

*On the Road to Hokitika: The Epics of a New Constellation*

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**Abstract:** This article aims to analyse Eleanor Catton's novel *The Luminaries* mainly using Paul Carter's theory of spatial history and Catton's own notions of the influence of astronomy upon human behaviour. The novel portrays a number of individuals who get together in a sparsely populated spot in the South Island of New Zealand and develop a gold-rush town that will eventually become actual Hokitika. Turning a natural space into a "civilized" place requires much toiling and moiling, many personal clashes and the solving of a few mysteries —eventually Hokitika will have its own history grounded and *The Luminaries* can be concluded in a scene that rounds up the epic construction of the city and promises, at the same time, a consistent future.

**Keywords:** Eleanor Catton; Paul Carter; New Zealand; Hokitika; *The Luminaries*; spatial history; gold-seekers.

*It is not the historian who stages events, weaving them together to form a plot, but History itself. History is the playwright, coordinating facts into a coherent sequence: the historian narrating what happened is merely a copyist or amanuensis.*  
(Paul Carter in *The Road to Botany Bay*, 1987: xiv)

When I first visited Fremantle in 1990, Veronica Brady took me book-hunting and, in the very first bookstore we entered, recommended me to buy Paul Carter's *The Road to Botany Bay*. In time, Carter's book would prove a mine of ideas for my academic work, as it weaves together notions of literature, history, mythopoesis and sociology applicable to many a literary text. When I read Eleanor Catton's 2013 Man-Booker-Prize-winning novel *The Luminaries*, Carter's theories came to my mind when trying to unravel Catton's complex narrative. Carter elucidates Australian history not only from Botany Bay onwards, but by rising awareness about the steps that conducted to Botany Bay, similarly, *The Luminaries* looks backwards into the personal stories of those that grounded Hokitika, and into the movement of the stars as a reflection of how humans interpret and fantasize those worlds that we cannot easily grasp.

Eleanor Catton was born in 1985, the year that Keri Hulme received the only other Man Booker Prize for New Zealand with *the bone people*, which put her country on the international literary map. *The Luminaries* tells the deferred story of twelve gold-seekers whose lives could be taken for each zodiacal sign, or, for that matter, for the twelve Christian apostles. In either case, they quiver around

a central axis which determines their runs, a centre that could easily be read as the Sun or God, among other possibilities, depending on who is directing the inscription of the new community. But, to all purposes, in Catton's novel it is Gold that turns these men into modern alchemists, ready to trade country, family, genealogy, honourable name and ethics for the shining mineral. Nevertheless, in a superficial first reading, what is actually at the centre of this novel is a mystery, a crime that brings fiction into the narrative in the form of ghosts, rumours, speculation and, therefore, fear. In accordance with the complex structure of the novel —allegedly sustained by astrological principles— readers have a hard work combining all these layers of meaning in order to complete the puzzle and identify the *Godspeed's* ghost and its legend and, on its tail, the epic of creating a new world from scratch, thus converting the muddy Hokitika into a proper city.

Catton gives us some key words in the "Note to the Reader", in the first page of the novel, where she explains that action in *The Luminaries* takes place during the Age of Pisces, an age of "mirrors, tenacity, instinct, twinship, and hidden things". This lead into the story influences our perspective and delineates our choice of language in assessing the novel, knowing that the narrative pretends to evolve around those characteristics and within the realm of the zodiac. Each character has his or her own personal story, consisting of hopes, wishes, loves, pains, name, place and chronology, which develop, clash or collapse when, within the general outline of Hokitika country, their orbits cross those belonging to someone else. But, while Catton tells us to believe all along in the cosmological characteristics implicit within this new society, she is subverting Ptolemy's classic definition of the field, which defies her point of departure in enumerating precisely the opposite of what she proposes:

With regard to virtuous conduct in practical actions and character, this science, above all things, could make men see clearly; from the constancy, order, symmetry, and calm which are associated with the divine, it makes its followers lovers of this divine beauty, accustoming them and reforming their natures, as it were, to a similar spiritual state.

*Ptolemy*

The making of Hokitika does not fulfil the idea that Ptolemy had of cosmology and how it governs people's attitudes; on the contrary, his definition seems to be the specular image of the steps taken in the epic of the new place. Where the classic thinker sees order Hokitika offers chaos, where he sees symmetry, the new town presents constant and unexpected alterations, and as for calm —if any—, we find it only on the surface. In fact, we could safely assert that Hokitika is the exact reverse of Ptolemy's ideal: the place to bring out the worst in human nature. There is nothing divine in the pioneering town, but only despair that leads its inhabitants into drugs, whoring, cheating, fighting and, eventually, killing.

