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ARTICLE

'Some magic is normality': Fantastical Cosmopolitanism in David Mitchell's *The Bone Clocks*

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David Mitchell's *The Bone Clocks* (2014) seemingly echoes the historical struggles of *Cloud Atlas* (2004) in pitting active ethical agency against cannibalistic rapaciousness. And yet, the trans-universal war between a band of peaceful 'Horologists' and predatory 'soul-decanter' demonstrates how fantasy fiction offers alternative perspectives not only for socio-cultural models of diversity and difference, but for cosmopolitical power struggles being played out at supranational levels.

The Bone Clocks opens up subversive spaces through which to think about threats facing the twenty-first century, from migration and xenophobic nationalism to ecological degradation and planetary destruction. By imagining progressive interrelationships between human and supernatural entities, the novel gestures towards fantasy literature's unique capacity to extend future discussions of cosmopolitanism in new and innovative directions. While the presence of cosmopolitan theory has received much critical attention in Mitchell's earlier fiction, this article will suggest that the speculative nature of *The Bone Clocks* is important in demonstrating the concept's continuing capacity to serve as a fantastical form of imaginative cultural protestation and social polemic.

Keywords: Cosmopolitanism; David Mitchell; *The Bone Clocks*; Globalization; Memory; Environmental

In recent years literature has witnessed a resurgence in established authors, such as Neil Gaiman and Kazuo Ishiguro, attempting to cross what John Lanchester terms 'an unbridgeable crevasse' between fantasy and more 'serious' literary fiction (Lanchester 2013). David Mitchell's 2014 novel, *The Bone Clocks*, bridges this divide by charting a cosmic war over the fate of humanity between two groups of atemporal beings— the

peaceful Horologists and the predatory Anchorites.¹ The narrative consists of six chronological chapters tracing the life of Holly Sykes from 1984 to 2043, concluding by placing the reader in a near-future beset by the tangible global risks of socio-economic upheaval and ecological degradation. Mitchell purposely grounds the novel in each specific time period via the inclusion of pop culture references and ordinary routines of daily existence to create a sense of social realism in contrast to the fantastical events being played out on a much grander scale. *The Bone Clocks*, like Ishiguro's *The Buried Giant* (2015), manipulates this permeable boundary between fantasy and reality to explore the formation of collective memory and its relevance to contemporary society. Mitchell even credits Ishiguro's novel for its attempt to 'destigmatize' fantasy: '[f]antasy plus literary fiction can achieve things that frank blank realism can't' (Alter 2015). Through an examination of atemporal beings and transmigratory processes, the novel suggests how fantasy fiction possesses the unique capacity to imagine new ways of co-existing with radical forms of cultural otherness. This article will engage with the critical reception of Mitchell's foray into fantasy fiction, before demonstrating how the novel's cosmopolitan strategies of atemporal collaboration respond directly to the socio-political and environmental concerns of an increasingly volatile globalized environment.

The Reality of Fantasy

In a personal conversation with David Mitchell in August 2017, he suggested that the fantastical cosmopolitanism inherent in *The Bone Clocks* had its roots in his time spent teaching English in Japan. The difficulties in 'translation' and the sense of being an 'outsider' influenced his desire to create an imaginative form of complex interdependence between disparate peoples in his fiction (Mitchell 2017). Because their souls survive death, atemporal Horologists in the narrative take up residency and inhabit a new body via a process of transmigration – 'ingressing' into the new host but carrying with them the collective memories of previous lives as well as acquiring the new memories of their current host. However, as Mitchell declared prior to the

¹ Horology is the measurement of time.

release of the novel: 'I don't want to project myself as this great experimenter – I'm not. In any case, the words "experimental novelist" must make your heart sink as much as the words "British magical realism"' (Jeffries 2013). Rather, by exploring theories of both abstract and actually-existing cosmopolitan engagement within the novel, *The Bone Clocks* demonstrates how fantastical representations may resonate with the contemporary moment by possessing real-world applicability. It will be suggested that the novel offers alternative perspectives not only for cultural models of diversity and difference associated with cosmopolitanism, but for cosmopolitical power struggles being played out at supranational levels.

