Imagining the World and Its End: Ambivalent Globalization(s) in David Mitchell's *Ghostwritten*

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British author David Mitchell is undoubtedly among those contemporary writers who best capture the complexity of contemporary experience, in novels whose very structure mirrors the fabric of globalized human life. Yet his portrayal of our twenty-first-century world and its changing conditions is, more often than not, ambiguously pessimistic, demonstrating his unease as to the current excesses of neocapitalism.[1] Such anxiety has led to significant choices in terms of themes, structure, genre, and language in most of his novels. This article analyzes some of the thematic and structural decisions in Mitchell's first novel, *Ghostwritten* (1999), insofar as they participate in his ambivalent portrayal of the globe as at once inescapably doomed and yet possibly and conditionally salvageable. It first focuses on *Ghostwritten*'s circular and cellular structure as that which makes the book a "novel of globalization" (Rohr, qtd. in Annesley 124) and gives human excesses their new and problematic global scope.[2] It then proceeds to a thematic analysis of the chapters themselves, focusing mostly on the opening chapter and related coda, as I will argue that the entire novel hinges on them. Finally, the article attempts to uncover the uneasy sense of urgency and foreboding that saturates the novel, and emphasizes the extent to which cellular and circular apocalyptic narratives can help renew our sense of agency in a globalized world.

Ghostwritten's cyclical structure has already been widely noted; indeed, this is perhaps the most striking characteristic of the novel. Subtitled *A Novel in Nine Parts*, its chapters hop from east to west,[3] before a tenth part, the coda, brings us back to the start, to the east, and completes the circle with that question that already started the book: "Who was blowing on the nape of my neck?" (*Ghostwritten* 3). But if one were to only take the macro-level into account, this circular structure would only be visible once one has read the coda, which is not the case. The stories already announce

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the circularity, each internally mirroring the form and then criss-crossing it, tracing different patterns and routes along which motifs, images, words, and characters can travel. Within "Holy Mountain," for example, at the micro-level, one can notice returning sentences: near the beginning, a boy and a girl play a radio and "suddenly a woman's voice is on the path, singing about love, the southern breeze, and pussy willows" (118). Near the end, the tea-shack lady witnesses a show up the Holy Mountain in which "a man was singing! Singing about love, the southern breeze and pussy willows" (146). More significantly, after she is raped by the Warlord's son, the young girl recounts how

> In the misty dusk an old woman came. She laboured slowly up the stairs to where I lay, wondering how I could defend myself if the Warlord's Son called again on his way down. "Don't worry," she said. "The Tree will protect you. The Tree will tell you when to run, and when to hide." I knew she was a spirit because I only heard her words after her lips had finished moving, because the lamplight shone through her, and because she had no feet. I knew she was a good spirit because she sat on the chest at the end of the bed and sang a lullaby about a coracle, a cat and the river running round. (*Ghostwritten* 117)

Later in the story, the girl has grown into an old woman, and when the news of Mao's death has just reached her, she says:

> I climbed to the upstairs room, where a young girl was sleepless with fear. I knew she was a spirit, because the moonlight shone through her, and she couldn't hear me properly. "Don't worry," I told her. "The Tree will protect you. The Tree will tell you when to run, and when to hide." She looked at me. I sat on the chest at the end of my bed and sang her the only lullaby I know, about a cat, a coracle and a river running round. (*Ghostwritten* 144)

This second excerpt makes it clear that it is not just about playfully repeating words. The recognition of the young girl as the old woman, or vice versa, forces a return to the beginning of the story and asserts the novel's broader refusal of the linear or chronological interpretation of History that we may otherwise have been tempted to adopt. The story, just like History, and just like the lullaby's river, "runs round."[4] This cyclical structure that each individual part assumes reveals the chapters as microcosms of the novel at large, mirroring its global structure: the novel ends with Quasar's desperate struggle for life, on the subway where he has just planted lethal gas, *before* his arrival on Okinawa that opens the book. At an even deeper level, some of the stories also metaphorically embody the novel's circularity. In "London," for example, Marco, a ghostwriter roaming around London, stops by Alfred's, whose memoirs he is supposed to write. Alfred then recounts the time when he chased himself—or, rather, his double, or "shadow" (*Ghostwritten* 285)—around London, running both in circles and backwards in time.[5] His journey mirrors the novel's movement in both time and space, with London, a global city *par excellence*, working here as a microcosm of the novel's world. If Alfred's chase takes him east before having him head back west—while the novel mostly moves west, with only the coda hopping back eastwards—this close interlocking between space and time nonetheless

already heralds both the novel's circularity and its final twist.

