver when he takes up his government position in *The Golem's Eye*. Alex Verus, in contrast, who also represents the individualised perspective on London, travels by Tube or uses magical methods of transport (flying or gating, a form of magical teleportation). In contrast to Swift, however, Verus exclusively moves through the city with a specific purpose and destination.

[88] This observation echoes my argument from the previous chapter 6.1.2 about elevated positions as signifiers of surveillant control in the *Alex Verus* series.

used for managing and administrating purposed that urban governance has taken since the mid-1980s, as I have argued throughout this chapter.

In Griffin's series, this totalising administrative perspective is represented by the magical equivalent to the Court of Aldermen, presided over by the Lord Mayor of London's magical counterpart, the Midnight Mayor.[89] As such, the Midnight Mayor and the Aldermen form London's magical government, who retain executive, legislative, and judicative powers and whose jurisdiction extends well beyond the square mile of the City of London. While there is no magical police force in the series in the narrower sense, the Aldermen are introduced in *The Midnight Mayor* interviewing Matthew Swift in an unmistakably police-like fashion and are referred to as the "[p]rotectors of the city. The ones who do whatever it is that is necessary for the city to be safe" (*Mayor* 61). Thus, as the highest authority within London's magical hierarchy, the Aldermen not only symbolise traditional power but are directly responsible for maintaining order, for making and enforcing the laws of the magical community in London, and thus wield considerable control over magical activities in the city.

This managerial and authoritative position is spatially reinforced by the location of their headquarters, which is disguised to the nonmagical public as a trust fund office and located in a high-rise overlooking Aldermanbury Square, in close proximity to both the old city wall and Guildhall, London's old city hall. The disguise as a trust fund already betrays the Aldermen's entrepreneurial approach to the governance of London; an impression which is reinforced throughout the series. Swift's first trip to the head of the Aldermen's office, Mr Earle, further illustrates the emphasis on verticality, which conveys the surveillant position above the city:

> The lift . . . crawled up the side of the building, faced outwards to the falling city below. Aldermanbury Square became just a blob within a maze of streets, alleys, bus-clogged roads, cranes, building works, Victorian offices and gleaming new towers, and then lost amid the snake of the river and the sprawl of the city. (*Mayor* 328)

The details of the city streets, visible as they are in the narration of Swift's perambulations through London, vanish as the lift elevates him to Mr Earle's surveillant perspective over the city. What is more, the narration not only indicates the elevated position as one of ocular totalism, but makes it explicit as it continues: "Earle's office was on the very top floor. From there, presumably, he could stare down and survey all his little people toiling below, from his nest of triumphant endeavour" (*Mayor* 328). The connotations clearly are that Mr Earle, as the representative of the Aldermen

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[89] The terminology requires some clarification: The Lord Mayor of London is a ceremonial figure representing the City of London, not to be confused with the Mayor of London, who has executive powers over the entire Greater London Area. The Lord Mayor of London and the City of London Corporation, of which the Court of Aldermen is part, govern the City of London with a focus on maintaining its status as a financial hub, whereas the Greater London Area is governed by the London Assembly and borough councils in each of the 32 individual boroughs. This unique status of the City of London, the 'Square Mile', dates back to the Anglo-Saxon period and is guaranteed in Magna Carta's clause IX. In the magical London of Griffin's series, there is no such distinction in jurisdiction.

more generally, occupies a position of power and authority, which is expressed spatially through the elevated position of the Aldermen's offices overlooking London. This totalising perspective of voyeuristic managerialism quite literally loses sight of the little details down below on the city streets to which Matthew Swift, in contrast, devotes considerable attention as the reader wanders London's streets with him.

In the conversation between Swift and Earle that subsequently ensues, the latter modifies Swift's previous conception that it is indeed he alone who surveys London, explaining patiently and elaborately the very transition from surveillance society to the culture of surveillance that David Lyon has proposed for our extradiegetic consensus reality on a theoretical level.

> "Mr Swift," he said, . . . "do you know *why* Big Brother isn't watching you? . . . Because, Mr Swift, *because*, in this city there are anywhere between eight and nine million other people to watch. In a single day, tens of thousands of people will pass through one Underground station alone; in a single week, hundreds of thousands, all moving, all turning. Millions of vehicles every month will pass in and out of the congestion charge zone, *millions* . . . Big Brother isn't watching you, Mr Swift, because there's just too much for Big Brother to keep an eye on. You are . . . not important." (*Mayor* 330; original emphasis)

Earle's elaborations highlight the vast technological surveillance assemblage which is at his and the Aldermen's disposal for locating individuals who in their view need locating. CCTV at underground stations and ANPR cameras monitoring the entry and exit of vehicles into Central London are only emblematic for the vast network of surveillance technologies which covers the city. However, the relevant point for the administrative perspective informing Mr Earle's statement is the last sentence: While the social sorting of surveillance technologies aims at the individualisation of the city's inhabitants, the individual is, ultimately, not important; it is the bigger picture on which the Aldermen are focused in their task of 'protecting' the city.

In its capacity of breaking free from realist narrative conventions, the series subsequently abstracts this logic of the protection of the city to the point where it degenerates into an end itself. From the Aldermen's point of view, any acknowledgement of the individual's position in a greater community of people is denied. In their perspective, what characterises the city, which they serve to protect, is not its inhabitants but its material structures, as Earle makes clear to Swift in the remainder of their conversation:

> To become an Alderman requires . . . an understanding of the smallness of man within this great machine of the city. London is an antheap, Mr Swift. It is a great, sprawling, beautiful nest, built by two thousand years of man . . . There is nothing that binds these ants together, that stops them from ripping each other apart, save that they share the same structure, the same city, the same physical structure that only exists because, for two thousand years, the ants have carved. We are tiny, Mr Swift. We are insignificant, living in a world of life and wonder and miraculous existence and excitement, not because of who we are, or whom we know, but because the construction around us, the bricks and stones of London, shapes

and guides us, and gives unity to the millions of strangers who inhabit its caves, so we can all say, "I live in the city". (*Mayor* 332)

According to the logic of the Aldermen, London shapes its inhabitants in their identity. What Londonness means, then, is not tied to its inhabitants, who seem to passively absorb a prefabricated sense of Londonness upon moving to the city. Rather, Earle argues, it is the physical structure and its historicity which make London what it is. Thus, he drives the structural metaphor of the antheap further to deduce the position of Aldermen among – or rather above – the rest of London's inhabitants. Being an Alderman, according to Earle,

> is about dedication. To an idea; to a cause bigger than any individual. . . . this is what the Aldermen are. We are the ants who climbed to the top of their hill, who looked down from the highest tower of the maze and saw the darkness and the time and the caverns, and realised the smallness of man within this heaving world. (*Mayor* 332)

With this self-description, Earle returns to the visual allegory of gazing down from an elevated position, which links to the literal meaning of surveillance. In summary, then, his managerial view can be described as favouring what De Certau has described as the perspective of the voyeur and which David Harvey sees characteristic for an entrepreneurial urban governance that is dictated by economic rather than humane concerns ("Managerialism" 4–5). As a representative of the Aldermen at large, Mr Earle is someone who looks at the city from above, who loses sight of the individual(s) at street level, and who sees patterns and structures rather than people. Consequently, among London's magical community, the perception among London's supernatural denizens is that the Aldermen and the Midnight Mayor "protect[] the city, not the people" (*Council* 115), as "[t]heirs is a world of numbers and ideas, of big problems and bigger solutions, of what is best for the majority and of prices that must be paid" (*Council* 189).