Peter Hunt acknowledges that: 'fantasy 'cannot be "free-floating" [...] It must be understandable in terms of its relationship to, or deviance from, our known world' (2001, 7). By linking Holly's life as a mortal to the Horologists' inhabitation of corporeal forms, *The Bone Clocks* employs an obvious allegory for the frailty and fragility of the human condition. It is on this uneasy balance between fantasy and 'reality' that the narrative lies – an imaginative space in which '[t]elepathy is as real as telephones' (Mitchell 2014, 194). Mitchell employs his customary metalepsis to acknowledge the precarious position 'serious' authors assume by tackling fantasy as a genre: 'You can look so ridiculous so easily with fantasy' (Schulz 2014). Crispin Hershey, a fictional author in the narrative (a self-deprecating blend of both Mitchell and Martin Amis), is accused of formulating a fantasy novel that is 'only one-third fantasy. Half, at most', and claims that 'the fantasy sub-plot clashes so violently with the book's State of the World pretensions, I cannot bear to look' (Mitchell 2014, 348; 281).² Several critics initially suggested that the novel consists of 'dual narratives' due to this dynamic interplay.³ The subsequent judgement of Crispin's literary agent that a novel 'can't

² Crispin's claim that writers 'work in a physical space [...] but also we write within an imaginative space [...] what Tolkien called "the compost heap"', echoes comments that Mitchell made in conversation at the Royal Geographical Society in 2014, referring to his own writing as a 'compost heap' of various cultural and literary presences (Mitchell 2014, 363; Mitchell 2014b).

³ O'Donnell (2015) among others.

be a half-fantasy any more than a woman can be half pregnant' anticipates the early reviews Mitchell received (Mitchell 2014, 349).⁴

Yet such criticisms neglect the purpose of the permeable border between fantasy and reality in the novel and contradict the 'dual narrative' reading. The widespread usage of supernatural terminology and application of compound neologisms throughout the narrative ('metallife', 'animacide', 'psychovoltage', 'subspeech') convinced some reviewers that Mitchell's use of fantasy failed to cohere with the mimetic and realist representations of contemporary global society elsewhere in the narrative (425, 396, 507, 412). Ursula Le Guin, in her review of the novel, summed up the feelings of many critics: '[a]m I to believe in the hocus-pocus of the secret cult of the Blind Cathar in the same way I am to believe in the realistic portrayal of the death agonies of corporate capitalism – or should I believe in them in different ways?' (Le Guin 2014b). Mitchell has spoken at length on the influence of Le Guin on his fiction; his assessment of her seminal *Earthsea* series exposes his own attempt to manipulate the relationship between fantasy and reality in *The Bone Clocks*: 'its magic is weighted with metaphysics, its fantastical elements feel almost quotidian' (Mitchell 2015). In attempting to replicate the notion 'that "other ways of living" are as valid as one's own', *The Bone Clocks* echoes Le Guin's positioning of magic as 'a branch of ethics' as well as 'a metaphor for power' and how it may be exploited for individual gain (Mitchell 2015).

Indeed, a defining feature of 'epic' fantasy fiction is the spectre of global risk, and the subsequent mobilization of disparate groups in order to combat an external threat or environmental catastrophe. As David Gooderham points out, 'fantasy is a metaphorical mode' that describes 'not so much a collection of marvels that which divert readers from ordinary concerns, but a [...] fruitful way of speaking about just these concerns' (1995, 173). There are obvious ties to be made between pragmatic theories of cosmopolitanism and their application in fantasy fiction. The utilisation of the genre seems especially pertinent in offering visions of emancipatory potential

⁴ *The Bone Clocks* was swiftly derided as 'third-rate fantasy poppycock' (Collins 2014), 'paranormal hoey' (Kakutani 2014), and a 'knock-off version of "Harry Potter"' (Charles 2014).