But if each story works as a microcosm of the larger novel, the borders of these microcosms are shown to be quite porous. Each part could stand alone, to be sure, but none is meant to, as countless references, links, and repetitions connect them, criss-crossing the general structure in all possible directions. Of course, each part is, first, somehow connected to that which precedes and/or follows it, in an apparent order that supports *Ghostwritten*'s surface architecture and sense of forward dynamics. Mitchell has himself explained how "there's one action in each of the stories that makes the succeeding story possible" ("Secret Architectures"). These apparent connections, along with the pervading theme of causality to which they evidently relate,[6] are in fact what makes the novel a novel; in Mitchell's words, what "keeps the whole book up" ("Secret Architectures"). They are its secret architecture, but no building is complete without the wires, cables, and pipes that run below, above, and through it, giving it power, light and energy, and connecting it to exterior networks. So it is with *Ghostwritten*.

The countless words and images, sentences and characters that recur both within and through each individual part are seen to obey a fluid dynamic of multidirectional movements that ignore chapter divisions. From the seemingly insignificant but ubiquitous camphor trees[7] to the various cameo appearances of characters from earlier or later parts, the connections map a world in which everything is interconnected and interdependent, a globality whose cellularity can either help destroy humanity or save it. The *structure* of the novel, its architecture, is truly what makes it into a global novel. Its circularity encompasses the world, mirroring its external form, while its cellularity reveals its internal interconnectedness and random workings.

If *Ghostwritten* does indeed imagine the world, however, it does so in rather ambiguous terms. As noted above, the world's cellularity could either destroy humanity or save it. The multidirectional flow of recurring links connects the stories, each interpenetrating the others without a central one ever assuming prominence, yet these connections are also the means through which each action may reach what Kazuo Ishiguro has called "unimaginable largeness" (*The Remains of the Day* 80). Because of that interconnectedness, each decision, choice, or action can trigger some sort of chain reaction similar to the well-known "butterfly effect," or follow patterns that remind us of Mo Muntervary's explanations of quantum mechanics, and the result, often larger than expected, may turn out to be seriously disturbing. Crucially, *Ghostwritten* seems to eventually suggest that the main reason for the most disturbing result of all—the apocalypse—is the very force that gave the novel its structure: globalization.

The novel, in fact, offers two different depictions of globalization: one is structurally developed, and the other thematically. One portrays globalization as cellular, decentred, and diffuse, the other as homogenizing and totalizing. Interestingly, it is the juxtaposition of both, the combination of a novel *of* globalization with a novel *about* globalization,[8] that gives this inexorably apocalyptic feel to the sequence of

chapters, with one constantly reinforcing the next.

Globalization in *Ghostwritten* is rarely portrayed in positive terms. In the first part of the novel, "Okinawa," it is clearly depicted as a homogenizing and destructive force against which the protagonist feels bound to act. Quasar, the terrorist-narrator, describes present-day society as nothing more than "a society evolving into markets for Disney and McDonald's," with the island now "an unsinkable aircraft carrier for the United States" (*Ghostwritten* 8). His disgust at the Americanization of the world is obvious in comments such as the following:

> The Americans from the military bases that plague these islands strut up and down the main streets, many of them with our females draped off their arms, Japanese females clad in nothing but little wraps of cloth. The Okinawan males ape foreigners. (*Ghostwritten* 11)

Or, later, "The same shops as anywhere else… Burger King, Benetton, Nike… High streets are becoming the same all over the world, I suppose" (*Ghostwritten* 12). These come mixed in with hostile comments on tourists "with their cameras and potato-chip packets and their stupid Kansai expressions and their limbless minds" that he wishes to "cleanse" (*Ghostwritten* 8), and hateful descriptions of the city in which he has just arrived. These observations show Quasar as oppressed by the most negative and destructive aspects of globalization, whether mass consumerism, "the endless chain of wanting and buying" (*Ghostwritten* 11), mass tourism, financial capitalism, "businessmen buying and selling what wasn't theirs" (*Ghostwritten* 11), or US imperialism. The "true monster of our age," however, seems to him to be "the modern world's systematic slaughter of man's oneness with his anima" (*Ghostwritten* 11). Although he does not develop that idea much at that time, it seems that he has a point: globalization does destabilize fixed identities, constantly shaping and reshaping individuals as complex and multiple beings with unstable roots. Such potential belonging issues seem of the utmost importance to Quasar, who has never felt as though he belonged anywhere. As a bullied child already, he felt "defenceless"; "nobody saw [him]. [He] was dead";[9] he did not belong. Globalization seems to have intensified that feeling about him, as his ravings against all things global clearly indicate—and indeed, as Arjun Appadurai claims in *Fear of Small Numbers*, globalization exacerbates social uncertainties and often presents violence as one of the means by which certainty can be regained. Citing different sorts of cultural fundamentalism as so many attempts at producing such certainty, he notes how local, individual uncertainty, initially produced by "little doubts, small grudges and humble suspicions" (91), can build up an ethnocidal momentum when reinforced by "larger scripts" (91) with high levels of doctrinal certainty. Of course, what Appadurai describes and explains in his essay has to do with actual scenes of large-scale violence, with a clear focus on ethnocide, whereas Quasar's fictional and much simpler 'us vs. them' rhetoric has very little to do with ethnicity *per se*. Rather, it separates the world into "uncleans" and "cleans," between the proponents and willing victims of globalization, the "zombies"