However, favouring the allegedly critical distance of the voyeur's surveillant position results in ignoring the individual, as Swift well knows: "Spend enough time concentrating on the big picture and, sooner or later, you'll forget about being human" (*Council* 247), he tells the Aldermen. Swift's words at this point build on the experience of having met the Alderwoman Anissina during the events in *The Midnight Mayor*. She has lost faith in the proper workings of the city and, unbeknownst to her colleagues, has switched sides to aid the novel's principal antagonist, a mythical force styled as the Death of Cities, who takes the mundane form of Mr Pinner. The events in the novel are kicked off when a teenager steals the head of a traffic warden, Penny Ngwenya, who is an urban sorceress but does now know about her power. Thus, she unwittingly summons the Death of Cities when she complains about the hardships of her job – not only having her hat stolen but also being spat at and verbally abused by other Londoners because of the job she is doing. In conjunction with her magical powers, Ngwenya's suffering fuels the Death of Cities, who subsequently tries to eradicate London as a supposedly corrupted city. Anissina, who as an

Alderwoman is tasked with protecting the city, succumbs to the view that the Aldermen's approach to administration has failed and that hence London is corrupted beyond redemption. In Mr Pinner's efforts to eradicate London, she sees the possibility for a fresh start, and thus aids him in his apocalyptic endeavour. During the climax of the novel, in a passage titled "Third Interlude: Damnation, Contempt and Traffic Wardens", Anissina uses the example of Ngwenya to explain to Swift the causal correlations between London's allegedly failed social network and its looming downfall, that is, how contempt caused damnation:

> Strangers beat, robbed and spat at her, faces she will never see again, and who will never see her, too many million between her and them. They did it not for who she was, or why she was, or what she was - but because she was there and they did not have to care for her, a stranger. A cruelty without consequence, a deed without responsibility. (*Mayor* 473)

For the sorceress Ngwenya, the last act of cruelty, the theft of her hat, is the straw that breaks the camel's back. She demands for her hat to be given back and in the world of Matthew Swift, where every mundane aspect potentially carries supernatural power, this seemingly innocent demand is imbued with the magic of her emotions and becomes the equivalent to cursing the city and bringing Mr Pinner to the scene:

> She stood on the bridge and saw the magic of the city, a harsh, cruel, unloving thing, stood alone and cried as a hundred strangers ignored her, and came to realise that this city, this place she had thought so beautiful, was a diamond she could never possess. A gleaming ornament on someone else's glittering coat. A thing bought with money, carved out with blood, cold, beautiful, unyielding, cruel. (*Mayor* 474–75)

As the title of the interlude indicates, the contempt Ngwenya suffers from other Londoners is tightly linked to her profession, a traffic warden. As Anissina subsequently explains to Swift, professions such as this are crucial in keeping the city a functioning system, yet the people who occupy these central positions tend to be overlooked – or actively ignored – in daily life. This scopic regime of ignorance contributes to the feeling of estrangement in urban environments:[90]

> Damnation upon the cruelty of strangers, she breathed, curses on the unkind unfamiliarity. . . . Hundreds of people must have heard. But as we avoid seeing the cleaners, the dustbin men, the drivers, the road painters and the sewage workers, no one heard. (*Mayor* 475)

The contempt and disregard with which Ngwenya is met in her function as a traffic warden prevents her from being seen as an individual. The irony that this is exactly the point of view which the Aldermen take, as previously espoused by Mr Earle, is not lost on Anissina either, who triumphantly points out to Swift that the Death of Cities is the eventual result of such an approach:

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[90] In his famous essay "The Metropolis and Mental Life", Georg Simmel has also observed this practice of deliberate ignorance in the city. He termed it 'blasé attitude' and theorised it as a sort of coping mechanism with the sensory overload one is presented with in the city. Here, in the *Matthew Swift* series, this blasé attitude is explored in its consequences towards our fellow urbanites and indicative of a decidedly un-communal attitude in the contemporary metropolis, which gives way to a scopic regime built around ignorance and contempt.

It summoned him, brought him up out of the streets, built him from the papers drifting in the wind, stitched the suit to his flesh and the fury to his soul, bound him to one purpose, and one purpose alone - damnation on this city! He is the tool of her vengeance, the vehicle for this city's demise. . . . Mr Pinner - the death of cities - is Ngwenya's revenge made flesh. . . . She said, a curse on the unkindness of strangers, and the city is nothing more than a commune of strangers, eight million of them, each of whom will never know more than a few hundred faces, a tiny sliver of a per cent of all that there is to know, who will never walk more than a few hundred streets, a fraction of the hive. (*Mayor* 475–76)

The last part of the quotation echoes Mr Earle's allegory of the antheap, but in contrast to her superior Anissina acknowledges the consequences such a perspective on the city entails. In a very long and quite passionate speech she outlines to Swift that the very fact that so many different people were, and to a certain extent still are, able to live together in one place for so many years – she references London's two-thousand-years-long history – is "a miracle" (*Mayor* 476). The acts of contempt, which threaten the city, thus are all the more worthy of condemnation:

How *dare* anyone, anyone who lives in this city, how dare they ignore the miracle? How dare they shrug and say, "whatever"; how *dare* they forget the size, the beauty, the wonder, the scale, the life, the vibrancy, the glory, the miracle! How *dare* a stranger spit in another's face, how dare a stranger strike a woman down, knowing it is cruelty without consequence, how dare you throw your litter into the street and wait for the cleaner to pick it up, how dare you park your car and shrug at the rules, how dare you scream at the policeman, how dare you curse the bus driver, how dare you steal a traffic warden's hat, how dare you show such *contempt*? (*Mayor* 477; original emphasis)

The repeated emphasis on the word *dare* in the quotation accentuates that what Anissina decries here is not a question of criminality or lawfulness, but one of morality. The city is a conglomerate of people "pressed in like lovers" (*Mayor* 476) whose cohabitation can only work, she suggests, if a set of morales is observed that guarantees mutual kindness. Contempt and estrangement are, in this fantastical world quite literally, fuel for the city's demise. As a defected Alderwoman, Anissina's condemnation of such an estranging approach to urban governance resonates all the more powerfully.

In talking to Swift, however, Anissina is preaching to the converted. Swift very much agrees with her point and drily responds after her passionate speech that "I'd figured a good part by myself" (*Mayor* 478). Where he disagrees are the conclusions Anissina draws from the realisation that a London ruled by contempt and "the cruelty of strangers" (*Mayor* 478) – a repeated phrase throughout the climax of the novel – is invariably an inhospitable environment. Anissina does not strive to improve the conditions she so decries but disavows her position as Alderwoman and aids Mr Pinner in the hope that the Death of Cities may bring about a complete but radically destructive change. Her apocalyptic position indicates that the only way to improve London she recognises is

erasing the status quo and starting from scratch.[91] Matthew Swift, in contrast, recognises the immorality of such a suggestion through the fantastic entity in his body. The blue electric angels narrate the following response to Anissina's proposition of letting Mr Pinner destroy London, which they reject as inhuman:

> "Fire and fury," we sighed. "People say these things as if they were meant to make us feel ashamed. As if a bomb going off were not, secretly, obscenely, immorally, indefinably, beautiful. We are not permitted by the customs of this world to say such things. It is regarded as unhealthy. (*Mayor* 479)

The blue electric angels recognise Anissina's desire for a fresh start and acknowledge that a cleansing fire can hold a certain appeal. However, one must not give in to this desire, they claim, because such a totalising reasoning is fundamentally flawed by tarring everyone with the same brush.[92]

Such an economical logic also dictates the actions of the remaining Aldermen, who seek to kill Penny Ngwenya in the hope that eliminating the sorceress who summoned the Death of Cities will also eradicate the supernatural threat to the city's future. However, Swift refuses outright and exposes, not without irony, that the inhumanity of the Aldermen's proposed solution is not dissimilar from the contempt and estrangement that prompted Ngwenya to unwittingly summon the Death of Cities in the first place.