and socio-cultural interconnection. When Mitchell first emerged at the turn of the millennium a few critics floated the term 'cosmopolitan' in reference to *Ghostwritten* (1999) and subsequently *Cloud Atlas* (2004), but employed it as a vague signifier or catch-all term for the novel's multi-faceted engagement with transnational corporations, the evidence of global mobility across various geographical locations, and its multicultural cast of characters. Magdalena Nowicka and Maria Rovisco apply a more accurate interpretation of the term, arguing that cosmopolitanism involves an engagement 'with the otherness of the other and the oneness of the world [...] and the possibility of a more just world order' (2009, 2). While the presence of cosmopolitan theory has received much critical attention in Mitchell's earlier fiction, this article suggests that the decidedly antinomious approach and speculative nature of *The Bone Clocks* is important in demonstrating the concept's continuing capacity to serve as a progressive form of imaginative cultural protestation and social polemic. Through an engagement with fantasy and the supernatural, the novel opens up subversive spaces through which to imagine and address viable threats raised in Mitchell's earlier novels, not least fears surrounding ecological disaster and the decline of technocapitalism.

Cosmopolitan Memory

The Bone Clocks could even be positioned as the third in a 'global' trilogy (following *Ghostwritten* and *Cloud Atlas*) – exploring the human condition across temporal and spatial boundaries through transmigratory non-corporeals and multiple first-person narrators – were it not for Mitchell's admission that the novel is the second part of a planned Marinus trilogy (of which *The Thousand Autumns of Jacob de Zoet* (2010), which featured the character Dr Lucas Marinus, was the first instalment). Not only does the novel echo the historical struggles of *Cloud Atlas* by pitting active ethical agency against cannibalistic rapaciousness, but it retains *Ghostwritten's* ambitious geographical scope, containing chapters that move through Iraq, Ireland, Western Australia, Canada, Iceland and many other global locations (as well as a foray into a metaphysical realm). As with Mitchell's earlier global fictions – structurally as well as thematically – the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. Mitchell's continued

exploration of the transmigration of cultural identities constructs a form of interdependent 'cosmopolitan memory', a feature which is pertinent to an examination of fantasy elements in his fiction. The term 'cosmopolitan memory' was coined by Daniel Levy and Natan Sznaider at the turn of the millennium to suggest how 'collective memories [...] transcend national and ethnic boundaries', with the 'solidarities and mutual responsibilities' generated by these 'memoryscapes' serving as an ethical catalyst towards the safeguarding of a globalized future (2002, 88).⁵

Levy and Sznaider draw on Jan Assman's distinction between memory types to posit two related forms of cosmopolitan memory: 'communicative memory, based on group-specific carriers [...] and cultural memories that can exist independent of its carriers' (2002, 91). The *Horologists* serve as an example of the former, acting as 'group-specific carriers' preserving the thoughts and experiences of transnational individuals across millennia. We witness a fantastical version of the latter when Holly Sykes visits Rottnest Island in 2017 – the land of western Australia seems to function as an 'echo chamber' that preserves cultural memory, specifically the memory of ethno-cultural trauma (Mitchell 2014, 322). On Rottnest, Holly is blessed with some form of precognitive ability or 'psychosoteric' gift that enables her to function as radio transmitter or a 'mouthpiece for...presences that weren't me', channeling the experiences of the Noongar people who were imprisoned on the island by Western colonizers: 'Whitefella made Wadjemup a prison for Noongar [...] Chains. Cells. Coldbox. Hotbox. Years. Whips. Work. Worst thing is this: Our souls can't cross the sea. So when the prison boat takes us from Freemantle, our souls torn out from body' (Mitchell 2014, 335; 323). Holly is effectively translating a cosmopolitan memory that overrides linguistic borders and language barriers. Crucially, as Levy and Sznaider emphasise, cosmopolitan memory must involve the 'recognition of the