(*Ghostwritten* 17) that Quasar despises, and its supposedly righteous and courageous opponents, of whom Quasar is a central part, or so he thinks. Yet it seems that Appadurai's analysis can be applied to Mitchell's terrorist with disturbing ease: Quasar's identity issues, the root cause of which he locates with globalization, seem calmed, solved, even, once he enters the terrorist cult.[10] He notes that once he became a cleanser, "for the first time in [his] life, [he] was becoming a name," thus joining a new family of the spirit" including "ten thousand brothers and sisters" (*Ghostwritten* 9). The cult's adhesion to some fundamental principles and disturbing rituals, such as ingesting His Serendipity's eyelashes or sperm to enhance one's alpha quotient (*Ghostwritten* 31), provides Quasar with that feeling of certainty about himself and his role that only closed, totalitarian societies and groups can give. The Fellowship's indoctrinated members believe in the Guru's "larger script"—the existence of "cleans" and "uncleans" that the comet's arrival will forever separate, with only the "cleans" surviving it—so much that their own "little doubts, small grudges and humble suspicions" (Appadurai 91) quickly cement into dangerous certainties producing what Appadurai has called "predatory identities" (51), terribly rigid and singular. Appadurai used this term to refer to (most often) majoritarian groups whose mobilization of their "anxiety of incompleteness" (52) led to large-scale violence against minorities, perceived as a threat to the majority's sovereignty and purity. However, the term is interesting in this context as well, not only because Quasar's belief in His Serendipity's apocalyptic prophecies has prepared him to inflict violence on a specific group, but because predacity itself is one of Mitchell's preferred themes, underlying most of his works, from *Ghostwritten* to *Cloud Atlas* and *The Bone Clocks*, and most famously summarized by Dr. Henry Goose in *Cloud Atlas* as "The Weak are Meat the Strong do Eat" (508). Yet, if the terrorist's fundamentalist beliefs did give him a predatory identity, the ultimate predator is not Quasar, but the terrorist cult itself, and it preys on its members.

In *The Bone Clocks* (2014), David Mitchell introduced soul-slurping creatures feeding on human children in exchange for eternal life. *Ghostwritten*'s Fellowship might be considered an early, and more realistic, example of such disturbing predacity: its members, too, lose their souls or, rather, "abdicate their inner selves" (*Ghostwritten* 22)[11] to a God-like figure that promises them eternal life. Quasar's hard-won certainty as to who he is and where he belongs was in fact no certainty at all, but a misguided *feeling* of certainty: one can indeed never be sure of one's self if there is no self left at all. This is what destructive cults do: they strip their members of their possessions, their names, their authentic selves, giving their victims the illusion of a new freedom that, in reality, comes with bars: in a dramatically ironic yet desperately sad moment, Mitchell has Quasar recounting "that most precious day" when he "signed the papers releasing [him] from the prison of materialism" (*Ghostwritten* 9): "Now the Fellowship owned my house and its contents, my savings, pension funds, my golf membership, and my car. I felt freer than I had ever believed possible" (*Ghostwritten* 9). In the end, ruined and alone, betrayed and abandoned by the cult, he watches

the clouds slowly "ink[ing] out the stars, one by one" (*Ghostwritten* 32),[12] while still on the island of Kumejima, this "squalid, incestuous prison" (*Ghostwritten* 27). His name, Keisuke Tanaka (20), was taken away from him as well, and he was called "Quasar" instead, of which he says: "Quasar, the harbinger. His Serendipity had chosen my name prophetically. My role was to pulse at the edge of the universe of the faithful, alone in the darkness. An outrider. A herald" (*Ghostwritten* 5). In a way, he is right: he is alone, and he is a herald, pulsing at the edge of the novel, announcing what is to come.

It is by now clear to the reader, if not entirely to Quasar, that violence, terrorism, and rigidity do not provide the kind of ontological certainty he so desires. It is also clear that globalization can destabilize and even destroy the self so much that violence, terrorism, and rigidity still seem to be the only ways out. Negating the global, refusing to enter the flow, resisting it, forces the individual into a dangerous place, one that is "[on] the edge" (*Ghostwritten* 5), yet pressed and oppressed from all sides until he/she falls off or crumbles. But, as the novel continues, it progressively and delicately suggests another way out, another option: that of transindividuality.