> "We could have killed her, sorcerer," growled Earle.
> "Yeah. The most efficient strategic solution in response to the onsite risk assessment analysis. . . . A stranger kills a stranger and that's it, goodbye, goodnight, end of the line. Cold, efficient – very financial. As cruel and distant as mankind can ever really get. We will not sink to your level." (*Mayor* 498; original emphasis)

The denunciation of Earle's approach as financial and predicated on risk assessment makes his entrepreneurial perspective apparent. From his high vantage point in the office tower, Mr Earle crunches the numbers and disregards the individual, not unlike the people at street level who wilfully disregard the individuals who keep the city running. As a result, he has become so accustomed to thinking in terms of economic risks and benefits that he cannot eschew this logic even when it comes to judging the value of human lives. Swift, however, refuses to kill Penny Ngwenya, and presents himself to Mr Earle as an agent of change who breaks with established ways of doings things among the Aldermen:

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[91] In this, her reasoning echoes similar sentiments I have excavated in my analysis of Jonathan Stroud's *Bartimaeus* novels in chapter 6.1.1, in which the imagination of the cleansing fire is indeed actualised.

[92] The final confrontation with Mr Pinner takes place in the middle of the City of London and, after having held him off, Swift passes the Monument and remarks in passing that it was testament "to another time when the death of cities had come to London, another burning, another loss" (*Mayor* 529). The casual remark puts the current crisis in the storyworld in historical context and reinforces Swift's point of view that simply burning down London cannot be the solution to whatever one perceives to be wrong with the city, as after the Great Fire London now finds itself in the exact same predicament. Thus, a different solution has to be found.

> Every bloody stranger in the fucking city has been telling me [that] I am a disgrace to everything that the office [of Midnight Mayor] used to be, to the bigger picture, to the sensible solution, to the pragmatic deeds, to the necessary sacrifice, to the stones and the streets! And good! Frankly, excellent! I am honoured to have got this brand on my hand and be able to say with it, up yours, this is the big city! We exist to change the rules, and here I am, changing one now! (*Mayor* 497)

He then proceeds to finding the traffic warden's hat and restores it to Ngwenya as an act of kindness, which ultimately proves crucial in defeating the Death of Cities. It is merely consequential that neither Anissina nor Mr Earle survive the final conflict in the novel and are denied narrative validation of their reasoning in an act of poetic justice. Instead, it is Swift who prevails and *The Midnight Mayor* ends on a note of cautious optimism, as Swift is more confident in his abilities and his understanding of London's intricate magical connection to its inhabitants.

This understanding is again put to the test during the series' final novel, *The Minority Council*, which presents another example of how deeply the entrepreneurial perspective of the Aldermen is implicated with the desire to control London through extensive technocratic surveillance practices. The titular Minority Council turns out to be a clandestine political organisation run by Aldermen who feel neglected and marginalised by Swift's current magical governance informed by humane instead of economic concerns, chief among them Richard Templeman. As crime rates rise in London, unbeknownst to Swift the Minority Council sets up a neighbourhood watch project called Neighbourhood Eye, which is advertised to London's citizens as "the community support group for citizens concerned about crime" (*Council* 105) whom they can call whenever something suspicious happens in their area. However, the project turns out to be a magical death squat, dispatching an insectoid magical creature called 'the Culicidae' which kills the 'perpetrators'. As the neighbourhood watch system is disproportionally used by elderly citizens in London's rather affluent boroughs, their sense of criminality focuses on loitering teenagers who have not objectively violated the law, which is why the Neighbourhood Eye is informed and not the police. Swift is made aware of the – at this point mysterious – teenagers' deaths by a social worker to whom the Aldermen pay no attention when she comes to their headquarters. Subsequently, Swift gradually discovers that "the Neighbourhood Eye and the Aldermen are one" (*Council* 189), and that the Culicidae has run out of their control. When he confronts Templeman about the issue, the Alderman attempts to justify the project as an effort to "pacify . . . the community at large" (*Council* 197). Swift's irritation at the euphemistic choice of words shows in his immediate reply, which exposes Templeman's reasoning as disguised logic of pre-emptive policing and apportioning actuarial justice: "Isn't that what the Americans said about the Iraq War?" (*Council* 197). As Templeman continues to justify the project, its inhumane premises become even more apparent: "we hoped to remove deviant members of our society before they

had a chance to harm others" (*Council* 197). The problem behind this idea of actuarial justice, as Swift is quick to point out, is the definition applied to deviance, which Templeman clarifies as referring to people under 25 exhibiting "aggressive tendencies" and "a loss, as it were, of control" (*Council* 197–98) – in our extradiegetic consensus reality this is often rendered as 'anti-social behaviour'. The Culicidae, Templeman explains, was designed not to kill but to "cure" (*Council* 197), that is, "to draw from the subjects certain aspects of their nature which cause distress to others, as in, for example, their rage, fury, resentment, fears" (*Council* 198). Swift will have none of it, and attempts to make Templeman aware of the horrifyingly essentialist assumptions he and the other members of the Minority Council are making about what it means to be a teenager:

> "Can you hear yourself?" I blurted. "Pacify, neutralise 'deviant members of our society'? Fifty years ago you'd be hunting homosexuals; a century back, you'd be going after suffragettes! . . . Cure them? Cure them of what? Of youth, of bad dress sense, of drinking, of drugs, of smoking, of sitting on street corners, of trying to pull girls, of spotty skin and swearing? Cure them of *what*?" (*Council* 197–98; original emphasis)

The very idea of actuarial justice, which has taken hold not only in the Minority Council but, as I have explained at the outset of this chapter, is the principle increasingly governing policing in the risk society, has serious and harmful flaws, which threaten established democratic principles. Swift tells Templeman as much, thus building a case for consent in community policing projects such as Neighbourhood Eye: "[What about d]ue process? Rule of law? Innocence until proven guilty? How about the last thousand years of thinking about this shit and coming up, at the end of the day, with a big banner that says 'Don't go screwing around without the consent of your fucking peers?'" (*Council* 198). With the lessons learned in *The Midnight Mayor*, Swift is eventually able to persuade the Aldermen to dispel the Minority Council and abandon the Neighbourhood Eye project, though the novel still ends with a sense of poetic justice brought to Templeman, who cannot be swayed. It is, however, not Matthew Swift who kills him but his personal assistant Kelly Shiring, as Swift, ever the heroic protagonist, cannot bring himself to execute Templeman coldheartedly.

What this example shows in conjunction with the previous one from *The Midnight Mayor* is that throughout the *Matthew Swift* series, the Aldermen take the role of the administrative elites who are unable to relate to the common Londoners at street level. Instead, they reside in high rise office buildings in the City of London, where they have been tainted by the cold, inhumane financial logic that permeates this part of the city. As London's magical government, they increasingly rely on surveillance practices such as communal vigilance projects like the Neighbourhood Eye to provide the information needed for crunching the numbers and trying to consider what they regard as the bigger picture. As a result, they ironically lose sight of what the bigger picture they are desperately trying to see is all about, namely the people living in London.

What the Aldermen thus offer is a hagiography of the city on the basis of its history and the built environment, not the people actually living in it.