⁵ Paul Harris has floated a related notion of 'Anthropocene memory' that touches upon related territory to Levy and Sznaider's work. According to Harris, the reincarnation of *Horologists* 'links human lifetimes to cultural histories to geological eons', with the subsequent 'translation between cultural and evolutionary histories' serving as 'a resonant frontier in contemporary explorations of time and human identity (both individual and species' (Harris 2015b).

history (and the memories) of the "Other" – specifically 'the product of a reflexive choice to incorporate *the suffering* of the "Other"' (Levy and Sznajder 2002, 103). As Zlatko Skrbis and Ian Woodward note, 'while cosmopolitan memories appeal to ideals of universal empathy and global togetherness, they also need to be historically situated' (2013, 81). Openness to forms of alterity is central to Mitchell's fantastical cosmopolitan philosophy, serving as a catalyst for new cultural collectivities and allegiances that span spatial and temporal boundaries.

Esther Little, or Moombaki, the oldest of the known Horologists, is described as a 'collective memory' due to her longevity and memorial archiving of her people's harrowing and largely forgotten cultural history (Mitchell 2014, 414). After meeting fellow Horologist Marinus (whom we have encountered as a transmigratory presence in Mitchell's previous novels), she ingresses his mind and inscribes her 'long, long, true name' – forming 'a history of her people' – which is simultaneously 'the names of every host within whose body Moombaki has sojourned' (436). This naming process is a form of cultural renewal by which Esther can be resurrected and thus continue the struggle against the Anchorites' predatory practices. Following the failure of a previous mission to destroy the Anchorites, Esther seeks 'asylum' within Holly (24). In order to bring her back from this self-imposed stasis the Horologists must ingress Holly's mind to recover Esther's 'long name' (a collective memory of her various cultural identities). Contemporary theories of cosmopolitanism refer to such cultural engagement as a process of internal globalization by which global concerns become part of local experiences and ethical outlooks: 'cosmopolitanization of memory does not mean the end of national perspectives so much as their transformation into more complex entities' as individuals learn to enjoy a highly reflexive relationship with other cultural perspectives (Levy and Sznajder 2002, 92). These cosmopolitan memories, then, are both commemorative and possess culturally restorative properties – allowing for the recognition of 'epochal commonalities, which allow people to identify with cultural representations that originate elsewhere' (93). But more importantly, with regards to the narrative, they ensure that a 'shared sense of the past becomes a meaning-making repository which helps define aspirations for the future'

and serve as a catalyst for the emergence of wider transnational solidarities in the future: namely, the success of the second mission to destroy the Anchorite chapel and power source (Levy and Sznajder 2016, 295).

The novel's antagonists, Anchorites or 'apex predators', are 'metaphorically Vampiric', carnivorously consuming the bodies of humans – or 'bone clocks' – via a decanting process to prevent cellular degeneration and preserve their own singular identity and physical form without acquiring new memories (Mitchell 2014, 383; 452). The erasure of human memory is a suppression and elimination of cultural diversity, while their innate desire for short-term survival and self-preservation is symbolic of the worst aspects of the human condition (inimical to a more cosmopolitan vision of futurity). By acknowledging the critical import of mutual dependence and planetary interconnectedness in confronting global risk and circumventing humanity's inherent capacity for predacity, Mitchell ensures the Anchorites embody the Hobbesian assertion in *Cloud Atlas* that 'the Weak are Meat the Strong do Eat' (2004, 503). Whereas the Anchorites' consumption of their victims prevents an accumulation of memory, Horology possesses a 'curative function'; because 'no one pays for [their] Atemporality' they remain, essentially, 'herbivorous' (Mitchell 2014, 467; 431). Horologists practice two related forms of transmigration to inhabit corporeal bodies: Sojourners migrate 'out of one old or dying body into a young and healthy one, but never severing one's ties to a clan and its territory', while for Returnees 'each resurrection is a lottery of longitudes, latitudes and demography' (413). Although both forms of regeneration are predicated on a form of unconditional hospitality, the process allows Horologists to sustain and collect individual memories necessary for understanding and combatting an increasingly uncertain and fragile collective future. These acts of transmigration emphasise both difference and commonality in the preservation of individual/collective memory and the embrace of new forms of cosmopolitan relationality and regeneration, presenting 'the soul as a karmic report card; as a spiritual memory-stick in search of a corporeal hard-drive' (313). As Mitchell explains, 'I value the notion of reincarnation as a kind of metaphor for a single life. In our life we do, metaphorically, die and experience rebirth'; by 'coming back with their memories and aggregate identities intact [...] Horologists, then, are metaphors