This same idea of reversion or specular image is observed by one of the main characters, Walter Moody; when first considering the New Zealand diggings, he felt "a dim sense (he did not know from where) that the colony was somehow the shadow of the British Isles, the unformed savage obverse of the Empire's seat and heart" (11). More than three hundred pages later, Moody recalls that on disembarking in Dunedin, from Liverpool, "he had cast his gaze skyward, and had felt for the first time the strangeness of where he was. The skies were inverted, the patterns unfamiliar, the Pole Star beneath his feet, quite swallowed. [...] He found Orion — upended [...] It was as if the ancient patterns had no meaning here" (342-343). "Hokitika" is a Maori word and Te-Rau Tauwhare, the only Maori in the novel, explains the meaning of that word, which actually accounts for what the novel is trying to convey: "Around. And then back again, beginning" (106). This eternal recurrence is what makes Hokitika one in a long series of fantasy communities in the making narrated in film and literature: the goal, the journey, the fear and, eventually, success and destruction are recurrent, but the need to establish difference is what adds fantasy to it, what turns history into narration. So, it all must be set in a proper epic narrative in order to validate the story and turn it into history.

*The Luminaries* starts with a meeting of prominent men, Hokitika's agents to be. First we hear about their physical appearance, their dress and their body language, then we learn about their past and genealogy, the why and how they have converged in this same place on earth. And then, step by step, we find out about the network of relationships that binds them together. Together they form Hokitika, and their individual stories account for the foundation of the town, a patriarchal constellation drawn by the fate of those twelve men, a firmament dominated by males, drawn to a centre secularly compounded by the triad of gold, money and power. These men interrelate with one another, their orbits crisscross and, as a consequence, their individual stories are modified and proceed in unexpected courses. But it is practically impossible for the reader to account for those changes, both in character or motivation, unless we unravel the narrative mesh by carefully organizing the bits and pieces and their chronotope, thus creating an order we finally manage to understand. That is, we need to elaborate a story, the history of Hokitika, and close-read *The Luminaries* as the novel it is. This can be easily compared to the reading of the universe at large, if we are to follow Catton's suggestion; as astronomers divide the infinite into houses, organize them within the structure of the constellations, and proceed from there, leaving aside, for future use, the sidereal dust that dissolves our fictitious orderly notion of a world of reality and facts, so does *The Luminaries* create spheres of influence within the area of Hokitika, classifying persons according to class, race and gender, and re-enacting and reinforcing the appropriate dose of fantasy and reality that has secularly transformed space into place.

In the novel Catton makes events happen simultaneously but, following the good practice in detective stories, gives us a summary from time to time in order to enable us to disentangle such a wealth of information. The following paragraph, at the beginning of the chapter entitled "True Node in Virgo", is a good example of this:

At the very moment that Gascoigne took his leave of Edgar Clinch, slamming the Gridiron's front door rather discourteously behind him, Dick Mannering and Charlie Frost were disembarking from the ferry onto the stones at the riverbank at Kaniere. The commission merchant Harald Nilssen was also rapidly approaching that place on foot: he had just passed the wooden marker announcing he was one half-mile distant from the settlement, an encouragement that had induced him to increase his pace considerably, though he continued to swipe the wet grasses at the roadside with his stick. The object of all three men was, of course, to reach Kaniere Chinatown, and there demand an interview with the Chinese goldsmith Quee Long - who had just been startled, as presently he would be again, by the arrival of a very unexpected guest. (257).

This quotation depicts for us the characters' motivations, shown in the adjectives and adverbs that accompany them ("rapidly", "discourteously", "startled" or "very unexpected"), and provides a carefully drawn map of the place, with the road in the making, from Hokitika to the Chinatown in Kaniere, part a river way, part a mud path. This undecidability of the physical route, and the fact that the path is not used by the honourable citizens of Hokitika in the open, converts its transit into a rite of passage, makes that road the representation of "a journey" (Carter, 1987: 310). Not only do people feel the loneliness and deviousness of the path to Chinatown, with the accompanying sense of fear (all three basic characteristics of any rite of passage), but they charge this road-to-be with direction, with a determined, if forbidden, destination. Thus, Hokitika's citizens fulfil S. Blair's dictum that "the meaning of place [is] not a matter of intrinsic or dominant cultural value but of experiential history" (1998: 551). That is, the connecting thread between the only two existing communities in that part of the country has no more value than that experimented by those characters, who do not

inscribe it in their speech, since Kaniere, even though crowded with citizens and regularly visited, is a taboo place in the community.