Matthew Swift embodies an agent of change to such a logic, which privileges actuarial justice over traditional community policing, and with his appointment as Midnight Mayor he works to gradually alter the Aldermen's processes of governing London. As the series progresses, he understands that his role is not just about fighting magical threats but also about fostering compassion and understanding among the city's magical practitioners. This transformative role is emphasised by Swift's presentation as an urban outsider, someone who sees the city differently than through the surveillant gaze of the elites. I have previously argued that Swift's homelessness contributes to this impression and want to briefly offer an additional example here, which also draws on walking as the practice of providing a different perspective but which stems from an episode in *The Minority Council* during which Swift consults the Beggar King, another mythical entity, for information. As they walk through London, Swift explains to the reader:

> In the city, there are many ways of walking.
> Let me name them:
> Rush-hour scurry, retiree's shuffle, drunkard's ramble, frightened scuttle, tourist's wander, shopper's amble, mother's purpose, children's skip. . . .
> This was the beggar's walk. It was the sideways winding of those who are not there to be perceived. (*Council* 304)

Here, Swift transforms into another outsider figure: not a homeless man but a beggar, though the possibility that this is one and the same is entertained. In the magical world of the narrative, being a beggar literally hides him from others, even from the authorial gaze of a city constable who "paused on the corner beside me, and looked down, and round, and through me, as if I wasn't there" and the CCTV cameras which, by dint of beggar magic, "looked away as I approached, moving to stare at an empty wall or a quiet street" (*Council* 313). Swift's Otherness to the Aldermen's entrepreneurial perspective is, I have tried to show, inextricably interwoven with divergent ways of seeing the city and different scopic regimes thereby deducted. In doing so, Swift challenges the voyeuristic, surveillant gaze of London's magical government and proposes the diverging perspective of the walker in the street, who is better positioned to tease out the concerns of the individual than the watcher from above, who can only care about the bigger picture, whatever that may be. To come back to De Certeau's essay from the beginning of my examination, Swift thus conforms to De Certeau's idea of the urban wanderer as someone who is able, "by means of a semantic rarefaction, . . . of articulating a second, poetic geography on top of the geography of the literal, forbidden or permitted meaning" (De Certeau 105). The urban wanderer opens up a semantic void undisclosed to the aerial perspective of the planner and ruler, which allows urban space to become habitable rather than proscribed for specific uses. Using a well-established

surveillant metaphor, De Certeau writes: "The long poem of walking manipulates spatial organizations, no matter how panoptic they may be" (101). In this sense, Griffin's tetralogy can be construed as one very long poem of walking – and Griffin's uniquely poetic style contributes to this analogy – which not only explores the complexities of governance in the city through magic, but also highlights the enchanting potential of the quotidian, which becomes lost under the scrutinising gaze of the surveillant agent.

It is important at this point to stress that the series never condemns surveillance or the technologies through which surveillance is conducted *per se* but the uses to which they are put. This becomes evident not only in the lengthy arguments in which Swift engages with his adversaries, but also in Swift's friendship with the social worker Nabeela Hirj and the nature of his own fusion with the blue electric angels, who have come to life from technological means imbued with the magic of quotidian life. Hirj is the social worker who brought Swift's attention to the teenagers killed by the Minority Council's Culicidae. More importantly in this regard, however, she is a medusa, and her ancestral line literalises the alterations magic has undergone from a pre-industrial, folkloric age to the thoroughly technologised postmodern city:

> Her headscarf dangled from one hand, and on her head was revealed, not hair, not human hair, but something else, something that writhed and jerked and spun like living things. Once upon a time, they might have been snakes; but magic had evolved with the times, and now these snake-things had bodies of metal tubes, laced with fibre-optic cable, and heads of little hooded camera-eyes that swung this way and that to survey the world, darting no less lifelike than their organic cousins, but hissing not with venom but with motorised cogs. (*Council* 183)

The surveillance cameras on Hirj's head are "part of her", as Penny Ngwenya later explains to Swift more explicitly:

> Her hair was cables, thin and silver, each one ending at a lens, and they moved and writhed like living things, but where the cable met her skull it wasn't like it plugged in or anything, but like it just melted into her. Like, if you looked, you could see tiny wires running along her head like veins, before they vanished down deep. (*Council* 338)

Conforming to the series' notion that technology itself can be magical as part of an (re-)enchanted urban environment, Hirj thus exemplifies the evolution of magical beings who, like the world, became increasingly technological as time progressed. Significant in the example of Nabeela Hirj is that she is a surveillant being, who participates in surveillance culture simply by virtue of existing. The surveillance cameras on her head perform the same function as their wall-mounted cousins in London by surveying the world – with the added medusa-effect of petrifying those who look into the camera. This ability she uses to assist Swift in the strive against the Aldermen, hence portraying a case of positively evaluated surveillance. It is, in effect, not the technology *as such*, which carries any evaluation, but the individuals who use it for varying purposes. The series' narrative point of

view guides readers' sympathies towards Swift's position and, as a result, the Aldermen's surveillance practices are evaluated negatively whereas his own and those of his associates are evaluated more positively. At the same time, this sentiment acknowledges that, as Lyon argues (*Culture* 9, 30), in a surveillance culture surveillance is simply part of everyday urban life and no one can escape from participating in it.

Swift's and the angels' explanation of their ontological origins does not relate to surveillance technologies specifically, but reinforces the series' interconnection of magic and technology. True to the series' aphorism that magic is life and life is magic, the angels have come into existence from human emotions poured into the telephone lines over the years in which conversations have been run over the phone (*Madness* 245–46). As both the example of Hirj and the angels demonstrate, the *Matthew Swift* novels do not differentiate between technology and magic, but both become indistinguishable, which permits the protagonist to find magic in the most quotidian aspects of contemporary urban life.

Again, this perspective escapes Swift's adversaries, as Richard Templeman exhibits exemplarily: "Society evolves all the time, every day in new ways. That which was forbidden is now permitted, that which was magic is now science, that which was fiction is now fact, that which was unspoken is now sung from the wires. The world is changing, *mankind* is changing" (*Council* 346; original emphasis). Representative of the Aldermen at large, his perspective is one of disenchantment, of linear progress in time whereby one thing evolves from the other, and the previous state is irrevocably lost. Thus, the Aldermen are unable to grasp the magic of the city as Swift does and succumb to the entrepreneurial logic confined by a surveillant perspective which disregards the city's individuals. For them, the city becomes an empty shell, a form without content which they seek to protect but do now know what for exactly. In short, the city exists *for its own sake*. Through Swift's transformatory role, however, many of the Aldermen are able to eventually recognise the flawed premises of such a perspective and renew their oaths to the Midnight Mayor during a ceremony led by his PA Kelly Shiring:

> Our motto, the words that are burnt into the stones of this city, is Domine dirige nos, Lord lead us. We here gathered who do not believe in a god, we use these words of power to invoke something far more. We ask the city for guidance, for strength from its streets and its walls, its secrets and its shadows. We draw our power, our authority and our righteousness from all that is around us, and in that process *we forget that the city is no more and no less than those who move within it*. We are not greater than other men. We are not wiser, we are not smarter, we are not worthy of more or less than those whose air we breathe, whose water we share. This truth is universal, but never more important than within a city. (Council 390; my emphasis)

London is made by Londoners, is one of the central arguments made by the series, and this extract encapsulates the sentiment perfectly. What I have tried to show in this reading is not just the

argument the series is trying to make – informed readers should be able to tease that out for themselves – but situate the series' concerns within a broader culture of surveillance. Beyond its claim for re-enchantment of urban life, the novels address contemporary anxieties of entrepreneurial control and (in)security through the discourse of surveillance. However, instead of condemning surveillance practices, as the argument so often goes, and campaigning, for instance, against London's extensive CCTV network, Griffin's novels acknowledge that surveillance is a ubiquitous aspect of contemporary urban existence in which everyone is implicated. It is, then, not the technology itself nor indeed the practice of gazing which has harmful consequences for specific social groups but the intents of its users or practitioners. This the series makes abundantly clear by narratively villainising the Aldermen's attempt of using surveillance practices to control all aspects of life in London. In this respect, the series is similar to the concerns addressed in Jonthan Stroud's *Bartimaeus* trilogy but presents a different outcome. Rather than succumbing to cultural pessimism and legitimising the cleansing destruction of London, Swift's efforts at transformative change that emphasise collective community prove the more sustainable approach towards improving contemporary living conditions in the surveillance city.