of mortals' (Harris 2015a, 13), enabling the novel to maintain a consistent dialogue with the threat of civilizational decline.

Cosmopolitan Hospitality

Esther's act of 'ingressing' specifically brings into play Jacques Derrida's notion of cosmopolitan hospitality: 'a hospitality invented for the singularity of the new arrival, of the unexpected visitor' (2000, 83). Her inhabitation of Holly's 'bone clock' is a form of 'refuge' synonymous with the act of hospitality (Mitchell 2014, 24). With this in mind, *The Bone Clocks* is an apposite title – not only because Mitchell's works so often play with temporal boundaries, but because atemporal beings can also be considered 'bone clocks' (their existence is affected by the provisional nature of mortality). Cosmopolitan memory is only made possible *via the act* of cosmopolitan hospitality (conditional or unconditional). As the Horologist Xi Lo explains to Great Aunt Eilish, Holly's brother Jacko 'couldn't stay, but [I'm] keeping [his] memories safe' (261). Opening a fictional space for the 'other' becomes an act of mutuality and solidarity, and widens an individual's capacity for empathetic identification.

The Horologists, by providing epistemological vantage points, are responsible for this assemblage of cosmopolitan memories and formation of a global consciousness as a means of combating the worst excesses of humanity. In this sense, the atemporal beings are reflective of Rosi Braidotti's notion of 'mutually interdependent nomadic subjects' (2013, 24). As Braidotti theorises:

The nomadic version of the subject as a time continuum and a collective assemblage implies a double commitment, on the one hand to processes to change and on the other to a strong sense of community [...] Our co-presence, that is to say the simultaneity of our being in the world together sets the tune for the ethics of our interaction. Our ethical relation requires us to synchronize the perception and anticipation of our shared, common condition. A transversal form of shared relational bonding emerges from this. (22)

This notion of 'collectively distributed consciousness' enables nomadic subjects to become 'attuned to a shared planetary condition' which actualises 'new forms of

cosmopolitan belonging' and foregrounds the importance of ethicality (19). Such a 'translational' form of cosmopolitan hospitality, in which 'a unitary and "home-bound" subject gets redefined in terms of multiple belongings, non-unitary selfhood and constant flows of transformation', suggests cosmopolitanism to be a progressive form of becoming (Braidotti 2006, 17). For the Horologists, identity is fluid, complex and relational, alternating between genders and being reincarnated into male or female hosts in their continual process of transformation. Horologists experience a literal state of ekstasis: a process of movement away from the self to empathise and acknowledge other perspectives (and the perception of the self in the other). Such cosmopolitan memories are only preserved by acts of hospitality – by letting the 'other' in. As Patrick O'Donnell argues, 'Mitchell's narratology [in all his works] is deeply linked to his portrayals of identity as collective alterities (the "others" within and without)' (2015, 185). This can either be via an abstract form of transmigration represented by the methods of Horologists, or via ordinary, actually-existing acts of hospitality such as Holly's adoption of Rafiq, a refugee. The comment that this 'secret war [between the atemporals] is waging around us, inside us even' is suggestive of the ethical equivalence between the two practices (Mitchell 2014, 399).