In order to inscribe meaning into culture and turn it into history, any new world —be it geographical, ideological, sidereal or else— needs an epic to be made understandable to the human mind so that people are able to take root in it. Hokitika wounds around a chimera, defined in the dictionaries as "a wild and unrealistic dream or notion" (Collins Concise) or "an illusion or fabrication of the mind" (Merriam-Webster). The chimera of *The Luminaries* is that of the gold seekers, who, through their capacity for fantasy and their hope to hit a gold vein, imagined the place out of a few rumours and, in the act of picturing themselves there, brought it "into being as the occasion of a historical event. In this sense, from the point of view of spatial history, the road is richly metaphorical" (Carter, 1987: 310). If we understand a galaxy as the space occupied by a group of stars, where the different stars stand for individual characters, *The Luminaries* constitutes a sustained metaphor of the making of a new galaxy: Hokitika, an incipient social unit. Difficult as it is to delimit or understand what a galaxy is, we could easily agree on calling it the material world, the physical representation of what we might understand as "reality". And, pursuing the cosmological metaphor stated by Catton herself, we can oppose it to the fictional world of the novel, the constellation, which is made from weaving together the fantasy route of the different stars of the galaxy, and assigning each route a particular picture, a name and a whole set of zodiacal meanings. Carter, again, relates the stars, "which provided as good a genealogy as any" (1987: 334), with such an important action as naming and the creation of meaning—even though it is clear that naming depends on power and has nothing to do with the subject itself.

The names Anna, the main female character, is called are a good example of that; she is a whore, a lover, an interlocutor, a friend or a loved one, among many others, depending on who mentions her. These processes fulfil Zygmunt Bauman's theories on movement and identity building, according to which meaning is effected through the wandering of characters along "the track leading to the finishing line where the meaning resides. [...] [They and the world] acquire their meanings *together*, and *through each other*." (1996: 22). So do characters and the town itself experience different stages of being till they reach the identity accord to them by time, place and history. Meaning, in Catton's novel, is constructed through a convoluted and devious structure. *The Luminaries* is divided into twelve parts of different length, modelled on the signs of the zodiac. The first part, which takes place on one day, 27 January 1866, is a long chapter of narrative formation; its 360 pages are, in turn, divided into twelve parts, one for each main character. The title of this chapter is a good indicator of the intention of the novel "A Sphere within a Sphere", pointing to the spidernet of different ways of being and states of development, closely interconnected so as to create a sense of belonging that will allow for the formation of a new community from scratch and with a vocation into the future.

This meeting of differences makes Hokitika and its surroundings, necessarily, a site for tensions "peculiar to borderline existences" (Bhabha, 1994: 218), since new communities are built through performative discourses. Out of these tensions characters emerge, also necessarily, changed by their encounters. This human sphere "in the making" evolves outside the limits of imperial history, which turns Hokitika into frontier land, land yet to be "civilized" and inscribed into history. Unlike in imperial history which, according to Carter, only "pays attention to events unfolding in time" (1987: xvi), the events in *The Luminaries* unfold in space, in parallel and superimposed narratives. This is why Carter's notion of spatial history becomes so useful to unravel Catton's Hokitika, for "the country was not simply already there, waiting to be discovered, but the act of journeying in and around it, mapping it, naming it, is what tenders it meaningful" (Sheridan, 2010: 1). With the collusion between imperial and spatial ideas of history, characters create, inadvertently, Hokitika as a na(rra)tion (Bhabha, 1990), dependable on the ability of its inmates to recognize, share and narrate their participation in converting space into a place. Once Hokitika becomes a space full of meaning for the twelve main characters, it can be considered part of the sidereal sphere, that is, as history within

cosmos. This experience has been common to other such enterprises throughout the history of art producing - to witness, when Marianne O'Doherty summarizes *The Travels of Sir John Mandeville*, which first circulated around 1360, in terms that could still be applied, seven centuries later, to *The Luminaries*:

the author structures the book to mirror the world it seeks to represent, confects a single spatial representation out of multiple perspectives, imagines cosmology through the experience of the traveller, embeds the experiences of the individual traveller within a geographical and cosmological framework, and, occasionally, shows signs of the difficulty of his compositional task. (2013: 211)