6.3 Conclusion

This chapter has mapped urban fantasy's engagement with urban surveillance. The arrangement of the analyses has been made in order to highlight a certain evolution within the texts, one that reflects the overall development from a surveillance society to a surveillance culture, as David Lyon has diagnosed it for the twenty-first century (*Culture* 9, 30). In doing so, the texts also present different perspectives on the issue and outlooks on the future, which can be roughly differentiated into an individual and an institutional perspective as well as pessimistic and optimistic visions for urban life under surveillance culture.

To begin with, Jonathan Stroud's *Bartimaeus* trilogy, the text which predates the others in my corpus by half a decade, paints a gloomy picture of a dystopian, totalitarian society, in which magicians use their abilities to subject the nonmagical population. Their use of surveillance practices speaks to urban anxieties at the beginning of the twenty-first century, when authorities' and security agencies' response to the terrorist attacks of 9/11 and the 7/7 bombings has been one of dramatically increasing public surveillance in an attempt to pre-empt future attacks and increase public security. Stroud's anti-urbanist narrative exacerbates these developments in form of a cautionary tale which, in the end, delivers poetic justice to the oppressive magical elite and ends not just in a revolution that upends social power structures but also eradicates London. Throughout the series, the British capital is construed as a city corrupted by the decadent influence of the ruling magicians which, within the framework of this chapter, entails the ubiquity of social and magical

surveillance to the detriment of others, resulting in a menacing atmosphere of profound mistrust among all members of society. The trilogy suggests that such an urban environment is beyond redemption; hence, the series' ending depicts the city in flames.

Benedict Jacka's *Alex Verus* series continues the identification of surveillance practices with oppressive governments but switches the narrative perspective more decidedly than Stroud's trilogy to that of the individual living under such conditions. The eponymous protagonist Alex Verus constantly struggles to escape the attempts of both the Council and a group of dark mages who require his services as a diviner to recruit him for their respective purposes. In this configuration, London becomes an equally threatening environment of constant visibility, in which Verus has to use his own magical and technological abilities to carve out pockets of invisibility for himself. While the series attempts to present its protagonist in positive terms as a fighter for democratic values who is pitted against an undemocratic regime and, simultaneously, has to prevent a group of individuals with a totalitarian ideology from staging a *coup d'etat*, the novels celebrate Verus's own surveillance practices as counter surveillance and thereby negate his implication in and compliance with a scopic regime that uses vision as a means of gathering knowledge for the purpose of gaining political advantages. Both his diviner ability and the panoptic narration focalised from his perspective serve to manipulate reader sympathies for a character whose *lex taleonis* mentality is not exactly the epitome of democracy itself. In conjunction, both texts highlight negative aspects of surveillance technologies, provided they fall into the wrong hands, which are exacerbated by the series' fantastical mode. Thus, they aim to caution against developments in our consensus reality.

Ben Aaronovitch's *Rivers of London* series and Kate Griffin's *Matthew Swift* series take a different stance on the matter and shift the concern from one focused on a scopic regime whose purpose is the creation of security sanctioned by the authorities to information collection processes which produce knowledge systems and thereby regimes of truth. In doing so, the texts reflect aspects of a surveillance culture in which surveillance practices are no longer the actions of a top-down power hierarchy, that is, a society where the powerful few watch the powerless many, but in which everyone engages in surveillance practices. The *Rivers of London* novels do not explicitly acknowledge such a pervasiveness of surveillance, as their perspective is still the police as a powerful urban actor, but they present an argument for a responsible handling of information gathered for knowledge-production purposes. This argument is modelled into a case for consensual policing, as the protagonist Peter Grant is confronted with the bureaucratic practices of the Metropolitan Police that conforms to the pre-emptive logic valued by the risk society. The supernatural resists the ordering attempts of police regulations and forces Grant to develop a more flexible logic, and to thus acknowledge both the individuality of his cases and the individuals behind them. His transformative role rubs off on his superior Thomas Nightingale, whereas his former

colleague Lesley May is frustrated with the disillusionment that the supernatural's nonconformity produces and resorts to unlawful practices in order to level the playing field with supernatural perpetrators of crime. In relation to (in)security as a contemporary structure of anxious feeling, the novels address the responsibility in data collection and collation, particularly if these practices form the grounds for policing society.

Kate Griffin's *Matthew Swift* series most overtly acknowledges the pervasiveness of surveillance practices in contemporary urban life and celebrates the mundane aspects of technology through a re-enchantment of all aspects of the city. Similarly to Peter Grant, Matthew Swift is confronted with a disillusioning approach of governance by the Court of Aldermen, who form both London's magical government and its police force. The Aldermen reside in the City of London, masquerade to the outside as a trust fund office and have subscribed to the logic of entrepreneurialism. They use surveillance to gather information on London's citizenry for their aim to protect the city from any harmful activity. However, such a perspective is presented as gradually losing sight of individual denizens. The development towards the risk society's pre-emptive policing and the apportioning of actuarial justice is thus completed in Griffin's novels. Its main protagonist instigates social and political change after having been appointed as Midnight Mayor, the head of the Court of Aldermen, by dint of his unique perspective on the city. Whereas the Aldermen literally take a position high above the city and thus stand for a perspective on London which privileges patterns and structures over individuals, Swift is presented as an urban outsider and outcast. Both not entirely human and homeless, Swift's peregrinations on the city streets afford him with an understanding of London's individuals and provoke the realisation that the city is not formed by its built environment but by its people and that some of the greatest threats do not come from the outside of the city but are found in the entrepreneurial approach to urban governance itself. Swift is able to impress this perspective on the Aldermen and thereby effect a social and political transformation that does not require the radical solution of cleansing fire advocated by the *Bartimaeus* trilogy.

None of the texts engages with surveillance relations on the internet, which simply is not an issue reflected in my corpus texts. Hence, the pressing question of privacy or data protection in human-computer interrelations is completely absent from all the series. I want to cautiously suggest that a more profound evaluation of this issue is more in the realm of science fiction than fantasy, where magic and technology are presented as largely incompatible. Of course, as I have acknowledged, this lends to many of the novels under scrutiny a blissfully nostalgic tone, which propels readers back into a time where smartphones and other smart technology was not as ubiquitous as it is in our extradiegetic consensus reality today. Where magic and technology operate alongside each other, such as in the *Alex Verus*, the *Rivers of London* and the *Matthew Swift* series,

other aspects are foregrounded to the detriment of discussing such issues as, for instance, social media, data doubles, surveillance capitalism, and big data corporations. The one exception from this general observation is provided by my discussion of Bartimaeus's heist of Simon Lovelace's house, which has something to say about the classed aspects of home security and an understanding of commodified privacy production that borders on fortification.