There are stark differences in the allegorical battle between the acts of consumption and conservation practised by the Anchorites and the Horologists. One can perceive in the Horologists' transmission of collective memory the environmental ethics required to ensure the conservation of planetary resources (which is relevant to the concluding stages of the narrative), while the Anchorites' avaricious nature draws parallels with acts of imperialistic colonization. Anchorites effectively colonize rather than simply inhabit human bodies, eliminating an original identity to preserve their singular, unitary self, an analogy strengthened by their Eurocentric (or at least white) heritage. This is in comparison to the Horologists, whose ethnic diversity is reflective of their cosmopolitan preservation of global memories and identities.⁶ However, Sadaqat, a Pakistani warden exposed as an Anchorite spy within

⁶ Abbot Enomoto, a nefarious Japanese soul eater from *The Thousand Autumns of Jacob de Zoet*, is an obvious anomaly to this pattern, but he does not function as a core member of the Anchorites.

the Horologists' midst, levels his own charge, suggesting that by denying others an (albeit bastardized and immoral) form of immortality, Horology protects itself as an elite 'club for immortals, who prevent others from attaining their own privileges. They are aristocrats. They are very like a white country [...] a rich, white, imperial, exploitative bastion, which torpedoes the refugee boats coming from the Land of the Huddled Brown Masses' (Mitchell 2014, 502). In so doing, he fails to observe the 'spectre of race' – namely, that the 'All Whites' Anchorites share obvious 'ethnic commonalities' – and, rather than reward him for his deception, the Anchorites label Sadaqat a 'talentless, chakraless, *brown* traitor' before disposing of his corporeal form, positioning themselves as an imperial collective compared to the culturally diverse composition of the Horologists (503; 528).⁷

The collective assemblage of cosmopolitan memories from distinct subjectivities (and acts of non-corporeal hospitality) establishes a form of discursive power that operates in resistance to destructive globalising practices and hegemonic power-structures represented by the Anchorites. While Anchorite ideology results in a dissolution of the 'other' (a continual renewal of 'self' and spread of homogeneity), the atemporal transmigration practised by Horology accommodates a hospitality to radical forms of otherness predicated on 'play[ing] hosts to others' stories as well as one's own' (Rapport 2012, 209). In this sense, *The Bone Clocks* points towards a form of 'narrative hospitality' offered by fantasy fiction, concerning the 'mutualities of playing hosts and guests to one another', and the development of a 'storied reality [...] whose reciprocal hosting and guesting suggests a route to global sociality' (208; 210). The lifespan of Holly Sykes (as the timeframe for the narrative structure) indicates how suddenly humanity may find itself facing global catastrophe but, more importantly, as O'Donnell acknowledges: 'if the allegory of the Atemporals is folded into

⁷ Helen Young notes that fantasy fiction in general has historically lacked 'racial diversity in characters, themes, and structures' and remains 'exclusively concerned with white, Western culture' (2010, 351). By drawing attention to the global consciousness the Anchorites seek to destroy, Mitchell is resisting such representation. In this sense, he is once again proving himself to be an heir to Le Guin, who would reveal her protagonists, such as Ged in *A Wizard of Earthsea* (1968) or Genly Ai in *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969), to be racially diverse at later points in her narratives, thus challenging preconceived assumptions by the reader.

the picture, as Esther Little is folded into Holly, the single lifetime is not really single, but a collective assemblage of pasts, memories, and experiences' (2015, 180). The transmigration of the Horologists, then, serves as a fantastical analogy for global hospitality at an abstract micro-level. However, more realistic forms of hospitality come to define the concluding stages of the narrative as Mitchell establishes a dynamic synergy between fantasy and reality that responds to the contemporary moment.