*The Luminaries* shares with other narrated places the epic of creating a new world from scratch, a world full of legends (*Godspeed*, Crosbie Wells, Chinatown, etc), since any new community validates its existence only through the exhibit of force and bravery, the magnanimity of exposing one's own life for the benefit of the people and a sort of communion with the gods, a touch of extra-sensorial virtues. This requires a language that is beyond the ordinary, a language of fantasy, half historical, half legendary that will elevate this unnamed, unnarrated portion of earth to the category of a star, that is, a meeting point in the map of New Zealand and, as such, a genesic cultural and literary possibility. The initial blank space of New Zealand territory of what is going to be Hokitika has to be mapped and named, not only with ordinary possibilities but with the language of purpose, the language of history.

This is done in a similar fashion to the way we come to terms with the understanding of the universe: starting with the most apparent element and proceeding from there to the closing of the sphere —not in vain did Eleanor Catton professed her "faith in the vast and knowing influence of the infinite sky" (Note to the Reader). Consistently, each of the main characters represents a necessary profession to ground a gold-rush town: a goldfields magnate, a digger, a goldsmith, a banker, a shipping agent, a commission merchant, a justice's clerk, a newspaperman, an hotelier, a chaplain and so on. They not only display the conventional characteristics associated with the signs of the zodiac —as has been previously pointed out— but they are also archetypes, blueprints of their profession, to the point that we do not need to have their function in Hokitika explained to us. Given their role, we expect certain actions from them in order to keep the town in motion and make the life of its inhabitants an easy task. Homi Bhabha has pointed out that the making of a new society by definition has tensions, and so do literary archetypes act and react differently within their own boundaries, so that their actions, therefore, have to be explained in order to be understood. That is, novel and characters develop in a similar way to the creation of a zodiacal system, in that the universe and the novel need to be rendered feasible to the human mind.

*The Luminaries*'s structure and narrative constitute the myth that explains the creation of Hokitika. A myth that is expressed with the type of language with which the imagination orders basic mental images, initial feelings that are, in this case, prompted by the possible existence of gold, the riches that metal would bring, and the potentialities of a new beginning in a new place and the promise of a better life. This cannot be expressed only in terms of greed, Hokitika needs, as well, honest, positive characters that fulfil the archetypes of the good citizen, but good citizens alone cannot account for the founding of a proper new place. The language of myth fuses the conscious with the unconscious, what we inherit already impressed in our imaginary, as a result of eons of culture building, while believing, at the same time, that we are free agents in a random world. Myth is a discourse created to help people order the complexities of life, while myth-makers (and literary authors) capitalize on the construct we call culture, impelling people to move forward and face unknown fates and fortunes. Thus, Hokitika has become a literary paradigm of the grounding of a new city in a frontier, uninhabited land.

The last eleven parts of *The Luminaries* cover, one part a month, a whole year —ranging from April

1865 to 1866. The fourth part, "Paenga-wha-wha", overlaps the beginning and end of the series within the same month and zodiacal sign, Aries, to show the slight change in the position of Aries in the sky or, rather, our perception of it; in a word, to show how such a short span of time has changed characters and their position in Hokitika. As chapters progress from January 1866 onwards they become one part shorter at a time, till we arrive full circle to chapter twelve which has, consistently, only one part. The whole sphere of the world as we humans are able to perceive it is, so far, completed. The last part, or chapter, in the book is titled, precisely, "The Luminaries", and in its few lines (seventeen) it links the novel with Western tradition through the recurrence to T.S. Eliot's epic language and Christian iconography. It starts with the line "Tonight shall be the very beginning" (832), reminiscence of Eliot's "In my beginning is my end" ("East Coker", *Four Quartets*: 1945), which renders human life as a perfect sphere, and breaks, therefore, the illusion of chronological evolution. At the same time the concomitance of both sentences immediately establishes a play with creativity and fiction writing:

"Ought we to have different ones?"  
"Different beginnings? I think we must."  
"Will there be more of them?"  
"A great many more".  
(832)

This last part of the novel is indeed illuminating, and it highlights the main themes that underlie the story. Anna refers to her role in Hokitika in the following terms: "My beginning was the albatrosses" (831), thus connecting her fate to Coleridge's well known literary reference in "The Rhyme of the Ancient Mariner" (1798), in which the poet inscribes the bird as a metaphor meant to be a psychological burden that feels like a curse —and that, pointedly, Anna will carry then around her neck from the beginning to the end of *The Luminaries*. But Anna implements the reference, by using the plural, to the "real" albatrosses that had welcomed her to her new country, the albatross being also a bird of good omen, and, in that category, referring to her (in the end) successful journey to New Zealand.