What unites all texts with regard to urban surveillance is the condemnation of surveillance practices that are informed by totalitarian ideologies. Almost all texts attempt to highlight that surveillance technology is not harmful *per se*, but that it can become harmful in the hands of people with inhumane ideologies. Stroud's and Jacka's texts caution against the possibility of undemocratic exploitation of surveillance technologies, whereas Aaronovitch's and Griffin's series place more emphasis on humanity and feelings of community as a counter strategy. However, beyond Matthew Swift's plea for kindness towards strangers, even the imaginative potential of urban fantasy has little practical advice to offer for readers who feel anxious about ubiquitous (urban) surveillance practices.

The Manichean conflict at the centre of their plot notwithstanding, urban fantasies (re)present daily realities. The culture of surveillance seen through these imaginaries becomes more attuned to the practices of mundane, everyday life as conforming, or resisting, to ubiquitous surveillance. As David Lyon rightly points out, "[t]he mention of surveillance often summons images of spooks and spies, of video cameras recording what goes on in the street". However, despite the acuity of these images, "today's is a much more complex cultural landscape than a them-and-us binary, where 'they' watch 'us'" (*Culture* 173). In this respect, the issues I have discussed in this chapter typify variegated elements of surveillance culture and can be aggregated to a diagnosis of our lives in today's world of urban surveillance culture. The question then remains what they have to say beyond this assessment of surveillance as a socio-cultural condition.

One aspect the texts do highlight by virtue of their plot structures, which focus on individual characters, is the agency of individuals. Across the board, the texts represent compliant and resisting characters, whether these characteristics are acknowledged by the texts themselves or need to be teased out by careful analysis. While the *Bartimaeus* trilogy is most overtly defined by its technophobia when it comes to surveillance, negotiated as it is in the series through magic, the other three series range from outright opposition (*Alex Verus*) to seeking alternatives to surveillant strategies of power that contrast with and sometimes contest the hegemonic codes of control (*Rivers of London*, *Matthew Swift*). In doing so, the texts present alternative scopic regimes to varying degree, other ways of looking surveillantly, which centre the value of the individual human life and recognise people for who they are instead of abstracting individuals to data doubles which can be neatly filed into databases. In light of prevailing anxieties about the reduction of humanness

to data images and the increasing insecurity that stems from expanded surveillance practices, such an affirmation of the individual element to which the resistance of the supernatural to social sorting points in the series may inform our individual practices as we, like Matthew Swift, walk in the city.

7 Conclusion

As I have shown, twenty-first-century urban fantasy engages with Londonness in a variety of ways. While several representational strategies manifest in all texts under analysis, they do so to different ends and with differing effects. Their versatility notwithstanding, I have demonstrated that these ends and effects can be aggregated to nostalgia, haunting, and (in)security as three structures of anxious feelings which become evident in the textual structures into which they are inscribed. In doing so, London urban fantasy has indeed proven itself as a literary genre that is "*good to think with*" (Miéville, "Editorial" 46; original emphasis) – or, more precisely, to think *about* Londonness between 2001 and 2020 as a specific historical conjuncture. As stated previously, the power of these stories does not lie in simply reflecting or transmitting a sense of prefabricated Londonness but in constructing it. What London means is the result of entangled processes of producing, circulating, and consuming cultural meanings through signifying practices, to which urban fantasy is simultaneously subjected and in which it partakes. With its methodology grounded in literary urban studies as informed by cultural and literary studies more generally, I hope to have illuminated these complex processes. As my dissertation has forged a comprehensive analysis of how particular experiences of London are narrated in the fantastical mode, it illustrates how urban experiences form local attachments that are articulated through shared stories. The close readings conducted have revealed the texts under analysis to be responses to London's current situation as a specific conjuncture whose innovative aspect is not the representation of the British capital in radically new ways. Rather, their novelty lies in the engagement with the specific socio-political conditions of existence which they narrate figuratively with the help of representational strategies that form part of older literary traditions. As polysemic cultural products, the texts have also been found to contain multiple, sometimes contradictory impulses as to the construction of Londonness. With recourse to the tripartite analytical framework outlined in the introduction, this conclusion summarises the analytical results in order to do justice to "a soft version of totality" (Kramer 168) of Londonness in the twenty-first century. However, it also seeks to go beyond the analytical results by sketching further avenues of research and addressing the looming environmental crisis as one issue that is conspicuously absent from urban fantasy.

In chapter 4, I have argued that nostalgia constitutes a dominant structure of anxious feeling which manifests in urban fantasy in the spatial dichotomy between city and country. Recent research into British narratives of nostalgia contends that they depict "Britain's past in a highly idealised and romanticised manner, while giving voice to a diverse set of grievances about the country's current situation" (Henneböhl 285), even going so far as claiming nostalgia as a "master narrative" (3) for the twenty-first century. To a certain extent, this assertion has proven true also for London urban fantasy in particular. The spatial configuration of city and country is employed

to denote specific ways of life, which are then imbued with nostalgia. Thus, this particular representational paradigm constitutes a response to the political situation in Britian, to which London is central as the country's capital. In particular, two different versions of evaluating the dichotomy have been found, which correspond to Raymond Williams's claim that the two domains are often conceived as being anathema for each other. Jonathan Stroud's *Bartimaeus* trilogy and Benedict Jacka's *Alex Verus* series both flaunt the desire for a peaceful, rustic country life that conforms to literary constructions popular during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This nostalgic valorisation of the British countryside in both narratives serves the purpose of conversely imagining London as a perilous and parasitic space on the basis of the city's moral and political corruption. While Jacka's protagonist-driven series seeks to mask its anti-urbanism in this regard through frequently claiming that the protagonist feels at home in London, the narrative belies this assertion and constructs London as dangerous to the individual. In comparison, Stroud's *Bartimaeus* trilogy focuses more on the structural than the individual level of politics and presents London as so corrupted by the ruling magicians that the only conceivable ending to the story is a political revolution which devastates the city. Although the countryside itself is largely absent from the trilogy, *The Amulet of Samarkand* does present life away from London as a more peaceful and fulfilling alternative.

Privileging life in the capital over any nostalgic version of rustic country life, Ben Aaronovitch's *Rivers of London* series provides the foil to these two series. The novels engage more specifically than others in the corpus with concrete political developments in the UK and align a nostalgic romanticisation of the British countryside with the kind of political conservativism that is commonly associated with proponents of the Leave campaign in the 2016 EU referendum. In particular, the series' main antagonist over six instalments, Martin Chorley, is depicted as a narcissistic English nationalist who deplores London as the epitome of everything that he regards as being wrong with the country. Drawing on a nostalgic version of pastoralism that he takes from Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, Chorley consequently seeks to restore England to the times of King Arthur. In presenting this perspective as the villainous one, Aaronovitch's novels invite readers to sympathise with the perspective of its protagonist, Peter Grant, whose image of London is one that valorises it as the greatest city on earth. Thus, Grant's version of London is equally nostalgic by being predicated on the optimistic spirit that characterised the 'Cool Britannia' era. Without acknowledging to do so, the novels therefore actively construct a nostalgic counternarrative to Chorley's anti-urbanist vision of Britain without London. As a result, the *Rivers of London* series unwittingly contributes to the phenomenon it seeks to criticise, namely a reactionary response to a sense of Britain's London-centrism.