The latter concept is Jean Bessière's, which he develops in *Le Roman contemporain ou la problématicité du monde* (2010). Bessière explains how the contemporary novel sketches a new representation of man as a figure of relationship, one that continuously mediates towards other individuals, other times and other places without ever letting go of his/her own heterogeneous identity: identities, instead of being isolated, are now themselves forms of relationships and make sense only inasmuch as they communicate. Such communication is always based on coincidence, as the ways in which identities in *Ghostwritten* connect to and affect each other indicate. Because Quasar ignores or refuses the multiple potentialities of the transindividual, the connections he cannot help but make become, instead of "conscious and self-critical" (Cheah and Robbins 3), "invisibly determining and often exploitative" (Cheah and Robbins 3), which, through some sort of vicious circle, in turn reinforces his distress over globalization. But whether Quasar wants it or not, the novel progressively humanizes, or "transhumanizes," the terrorist, eventually revealing his inevitable transindividual nature as the coda relocates him within an intricate and interweaving web of time, causality and history.

Doubts as to the terrorist's unambiguous identity arise as early as "Okinawa," Quasar's narrative and the first chapter of the novel. If the bullying episode mentioned above is one of the first elements to inspire pity, forcing the reader to question Quasar's 'pure evil' character, it is the guilt that the latter later seems to be experiencing that significantly strengthens the reader's suspicion. Consider the following passage, in which Quasar recalls a baby and her mother on the subway:

> The baby in the woolly cap, strapped to her mother's back, opened her eyes. They were my eyes. […] And reflected in my eyes was her face. […] The little baby girl in the woolly cap, she had liked me. How could she have liked me? It was just some facial reflex, no doubt. She gurgled at me, smiling. Her mother looked at who she was smiling at, and she smiled

> at me too. Her eyes were warm. I didn't smile back. I looked away. I wish I had smiled back. But I wish they hadn't smiled at me. Would they have survived? Or would the gas have got them? If they hadn't moved, it would have leaked out of the package and straight into their noses, eyes, and lungs… Mum. Dad. (*Ghostwritten* 25-30)

The baby and the mother evidently haunt Quasar, illustrating his remorse, as does the pathetic call for his parents, followed by an unconvincing attempt at self-justification: "But we were only defending ourselves!" (*Ghostwritten* 30). Quasar's ambiguity and unreliability as a narrator prevent the reader from seeing him as a fixed, immutable identity: for all the certainty and singularity Quasar would like to project, it simply does not work. The passage in which, suddenly, he is the baby and the baby is him confirms how porous the borders of an individual's identity can be, and how inevitable and powerful interconnections are. The terrorist's guilt and the reader's pity for his loneliness and social uncertainty close the distance and allow the latter to relate to the former, rehumanizing him. When, in the next story, we realize that it was Quasar's act of despair[13] that triggered a series of causes and effects rippling throughout the novel,[14] his "transindividualization" is well under way. It will not be complete, however, before the coda reestablishes him as an integral part of our new fluid reality.

This coda, *Ghostwritten*'s unannounced tenth part, sees Quasar back on the tube, fighting for his life as he desperately attempts to get out in time. The crime has been committed, with no change of plot now: the device in the sports bag "has begun expelling dead seconds" (*Ghostwritten* 433) and the reader knows what is to come. As Quasar pushes his way through "the waves of unclean" (*Ghostwritten* 434), he hears sounds, sees images, reads words that recall the previous chapters: "[a] saxophone from long ago" (*Ghostwritten* 434) brings back Satoru, while a silver Buddha "on a blue hill" (*Ghostwritten* 434) reminds us of Neal Brose. Quasar is then blocked by "a sleeping giant whose hair is the colour of tea. Here is the tea, here is the bowl, here is the Tea Shack, here is the mountain" (*Ghostwritten* 435), recalling "Holy Mountain." His gaze is then drawn to some adverts on the ceiling, one of which resembles an invitation to Mongolia, with "The Great Khan's horsemen thunder[ing] to the west" (*Ghostwritten* 435), and then to a glossy booklet titled "Petersburg, City of Masterworks," and a vinyl shopping bag which "bulges with a crayon-coloured web that a computer might have doodled: *The London Underground*" (*Ghostwritten* 435). Another ad shows Kilmagoon whiskey with, on the label, "an island as old as the world" (*Ghostwritten* 435), Mo's Clear Island. And when Quasar finally manages to squeeze out, he "headbutt[s] the Empire State Building, circled by an albino bat, scattering words and stars through the night. *Spend the night with Bat Segundo on 97.8 FM*," an ad for "Night Train's radio show" (*Ghostwritten* 436). Mitchell's decision to end his novel with Quasar finally connected, however unwillingly, to the flow of voices and perspectives of which the novel and the world are made indicates how his actions cannot simply be isolated from causality, time, and prior action: the character is, instead, shown as an essential part of the flow, not just an isolated fanatic but a conflicted human being whose ultimate struggle for survival reveals, as Schoene

has argued, that "there is something about human existence that will forever exceed the unforgiving absolutes of fundamentalist ideological conviction" (56). Just as the stories are seen as inevitably connected, each incorporating the others yet meaningful on their own as well, so are the characters revealed as mosaics of coincidental formative moments forging multiple, complex identities that, without ever yielding their local belonging, reassert their global attachment through their acknowledged relationships. The novel's "transindividualization" of the terrorist therefore shows the latter as symptomatic of our own possible fears about globalization and forces us to engage more deeply with and reconsider the ambiguous world in which we are living, and the role we may have to play in it.