Global Endarkenment

The final chapter of *The Bone Clocks*, 'Sheep's Head', is set in 2043. It imagines a dystopian near-future in the south-west of Ireland following a series of global crises in the early 2030s. This so-called 'Endarkenment' – in which power systems fail and socio-political orders are destabilized – is closer and more urgent than the post-apocalyptic visions of futurity envisaged in *Cloud Atlas* (Mitchell 2014, 561). The cosmopolitan ideals of empathy, tolerance and openness to difference have broken down into squabbles over meagre rations and national territory: citizens are solely reliant on solar power, with electricity becoming the privilege of citizens from the 'Oil States' or those within the confines of 'Stability'; air-travel and other existing forms of transnational mobility are impacted by oil supplies drying up; whole swathes of the global population are affected by an emergent 'Ratflu' virus compelling nation-states to monitor and secure their borders, while even digital communicative technologies prevent a form of abstract planetary interconnection following 'Netcrash One' (525). The cut-throat individualism of neoliberalism and rampant technocapitalism, alongside the selfish disregard for environmental damage, has resulted in a mercurial and turbulent civic society and a melancholy populace: 'grief for the regions we deadlanded, the ice caps we melted, the Gulf Stream we redirected, the rivers we drained, the coasts we flooded [...] My generation were diners stuffing themselves stupid' (533). The evident criticism of the Anchorites' fantastical practices of self-preservation is reflected in Mitchell's pointed critique of humanity's failure to address an impending climatological disaster. Esther's observation that 'the future looks a lot like the past' evokes civilisation's omnivoracious capacity for a ceaseless process of infinite creation and destruction, symbolised by the ouroboros 'writhing snake' symbol of the Anchorites' chapel, depicted 'in the circular act of consuming

its own tail' (502; 495). Crucially, for Levy and Sznajder, a 'future-oriented dimension is a defining feature of cosmopolitan memory' and should be 'largely based on the recognition and the desire to prevent or limit future ecological disasters', linking the fantastical notion of cosmopolitan memory to the sobering vision of environmental degeneration (2002, 101; 102).

In this brutal landscape of technological scarcity and food shortages, the inhabitants of West Cork are controlled by the Pearl Occident Company who own the 'Lease Lands' and protect the 'Cordon'; however, the withdrawal of the Chinese consortium leads to the emergence of warring local factions and the construction of a 'new exclusion zone' regularly threatened by 'Boat People landings' – a migratory movement of 'thousands of hungry, rootless men, women and children' (Mitchell 2014, 524). This disturbing vision of forced migration brings more pragmatic and realisable forms of cosmopolitan hospitality into focus. Holly, now in her old age, cares for her granddaughter, Lorelei, and a young refugee named Rafiq, a member of the 'Boat People'. Allowing Rafiq across the threshold of her home reflects Seyla Benhabib's acknowledgment that cosmopolitanism involves 'enlarging the compass of our moral sympathy ever wider so that more and more human beings appear to us as "concrete other" for whose right as "generalized others" we are willing to speak up and fight' (2011, 93). Rather than the abstract and fantastical form of non-corporeal asylum granted to Esther, Holly's localised act of Derridean hospitality (offering refuge to those seeking asylum) represents an ethical commitment to cross-cultural interdependence, indicating how "others" include not just those found in the immediate community, but all those whose fates are interlocked in networks of economic, political and environmental interaction' (Held 1995, 228). In this sense, a recognition of the links between ethical agency towards others and an awareness of ecological sustainability are promoted as key features of the globally-conscious, cosmopolitan subject.

The actually-existing forms of cosmopolitan hospitality and locally relational analogies of wider planetary concerns in the concluding chapter expose James Wood's fatal misunderstanding of Mitchell's novel. Wood asserts: '[g]radually, the reader begins to understand that the realism – the human activity – is relatively unimportant; it is the fantastical intergovernmental war that really matters [...] this

is no more than weak realism's bad-faith tussle with a fantastic assailant who has already won' (2014). Although the Horologists seemingly win the war against the Anchorites, the fantastical narrative concludes by confronting us with feasible depictions of planetary deterioration. 'Sheep's Head' reveals a grounded realism at the heart of the novel that curtails the fantasy sub-plot in favour of a critical perspective on the global risks emerging in the twenty-first century. Further, despite the Horologists possessing the existential wisdom that comes with (in Esther's case) existing over several millennia, atemporal beings ultimately reside in singular entities and lack the capacity to prevent environmental degradation or the technological risks that threaten global society, being unable to change the self-destructive path humanity has set for itself.