Chapter 5 has offered a hauntological approach to urban fantasy's metaphorical representation of London in somatic and mnemonic terms and aggregated the different articulations of this representational strategy to haunting as a second dominant structure of anxious feeling. More specifically, I have found the metaphor of the city as a body to engage with London's status as an erstwhile imperial capital. The image of the heart of the city is rendered spatial in both Benedict Jacka's *Alex Verus* series and Jonathan Stroud's *Bartimaeus* trilogy in the form of the British Museum, which is an important location for events in both storyworlds. In both series, the museum is damaged structurally and ideationally as the result of a fight between different mundane and supernatural factions. I have argued that the *Alex Verus* series upholds imperialist modes of representation by narrating the museum as a microcosmos of both the British Empire at large and London as its capital which the protagonist needs to navigate. In doing so successfully, Verus conforms to and perpetuates the stereotype of the imperial map maker who imposes meaning on an exoticised space. More nuancedly, Stroud's trilogy posits the British Museum as part of London's imperial infrastructure. The nonhuman narrative perspective of Bartimaeus, who is not implicated in extradiegetic politics, enables critical commentary on the imperialist collection practices to which the British Museum testifies. Moreover, the trilogy's neo-imperialist setting is emplotted in the clash between Bartimaeus and the golem at the museum, which at first glance seems to be a reiteration of Victorian Imperial Gothic narratives of reverse colonisation. However, as the plot progresses, it is revealed that the golem does not pose a supernatural invasion of London from the imperial fringe but is controlled by a minister of the British government, thereby contributing to the trilogy's overall depiction of London as morally and politically corrupted, which results in its representation as a decaying necropolis throughout the entire trilogy.

The city is articulated as a mindscape predominantly through the presence of ghosts in urban fantasy, who fulfil the dual function as supernatural beings and as metaphorical figures of thought. Their presence is twofold, constructing London either as a haunt*ed* or a haunt*ing* place. In both Paul Cornell's *Shadow Police* series and Ben Aaronovitch's *Rivers of London* series, the ghosts feature as manifestations of the past in the present and hence form part of an urban ecology. In Cornell's series, London's ghosts point to the circularity of a history doomed to repeat itself, thereby indicating a pessimistic sense of the city lacking a potential future outside this repetitive pattern. In Aaronovitch's novels, the ghosts are posited as a vital part of an urban ecology which is governed by a logic of exchange. The protagonist Peter Grant must learn to engage with the ghosts in London as a vital part of a wider social network that encompasses both mundane and supernatural residents. As potentially disruptive manifestations of the past in the present, London's ghosts are ultimately representative of an integrative approach towards social relations in the *Rivers of London* novels. Kate Griffin's *Matthew Swift* series, in contrast, narrates London as a haunt*ing*

rather than a haunt*ed* place. The novels conjure up soulless, de-individualised spectres of teenagers as symptoms of late capitalism. Similarly to the sense of inescapable doom in the *Shadow Police* series, the spectres exemplify that under these existential conditions uniform repetition is privileged over a future that is fundamentally different. By the spectral presence of the London dragon throughout the series, this sentiment is exacerbated on the level of the city at large and acknowledges the sense of meaninglessness, fractures, isolation, and alienation in a seemingly illimitable and illegible metropolis. However, the protagonist Matthew Swift counters this "cultural logic of the worst" (Schmitt 2) indicated by the pathological mindscape by returning to an organic metaphor of the city which emphasises the multiplicity of individual connections within the urban network.

In chapter 6, I have engaged with the representation of London as a surveillance city and aggregated the literary responses to the ubiquity of surveillance technologies and the pre-emptive logic of the risk society under the label of (in)security as a third dominant structure of anxious feeling in contemporary urban fantasy. The analysis has drawn attention to the evolution of literary representation by aligning the different series to an overall progression from a surveillance society to a surveillance culture in our consensus reality (cf. Lyon, *Culture* 9). Published between 2003 and 2005, Jonathan Stroud's *Bartimaeus* trilogy can be read as giving voice to grievances about the widespread instalment of surveillance technologies in London following the 9/11 and the 7/7 attacks in response to the growing threat of international and domestic terrorism. The trilogy links magical surveillance to oppressive power structures in order to highlight the hermeneutics of mistrust that extensive surveillance generates, which is embedded in the novel's overall depiction of London as morally corrupted. Benedict Jacka's *Alex Verus* series also links surveillance technologies with oppressive political structures but stages its protagonist as a libertarian individual who fights these structures by resourcefully resorting to counter surveillance practices. In doing so, the novels implicate the reader in these surveillance practices, which are condoned as a form of legitimate resistance. Both series have been read as highlighting the negative consequences of surveillance technologies, exacerbating them by dint of their fantastical mode of narration which is decoupled from technological constraints of our extradiegetic consensus reality.

In contrast, both Ben Aaronovitch's *Rivers of London* series and Kate Griffin's *Matthew Swift* series shift their narrative focus away from the political concerns for either individual or collective security as tied to specific power structures to the epistemological conditions of a society in which everyone engages in surveillance. The *Rivers of London* novels take the perspective of the police and, by juxtaposing the supernatural with the mundane as ontological categories, interrogate the usefulness of information technologies for bureaucratic practices. As the supernatural constantly resists the ordering impulses inherent to the bureaucratic logic of pre-emptive policing

under the conditions of the risk society, the protagonist Peter Grant is forced to acknowledge the advantages of a more flexible approach to policing. The series therefore argues against surveillance practices as prerequisites for policing by exposing them as a form of social sorting. In doing so, the novels open up questions of communal responsibility in the face of widespread data collection and collation by authorities. In Kate Griffin's *Matthew Swift* series, surveillance is represented as being an integral aspect of the contemporary existence in London. All characters in the series are implicated in surveillance practices, which are not evaluated as being inherently 'good' or 'bad' but judged by the novels according to the ends for which they are employed. Thus, the extensive gathering of information on London's citizenry for the purposes of pre-emptive policing are strongly condemned, whereas the protagonist's surveillant perambulations through the city are posited as yielding necessary clues for understanding the city and initiating socio-political change.

The previous three chapters have deployed readings of London urban fantasies in a kind of explanatory relationship to structures of anxious feelings on the conceptual level. By arguing that Londonness in the twenty-first century is characterised by nostalgia, haunting, and (in)security, I have attempted to proffer an understanding of how the popular cultural imagination has responded to structural shifts in society and politics. However, rather than coupling anxiousness with fear and dread, or regarding it as a pathological condition, I have sought to underline the positive and utopian impulses within urban fantasy alongside more pessimistic conceptualisations of what London signifies in contemporary British urban fantasy. Although the simplistic distinction into utopian and dystopian London urban fantasies is a perfunctory, or even crude, ossification fraught with its own problems, a pattern emerges across my corpus texts which points to a typology of London literature different from the ones offered by John McLeod and Merlin Coverley.[1] Both these typologies are focused on the constitutive conditions of the narrative rather than its resolution and effects. It would be possible to fit the five series under analysis into both models, but I find a different pattern more fitting for the type of stories told in urban fantasy.

In chapter 2.2.1, I have briefly drawn attention to the fact that fantasy often, if not always, centres around the Manichean conflict between good and evil. As a result, London is invariably threatened in urban fantasy on an existential level – a type of conflict which is usually absent from realist urban fiction because the stakes cannot be credibly raised to encompass this level of existential threat to the entire city. The pattern which thus emerges in the novels I have examined is tied specifically to the *resolution* of this existential conflict rather than to the conditions which characterise the *perspective* of the narrative. One the one hand, in Kate Griffin's *Matthew Swift* series,

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[1] To recall, McLeod argues for three distinctive strands of London literature –polycultural examinations of the city, narratives offered from the social margins, and the exploration of psychological and moral consequences of social change – whereas Coverley distinguishes only two strands – a character-driven one in which the characters are symbolic of London and one which offers commentary on the city as a whole.

the protagonist is able to avert the dangers in each of the four instalments, and *The Minority Council* ends the entire series with a palpable sense of optimism as to the city's future. While Ben Aaronovitch's *Rivers of London* series is not yet finished, the main story arc centred around Martin Chorley's attempted restoration of the status quo of Anglo-Saxon England is brought to a conclusion in *Lies Sleeping*, which ends with the antagonist's violent death. The subsequent two instalments centre on Grant's modernisation of the Folly, thereby continuing the concern with bureaucratic structures examined in chapter 6.2.1, and are also marked by a noticeably optimistic tone with regard to London's future.