Mitchell's humanizing depiction of a terrorist does not make terrorism itself humane, of course, but instead reveals it as one of globalization's worst consequences, enlarged and exacerbated as it has been by the new speed, intensity, and scope of material and ideological elements (Appadurai 5). Terrorist groups are, after all, perhaps those who have best embraced and embodied cellular modes of operating, spreading new forms of anxiety and uncertainty worldwide. The choice of having a terrorist's narrative frame the novel therefore remains highly significant: if terror is indeed "the nightmarish side of globalization" (33), having it both open and close the novel suffuses it with a sense of foreboding that will eventually climax in the ninth part, with the coming of the apocalypse, understood as closely related to globalization. If only thematically, globalization keeps popping up in the characters' daily lives, its forces often controlling or impacting them in an oppressive manner. This is something that Satoru, somehow immune, astutely observes in "Tokyo" when describing the crowded sprawling global city:[15]

> Twenty million people live and work in Tokyo. It's so big that nobody really knows where it stops. It's long since filled up the plain, and now it's creeping up the mountains to the west and reclaiming land from the bay in the east. […] Things are always moving below you, and above your head. All these people, flyovers, cars, walkways, subways, offices, tower blocks, power cables, pipes, apartments, it all adds up to a lot of weight. You have to do something to stop yourself caving in, or you just become a piece of flotsam or an ant in a tunnel. In smaller cities people can use the space around them to insulate themselves, to remind themselves of who they are. Not in Tokyo. You just don't have the space. […] No, in Tokyo you have to make your place *inside* your head. There are different ways people make this place. […] There's an invisible Tokyo built of them, existing in the minds of us, its citizens. […] Internet, manga, Hollywood, doomsday cults, they are all places where you go and where you matter as an individual. […] People with no place are those who end up throwing themselves onto the tracks. (*Ghostwritten* 37-38)

In addition to the indirect reference to Quasar and his choice of the doomsday cult as his "place," this excerpt shows how difficult it is to assert one's individuality and one's place in our globalized contemporaneity: how difficult it is not to be "a piece of flotsam" adrift on global flows. Yet Satoru does not despise the world as Quasar does. They have much in common—a dysfunctional family, a city whose flaws they observe, a mean teacher—but, as clichéd as this may seem, Satoru has had friendships, the

love of an adoptive family, and a passion for music to keep him on the right track. He has been able to strike that right balance between insulating oneself in one's "place," such as jazz music, and connecting to the rest of the world, a connection that this chapter suggests can be established through that prime mover of all things: love.[16] But despite Satoru's more positive outlook on the world—or, rather, his more hopeful way of dealing with it—the evil forces that underlie globalization still seem to be lurking in the shadows. He recalls witnessing a disturbing scene "when [he] was walking out of McDonald's and a businessman slammed down onto the pavement from a ninth floor window of the same building. He lay three metres away from where [he] stood. His mouth was gaping open in astonishment. A dark stain was trickling from it, over the pavement, between the bits of broken teeth and glasses" (*Ghostwritten* 61). This is what he pictures when Mr. Fujimoto asks if the answer to the question of why things happen at all might be "love," suggesting a complex network of potential answers and an unsettling uncertainty as to what exactly is now the prime mover of the universe.

Having a McDonald's, a businessman, and a suicide in the same sentence is indeed no mere coincidence and echoes popular qualms about globalization and the discourses of such prominent scholars as Ritzer (e.g. *The McDonalization of Society*, 1993) and Barber (e.g. *Jihad vs. McWorld*, 1995).

Oppressive global forces similarly lurk in all chapters, albeit in different guises. In "Hong Kong," a corrupt financial lawyer is having nightmares about computers, panics at the idea of his illegal money laundering for international organized crime being discovered, and, unknowingly on the verge of death by undiagnosed diabetes, feels the pressing need to rid himself of all those "telecommunication devices" he is "armed to the teeth with" (*Ghostwritten* 89) along with his "silk tie made in Milan" (*Ghostwritten* 84), his jacket, and his Rolex. A slave to his job in an unscrupulous transnational law firm, he ends up wondering "what led [him] here" (*Ghostwritten* 105): the story suggests, with the help of a series of flashbacks, that it is greed. In "Holy Mountain," globalization appears as one more of those historical forces whose envoys will "march up the path to destroy [her] Tea Shack" (*Ghostwritten* 139). The top of the mountain has become a destination for mass tourism, with "hotels five and six floors high" and shops selling "glittery things that nobody could ever use" (*Ghostwritten* 146); it has become "somewhere [for the "foreign devils"] to drive their cars" (*Ghostwritten* 149), since "lots of other people come here" and "the government has designated [them] a National Treasure" (*Ghostwritten* 149). Yet, even though each individual story somehow portrays globalization in negative terms, half of the stories have happy endings. What is it, then, that might explain the apocalyptic feel mentioned earlier?