Part Twelve is subtitled "The Old Moon in the Young Moon's Arms". Since the very last words of the novel are "The rain", we can take this chapter to stand for hope and renewal —the phases of the Moon starting all over again and the positive meaning of rain comprised in its force to germinate new seeds, to cleanse away all curses and sins and to bring spring out of a barren winter. At this point we find Anna Wetherell and Emery Staines in each other's arms: they are the young newcomers into a plot already enmeshed in lies and thefts. Throughout the novel they remained mostly in the dark with regard to the abuses in Hokitika and they finish the narrative in complete physical darkness. Nonetheless, they represent the luminaries of the title, the sun and the moon indistinctly, one as the source of light, the other as its reflection. They are the embodiment of their times, the Age of Pisces, an age of mirrors, tenacity, instinct and twinship, as stated at the beginning by the author. Furthermore, their names also invite to be read as emblematic; not only because of the genealogy of their last names, Wetherell and Staines, but because of that final, meaningful dialogue:

"I feel - more than myself."  
"I feel - as though a new chamber of my heart has opened."  
(832)

If Anne Wetherell is more than just herself, she is to be read as the woman for all seasons (Wetherell is an homophone for "all weathers"), the one character with the strength to minister differently to different people and to assist Emery Staines (the man to bear the original sin or human stain in the novel) and other characters in changing their lives and improving their social behaviour. This reading

would account for the religious cosmogony we mentioned at the beginning —that of a godly axis surrounded by twelve acolytes and implemented by a healing woman, morally virginal if not physically a virgin.

This linking of human life and culture, completed with life in the sky and literature, complex as it is, fits Jacques Derrida's concept of "dissemination". If, according to the Argelian thinker, meaning is scattered throughout time and space, we can deduce that individuals harvest their own bits and pieces in consonance with their means and wits as they are moved by fate and deeds through life. So, when characters come together, in Hokitika, as is now the case, they have to elbow other experiences of life, other "truths", aside by the force of their own conviction. All lives and accounts constitute, thus, not simply a novel or a town, but a "mythical milieu that is now washing over [the reader], slipping into [the reader], out of [the reader], everywhere, forever" (Sollers, 1981: xxx). In fact, this overflowing of meaning in the making is the site for polyphony and polysemy, the coming together of many voices and different meanings. This meeting is punctuated in *The Luminaries* by the rendering of a tableau of all the characters —a pattern that is repeated throughout the novel and also in the final heading to the last chapter: Walter Moody, in his role as focalizer of the narrative, interprets those communal portraits;

In his mind Moody had arranged these external figures. [...] This realization pleased him - for Moody's mind was an orderly one, and he was reassured by patterns of any kind. Almost whimsically he wondered what role he himself played, in this strange tangle of association, yet to be solved. [...] They were gazing at him with more or less the same expression of hopeful expectation - the emotion betrayed, restrained, or displayed, according to the temper of the man. So I am to be the unraveller, Moody thought. The detective: that is the role I am to play. (352).

Again we find the conjunction of motives in the story; in arranging the external figures Moody is drawing a zodiacal constellation, amplifying the narrative over and above characters, the writer and the reader. Moody, in attentively recording what he sees and hears, functions, according to Paul Carter, also as a historian, as "an impartial onlooker, simply repeating what happened" (xv). Polysemy could not have been accomplished by realism alone, by narrating the story in a linear, self-explanatory way, as this would have resulted either in an impersonal historical account or in a moral tale. And it is polysemy which validates the "real" possibilities (we can accept an oxymoron at this point in the narrative) of the text since, after all, Hokitika is a real town in contemporary New Zealand that was, indeed, formed during the gold-rush.

All these efforts to convey the multiplicity of human experience, which drain into a common cultural waterway of language, are affected and re-created by our individual and communal actions, and they conform an ever new, contemporary subject. This new subject, as embodied in Walter Moody in *The Luminaries*, would respond, partially and with many caveats, to the *nómade* subject as defined by Rosi Braidotti, "a subject in becoming and, at the same time, grounded to a determined historical situation, embodied and situated" (hoi.polloi, 2011). Only such a subject can analyse the varied mutations that configure our contemporary cultural cartography, that is, "what is happening to bodies, identities, belongings, in a world that is technologically mediated, ethnically mixed and changing very fast in all sorts of ways" (hoi.polloi, 2011).