On the other hand, while Alex Verus is able to prevent the group of dark mages around the authoritarian Richard Drakh from successfully assuming political power in London in Benedict Jacka's eponymous series, he then retreats from society and the novels leave it unclear whether London is indeed better off than it was at the beginning of the series. Since the two opposing factions, light and dark mages, become increasingly indistinguishable over the course of the series with respect to their morality, the fate of London is at least cast into doubt. What is more, I would suggest that the overall attitude towards London permeating the series is one characterised by pessimism rather than optimism. More explicitly anti-urban, Jonathan Stroud's *Bartimaeus* trilogy depicts London as being so corrupted by the ruling magicians' influence that the only possible solution the narrative can imagine is an apocalyptic one. Consequential to its corrupted state, London is burned down during violent political revolution. However, *Ptolemy's Gate* ends in hesitant ambiguity towards London's future and does leave open the possibility of future improvement after the literally cleansing fire, thereby suggesting an opportunity for urban renewal. Paul Cornell's *Shadow Police* series has been terminated by the publisher before all instalments were published and is therefore hard to evaluate. Nonetheless, the narrative trajectory offered over the first three of the planned five instalments is characterised by such a pervasive sense of hopelessness and pessimism that it is hard to imagine both the characters and the entire city are granted a happy end should Cornell manage to find a publisher for the remaining two instalments.

To conclude, by posing an existential threat to the city the stories are able to interrogate what Londonness entails. In other words, because London is threatened *ontologically*, the novels pose the question of why it should continue to exist. The overall pattern that emerges in answer to this question is one divided into optimistic stories of conviviality and collaboration on the one side and of pessimistic stories of corruption, decline, and loss on the other. This ambiguity, I contend, is aptly reflected by my conceptualisation of nostalgia, haunting, and (in)security as structures of anxious feelings. As I have argued in chapter 3.2, anxiousness can be understood as sustaining a productive tension between positive and negative anticipation, and these ambiguous impulses have shone through all of my analyses.

One could suppose urban fantasy prescient in this respect, as "[t]he current state of London is a matter of speculation and contention to a degree greater than has been the case for at least several decades" (Black, *London* 232), but I would be wary of attributing such clairvoyant abilities to the genre. Nonetheless, the observation invites pondering London urban fantasy's own future beyond the period under analysis in the present study, as this provides a possible further avenue of research. In the introduction, I have argued for the years 2001 to 2020 to form a specific conjuncture which is delineated by the events of 9/11 and the COVID19 pandemic in our consensus reality as well as the formation and establishment of London urban fantasy as a recognisable publishing category. Of all the texts in my corpus only Aaronovitch's *Rivers of London* series is not yet finished, but the conclusion of the story arc centred on Martin Chorley's nefarious plans to destroy London has resulted in the impression that the subsequent two instalments have lost some of the narrative drive that hitherto had characterised the series. There is not yet another story arc that spans more than one instalment beyond Grant's attempts to modernise the Folly, which arguably is not a particularly suspenseful plotline. This suggests to me that the texts themselves support the argument that the COVID19 pandemic has proven to be an incisive event which has instigated the feeling that one particular era has ended, and that literary representation adapts to these altered circumstances to continue to engage with our conditions of existence. It will therefore be interesting to revisit London urban fantasy in a few years to see what will have become of the genre. The jury is still out whether it will be confined to being a publishing phenomenon of the first two decades of the millennium only or whether the narrative structures the genre provides are flexible enough to engage with an altered sense of Londonness beyond 2020.

Since urban fantasy blends the mimetic representation of London's mundane existence in our extradiegetic consensus reality with supernatural aspects, the genre will have to engage with the effects of the climate crisis. As Jeremy Black notes in *A Brief History of London*, anthropogenic "[c]limate change accentuates the long-standing risk of the drowning of some or much of London and of its hinterland" (234). Structural geological changes in the glacitectonic zones of East Anglia and South-East England combine with rising sea levels in the North Sea as a result of global warming as well as the increasing occurrence of extreme weather conditions, including heavy rainfall. These developments recurringly threaten London with flooding as experienced in July 2021, while heatwaves such as the 40°C heatwaves in 2022 are also becoming more common. Black points out that "both the Covid pandemic and the rise of sea levels indicate the instability of the environment and the dependence of human history on physical factors over which human control is limited" (235). I would argue that the fantastical mode is aptly suited to narrativise such a lack of control, but as things stand, urban fantasy has not yet incorporated elements from so-called 'CliFi', that is, climate fiction. Although this label suggests a certain generic affinity to science fiction, urban

fantasy must continue to depict urban environments from our extradiegetic consensus reality in such altered conditions with a degree of verisimilitude lest it risks becoming alternative history entirely.

There are some developments which indicate that London's uncertain future in the wake of the climate crisis is a growing concern among fantasists. An early forerunner is certainly J.G. Ballard's *The Drowned World* (1962), but a more recent example can be found in Jonathan Stroud's *The Outlaws Scarlett & Browne* series (2021–), which is set in a postapocalyptic England. In the storyworld, the British Isles have shrunken in size due to flooding and London has sunk entirely. In the map of Britain provided at the beginning of the novels, the entire Greater London Area is designated as a lagoon. Although the setting continues Stroud's proclivity for a destroyed London, the series does not really conform to the genre patterns identified as constituting urban fantasy in this dissertation. Maggie Gee's *The Ice People* (1998) and *The Flood* (2004), Will Self's *The Book of Dave* (2007) and Saci Lloyd's two *The Carbon Diaries* novels (2015, 2017) constitute further examples which imagine London and the UK under the impact of the climate crisis. In general, however, a trend is visible that the crisis' global scale provokes narratives which focus on the level of nations, or the world more widely, and thus tend to disregard the individual city. Clare Morall's *When The Flood Came* (2017) and John Lancaster's *The Wall* (2019) are examples for novels that, like Stroud's *Scarlett & Browne* series, imagines the consequences of the climate crisis for Britain rather than London. Kim Stanley Robinson's *New York 2140* (2018) constitutes an example for a novel that situates its story in an urban environment irretrievably altered by anthropogenic climate change. These novels are speculative because they exacerbate current trends, but sadly these will probably become reality in the near future.

Robinson's novel indicates another question that arises from my research, namely the composition of other fantastical urban imaginaries. While my dissertation has investigated the construction of Londonness as a nexus of structures of anxious feelings in urban fantasy, future studies might focus on American urban fantasies like Jim Butcher's *The Dresden Files* (2000–) set in Chicago, or Kevin Hearne's *Iron Druid Chronicles* (2011–2018) set in Tempe, Arizona, or examine how New York figures in the fantastical imagination as exemplified by N.K. Jemisin's *Great Cities* series (2020–2022) or Daniel José Older's *Shadowshaper Cypher* series (2015–2020). Even though London dominates the fantastical urban imagination in the UK, T.L. Huchu's *Edinburgh Night* series (2021–) has put the Scottish capital on the map of urban fantasy. While a full-fledged conjunctural analysis would have to move beyond the representational, more comparative work still needs to be done on these fantastical urban imaginaries to understand how fantasy helps make sense of our contemporary existence in cities and concomitant structures of feelings. I hope that the present study contributes to paving the way in this respect.

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