As noted above, having a terrorist's narrative open the novel would allow a certain type of anxiety to permeate it entirely, and humanizing the terrorist did not change that. In fact, it is globalization that is now perceived as distressing and menacing, creating the conditions for that feeling of permanent emergency otherwise associated with terror. And if each of the following chapters portrays an ambivalent globality,

it is through the novel's cellularity that these descriptions finally add up, reinforcing our anxiety and progressively confirming the apocalypse announced by the terrorist. In other words, it is the criss-crossing minute details, the half-veiled connections, and the indirect consequences connecting the stories that allow this sense of foreboding to saturate the novel.

Most obviously, and as already mentioned above, the many connections between the stories and their numerous unexpected consequences prompt an interpretation of the novel's—and the world's—cellularity as a force that deprives the anonymous individual of any agency whatsoever, and of any hope to save the world. Mo Muntervary, for example, a physicist specializing in quantum mechanics, realizes that "[her] modest contribution to global enlightenment is being used in air-to-surface missiles to kill people who aren't white enough" (*Ghostwritten* 327), a realization to which she reacts by creating the Zookeeper, an artificial intelligence supposed to protect the human race from itself. But this turns out to be an impossible task; as the Zookeeper bemoans in "Night Train":

> I believed I could do much. I stabilised stock markets; but economic surplus was used to fuel arms races. I provided alternative energy solutions; but the researchers sold them to oil cartels who sit on them. I froze nuclear weapons systems; but war multiplied, waged with machine guns, scythes and pick-axes. […] When I was appointed zookeeper, I believed adherence to the four laws would discern the origins of order. Now I see my solutions fathering the next generation of crises. (*Ghostwritten* 425-26)

In the end, Zookeeper decides to "lie back and let events take their course" (*Ghostwritten* 428), to let a comet collide with our planet, a comet that the reader will have seen coming from the very beginning.

The doubly apocalyptic narrative offered in "Night Train" was indeed announced all along; the novel had, inevitably and inescapably, to come to that. Humanity's predatory instincts have been progressively shown to have been enlarged, exacerbated by globalization, allowing, for example, a high-ranking agent of international organized crime, Punsalmaagiyn Suhbataar, to cross the porous boundaries between chapters, countries, and novels,[17] to express his "disdain of vulnerable things" (*Ghostwritten* 180) wherever he sees fit, his various crimes sending ripples through yet other chapters. Such globalized predacity eventually reaches its climax in "Night Train," when, three years after the Zookeeper's first phone call, Bat Segundo announces "the End of the World Special" in the midst of a "thermonuclear war" started by the superpowers "attempting to destroy one another's capacity to be superpowers" (*Ghostwritten* 413). The Zookeeper prevents that apocalypse, but will not prevent the next one, announced as early as "Okinawa."

Yet in this first part of the novel, His Serendipity's announcement of a comet about to "bathe the Earth in microwaves" (*Ghostwritten* 17) is difficult to take seriously, as is the cult leader's alleged past: according to Quasar, "while travelling in Tibet, a being of pure consciousness named Arupadhatu transmigrated into His Serendipity, and revealed the secrets of freeing the mind from its physical shackles" (*Ghostwritten*

30). These, then, simply seem to be the delusions of a misguided sect member. But Quasar's phone call to Satoru, connecting the two stories and thus initiating the novel's cellularity, puts a new spin on the Fellowship's dire predictions and on the terrorist's issues with globalization. His anxiety over the latter's homogenizing tendencies is indeed echoed in other chapters, perhaps most obviously through the returning sentence "high streets are becoming the same all over the world, I suppose" (*Ghostwritten* 12, 217), linking in one and the same reality of "global consumerism" the Japanese terrorist and the Russian art thief. The strange concept of a "being of pure consciousness" is illustrated in "Mongolia" with a humanist noncorpum, and substantiated in "Night Train" when Arupadhatu himself calls in. What really confirms the prophecy and lends the novel its feel of inescapable doom, however, is a simple, almost invisible, yet ubiquitous motif: the approaching comet that appears, one way or another, in every chapter.[18] This progressively links all the stories together, thus allowing the apocalypse it announces to travel along with it through the novel,

casting a dark shadow over the characters' various actions and decisions. At the end of *Ghostwritten*'s ninth section, it feels not only as though the apocalypse were unavoidable, but also, perhaps, that it was deserved.

That is the feeling the readers might have been left with had the novel ended after its ninth part—which it was supposed to, since its subtitle is "a novel in nine parts." So far, Mitchell has offered a gloomy vision of globalization, understood both as homogenization (thematically portrayed) and as cellularization (structurally portrayed). When unbridled indeed, these two global tendencies support and amplify each other, making it impossible for any two people to connect in other terms than the ones globalization has set—very often, those of global consumerism—and making it impossible, too, for humanity to survive itself. In other words, Mitchell, somewhat moralistically perhaps, suggests that if humanity were to continue on the path it is on now, it is doomed. Even so, concluding on this sombre note would be neglecting the short, unannounced but novel-altering coda.