With *The Luminaries*, Catton has gone one step further into fantasy, the language of re/creation of new worlds —she has brought to life the zodiacal signs, transmuting them into people, or maybe it is the other way around, maybe we should say that Catton has forced people into astral archetypes. From a literary perspective, Catton has provided an important stepping stone towards proving that the world

as we know it is one entangled net of interactiveness, an increasingly globalized, closely knit and overwhelming sphere, impossible to experience as a whole, which is why human intelligence has been breaking the world up into small pieces, each one adjusted to our partial knowledge. In recent decades, contemporary, postmodern culture has attempted to fuse as many pieces together as language and thought will allow. Catton has, therefore, attempted to coordinate different approaches to history, including everyday life and myth creating, and she has produced an original, multifarious novel.

Catton, on the other hand, is only reproducing the patriarchal system. She has persevered in the dominant and secular invisibility of the role of women in the event of any new cultural construction or in any rendering or analysis of a partial or holistic cultural reading. The very few women who appear in *The Luminaries* fulfil the worst aspects of female possibilities, they are merely fragments of the male imagination: a prostitute (a former candid, credulous girl), a widow (formerly a madame in a brothel for rich men) and a passive, subdued wife. *The Luminaries* missed a grand occasion to fill in the absences in this new epic of a gold-rush town. It simply followed suit, backing up the Masters. We are too far gone into the twenty first century not to miss the female voices that should have been there, especially after other literary works from and about the antipodes have paved the way to such an implementation while also showing its benefits, as in the case of Linda Spalding's *Daughters of Captain Cook* (1961), Jean Bedford's *Sister Kate* (1982), Peter Carey's *Oscar and Lucinda* (1988), Kate Grenville's *Joan Makes History* (2002), or, for that matter, Keri Hulme's *the bone people* itself, to name but a few novels that took into consideration the "other side" in history making. It might be argued that both women and men in *The Luminaries* are mere archetypes of the grounding of a city, but surely a novelist in 2013 should have a broader perspective when launching into an innovative fictional and fantasy world. Back in 1994, Braidotti, for one, already gave us the tools and precise instructions to use them: "Nomadism is a qualitative shift of consciousness that makes you inhabit the positions of power so as to change it." (hoi.polloi, 2011)

We should once again turn to Paul Carter's theories to find a general explanation for this major omission in Catton's novel. In summarizing the many sides of writing history, towards the end of his book, he reminds us that

History has a historical horizon which is constituted by the activity of history itself: the horizon of writing. It offers the mechanism for generating a tradition, but not the means of reflecting on the validity of the tradition itself. In this sense, it may exclude much of the past which matters to us - our own spatiality, for instance. [Because the fact] that history is essentially an act of interpretation, a re-reading of documents, means that it hides our origins from us. For, by its nature, history excludes all that is not quoted or written down. (Carter, 1987: 326)

Literature is not subjected to that historical horizon, nor are we humans. So it is the prerogative of authors to provide that missing link, the written words that can open life to a historiographic metafictional perspective. Paul Carter subverts the presupposition that Australia came into being from the time Captain Cook rests his foot in Botany Bay, therefore he uses "to" in the title of his book, a preposition that inscribes the time previous to Cook's landing. But that time is not written down, black letters on white paper, that time has to be recovered through memory, traces and artefacts, much aided by the logic and reason Western culture has been treasuring for ages. Failing that, we can always follow Carter's dictum of "perception as interpretation" (324) and adhere to Philippe Sollers's words that "this tale is addressed to the reader's intelligence, which puts things on stage, itself" (Johnson, 1981: xxx). But not in vain, we are reminded by astrophysicists themselves that even astronomers have been drawing and redrawing orbits and celestial routes for the last five hundred years, which, to them, is sensible and logical within such a vast, unstable terrain —so, even that "scientific" lead will allow for relocations in the polyphonic scene. *The Luminaries* should not be only the past of the

present, not even the present come back, but the discovery of a new galaxy full of potentialities and open to the future. Its addition to fantasy is bringing the astrological realm into the composition of a new community, making readers understand that eight hundred pages on the birth of a town mean no more than sidereal dust in the myth of eternal recurrence of contemporary civilization.

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