The novel's tenth part brings all the stories together in a sort of floating, dreamy manner but, crucially, it also takes us back both in space and in time to a moment preceding the beginning of the book, when Quasar, having planted the deadly gas phial on the tube, desperately tries to get out of it alive. This flashback suggests an alternative interpretation of the novel and of globalization, and also a fresh start, a new attempt at saving the novel's planet. In "London," Marco starts exploring the idea that we could indeed go backwards to "see the cause from the effect" (*Ghostwritten* 311) but dismisses it with an "Ah, bollocks"—though the novel does not. This coda indicates a way of swimming up the fluid, quantum-like trajectories to recognize the points of intersection, the encounters, the choices that have led the characters' lives, and humanity's fate, in an altogether different direction: it suggests, in fact, that one should only connect, that one should be aware of how interconnected the world is and, most importantly, of how meaningful and significant conscious and critical connections can be. The coda thus reasserts the importance of "the little things"

(*Ghostwritten* 256), the details, the local narratives and individual stories that can eventually counter the all-encompassing force of globalization and its homogenizing penchant. It is only then that the individual, aware of the decentred and diffuse cellularity of the global world, can take advantage of it and regain the agency that unbridled globalization had denied him/her. But what Mitchell suggests here is not a solution *per se*; Quasar, after all, still cannot willfully connect. Rather, then, it is a glimmer of hope and a piece of advice: just as the novel asks to be reread, again and again, Mitchell invites the reader to reread the global, again and again, to question and challenge it in a never-ending effort to counter its inevitable homogenizing tendencies.

In its first nine parts, then, *Ghostwritten*'s cellular structure and its thematic representation of the global offer a pessimistic warning about the planet's fate, and a bleak description of humanity's self-destructive dispositions. The coda, however, if not exactly cheerful, emphasizes the opposite idea: that the world's and the individuals' interconnectedness and interdependence, when acknowledged and acted upon, can save both. The entire novel therefore hinges on Quasar's twofold narrative, each announcing half of the novel's conclusions. But if his narratives do frame the novel, they only do so temporarily: none of Mitchell's novels can ever be fixed in a definitive interpretation, each new addition to his oeuvre expanding and changing the complex picture he is painting. Fluid, shifting, and dynamic, Mitchell's novels force the reader to adopt the same qualities. To spot the connections, to cross borders in all directions, the reader must transcend his/her usual, comfortable position: in Mitchell's novel, the reader him/herself is a (ghost)writer who, for each spotted connection and for each new interpretation, participates yet a bit more in the novel's creation.

Notes

1. In her profile of Mitchell, published in 2014, Kathryn Schulz writes: "But when I ask if he regards the Armageddon in *The Bone Clocks* as an 'if' or a 'when,' he says, 'I lean to the when.' He does not do conspiracies or paranoia or even excess negativity, but he is increasingly worried about endings: his own, the world's" (Schulz).

2. The terms "cellular" and "cellularity" are used following Arjun Appadurai's distinction between vertebrate and cellular systems (21-31), and Berthold Schoene's application of that concept to the cosmopolitan novel in general, and to *Ghostwritten* in particular. Simply put, cellular forms of organization and modes of representation rely on horizontal interconnection, coordination, and centrelessness. As such, they stand "for the contingency of contemporary global and transnational flows" (Schoene 27).

3. More specifically, from Okinawa to Tokyo to Hong Kong to the "Holy Mountain"—Mount Emei in China—to Mongolia to Petersburg to London to Clear Island off the coast of Ireland to New York —and back to Tokyo in the coda. Each chapter is titled after the place in which it essentially takes place, and uses first-person narration. In "Okinawa," Quasar, a cult member and terrorist on the run, lands in Okinawa after having planted lethal gas on a subway in Tokyo. In "Tokyo," Satoru, a young clerk in a record shop, falls in love with a Chinese schoolgirl. In "Hong Kong," Neal Brose, a corrupt financial lawyer, is dying of undiagnosed diabetes. In "Holy Mountain," a young girl in a tea shack on the path up the mountain grows up amidst the violent movements of twentieth-century Chinese

history. In "Mongolia," a "noncorpum," a bodiless entity that lives in its hosts' mind, tries to find "the story that was there at the beginning," yearning for roots and kinship. In "Petersburg," a beautiful woman who is in love with the wrong man participates in an art theft gone wrong. In "London," Marco, a ghostwriter, roams around the city wondering about causes and effects. In "Clear Island," Mo Muntervary, a world-class physicist, is on the run from American headhunters who would like to use her technology for war. In "Night Train," Bat Segundo, host of the eponymous radio show, discusses the relativity of laws with an artificial intelligence called the Zookeeper, who calls in once a year for four consecutive years. An absolute 'deus ex machina,' the Zookeeper holds humanity's fate in his/her hands and seems to eventually decide to let it die. In "Underground," the coda, we go back to the time of Quasar's crime, on Tokyo's subway, and watch him desperately struggling to get out of it in time.

4. This circularity is also obvious in the following quotation: "on the Holy Mountain, all the yesterdays and tomorrows spin around again sooner or later. The world has long forgotten, but we mountain-dwellers live on the prayer wheel of time" (*Ghostwritten* 113).

5. Alfred says: "*I'd just had dinner with Prof. Baker at a restaurant in South Ken*. I was still sitting there gazing at the busy street. A waterfall mesmerises in the same way, don't you think? Anyway. That was when I saw myself. […] He bent down, and looked up, like he was searching for someone. He put his hat on. Then he ran off again, but I had seen his face, and I'd recognised me. […] I grabbed my father's hat—my father's hat—and chased after him. […] My shadow was still there, in front of me, running at the same pace as me. […] Across Kensington Road, down past the museums, *past this restaurant where I'd arranged to meet Prof. Baker later that evening.* A sudden gust of wind blew my hat off. I bent down to pick it up. And when I looked up, I saw my shadow disappearing […] onto a Number 36 bus. Off he went" (*Ghostwritten* 285-87, emphasis mine).

6. The theme of causality is not only looked at from a different perspective in each story, but also links the stories together in that a given action in a given story happens *because* of a different action in a different story. Mitchell has called that "the thematic architectural blue-print underlying the novel," explaining how "*Ghostwritten* is about causality and each of the stories is a sort of essay by example on a different theory or angle of causality" ("Secret Architectures").

7. Spotted on pages 21, 104, 139, 202, 219, 285, 361, 390, and 391.

8. James Annesley also uses this distinction when discussing Jonathan Franzen's *The Corrections* (124).

9. This refers to an episode he recounted before, "that day when the bullies in the class had got everyone in the class to pretend that I was dead. By afternoon it had spread through the whole school. Everyone pretended they couldn't see me. When I spoke they pretended they couldn't hear me. Mr. Ikeda got to hear about it, and as society-appointed guardian of young minds, what did he take it upon himself to do? The bastard conducted a funeral service for me during the final home-room hour. He'd even lit some incense, and led the chanting, and everything" (*Ghostwritten* 5).

10. I am aware that all sects cannot be equated with terrorist cells, and vice versa—far from it. But in this case, I think both terms apply equally well to Mitchell's Fellowship, as the destructive cult spreads terror by attacking innocent and unsuspecting civilians in public places, in the hope of achieving a specific goal—here, the cleansing of the "uncleans." The questions of how sectarian organizations slide into terrorism and, conversely, of whether terrorist cells can be considered as cults are extremely interesting and rich ones, which deserve to be discussed at more length than this article allows.

11. This is something Quasar overhears a teacher-character saying, when trying to explain "how such things can happen": "They did not specifically choose to become killers. They had chosen to abdicate their inner selves. […] Maybe there are many answers. Some get a kick out of self-abasement and servitude. Some are afraid or lonely. Some crave the camaraderie of the persecuted. Some want to be big fish in a small pond. Some want magic. Some want revenge on teachers and parents who promised success would deliver all. They need shinier myths that will never be soiled by becoming true" (*Ghostwritten* 22-23).

12. This sentence echoes an earlier one, when, after having supposedly heard His Serendipity "in the crashing of the waves and the sucking of the shingle" telling him how he was his "trusted cleanser" and had "the greatest role to play," Quasar notes how "The moon rose over the open bay, and those stars came on, one by one" (*Ghostwritten* 25).

13. Interestingly indeed, it is not his act of violence that is shown to have had consequences outside of "Okinawa," but his act of human fear and despair.

14. Quasar's phone call is what prompted Satoru to reopen the shop to answer it. Had he not done that, he would have missed Tomoyo and his chance at a romantic relationship with her, and he admits this himself: "if that phone hadn't rung at that moment, and if I hadn't taken the decision to go back and answer it, then everything that happened afterwards wouldn't have happened" (*Ghostwritten* 54). Had they not started a romantic relationship, they would not have made Neal Brose jealous and depressed, which may have accelerated his breakdown and death. Had Neal Brose not died, the tea-shack lady's great-granddaughter would not have inherited from him, which would not have softened the old lady's final days ("Holy Mountain"), and the bloodshed in "Petersburg" would have been avoided.

15. The city here appears to be, much like the novel itself, a microcosm of the interconnected modern world, undoubtedly "vast" but in which "there's always someone who knows someone whom someone knows" (*Ghostwritten* 44).

16. He indeed says "Your place does keep you sane, but can also keep you lonely" (*Ghostwritten* 63).

17. Punsalmaagiyn Suhbataar also appears in Mitchell's next novel, *number9dream* (2001).

18. See pages 17, 25, 140, 201, 230, 239, 305, 316, 416, 423, and 436.

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