As with much of Mitchell's fiction, the structure of the novel is vital in emphasising this point. Had the narrative ended after the second battle in the Chapel of the Dusk within this penultimate chapter, 'An Horologist's Labyrinth', the tenuous balance between fantasy and realism (and widespread criticism of that very synergy) would have felt justified, as elements of fantasy would have overridden the contemporary resonance of earlier events in the novel. Instead, the fact that the final section returns to the localized, rural backwater of Sheep's Head peninsula – detailing the parochial frailties and quotidian trivialities of a destabilized society – indicates the desirability for humanity to address geopolitical, ecological and socio-cultural concerns in a realisable manner. The novel cannot simply be positioned as 'fantasy' or 'experimental fiction' as some reviewers labelled it upon its release. It is not until this penultimate chapter that the underlying cosmological war takes true precedence and we move into an alternate spatiotemporal dimension. Mitchell defends this reading of his novel in which fantasy and reality are reconciled, stating: 'if I can use this word in a book that is shot through with fantasy and the supernatural – it's a *realist* ending' (Ohlsen 2014). However, it would be more accurate to suggest that *The Bone Clocks* features a *speculative* ending based on the plausible extrapolation of the existing world, whereby elements of the fantastical (such as Marinus's reappearance) are subordinated to the speculative in order to tackle the very real threat of global environmental collapse. The widespread resistance by critics to fantastical elements

within the narrative is itself questionable. Mitchell's previous works contain traces of fantasy or hint at the supernatural, and contribute to an inter-generational, global 'ubernovel' (even the realist narrative depictions of 1980s Worcestershire in *Black Swan Green* (2006) incorporate elements of hauntology). The intertextual links created in *The Bone Clocks* merely elucidate metaphysical questions raised in his earlier fictions and expose the already-existing fantastical components in those works.⁸

Admittedly, the arrival of Marinus as a '*deus ex machina*' – transporting Lorelei and Rafiq to Iceland (whose relative isolation and stable sources of geothermal energy protect them from the worst of the global fallout) – appears to be a potential misstep in this endeavour to emphasise that climatological risk and corporate precarity outlive the fantastical events of the narrative as the key threats to global stability (Mitchell 2014, 586). Yet Marinus's reappearance is rather an acknowledgement of the limitations of the fantastical and its subordination to the speculative – the Horologists cannot prevent environmental destruction. The development also serves to emphasise how Holly's selfless act of cosmopolitan hospitality towards Rafiq will outlive the events of the narrative and contribute to humanity's continuing survival. The concluding lines place the impetus firmly on such future planetary ethics: '[i]ncoming waves erase all traces of the vanishing boat' (624). Marinus may save Holly's grandchildren, but for Holly – a 'bone clock' whose lifespan structures the novel – there can be no 'lifeboat and miracles' to avert civilizational decline: 'humanity is on its own and always was' (547).

The Bone Clocks could not speak *more* to the 'reality' of the human condition, the title suggestive of the fact that time is running out for civilization in general. The fantastical configurations of diversity and difference in the narrative open up an imaginative space for the discussion of cosmopolitan ethical values and enable cosmological events to maintain a resonance with those of contemporary society, possessing real-world applicability. Berthold Schoene's initial assessment of Mitchell's debut novel, *Ghostwritten*, continues to resonate: '[his] fictions summon

⁸ Anchorites, or 'Soul Carnivores', are active in *The Thousand Autumns of Jacob de Zoet* (2010) and Mitchell's subsequent work, *Slade House* (2015) (Mitchell 2014, 287).

humanity's world-creative potential as well as its tragic (self-)destructiveness' (2010, 89). Remove the fantasy-infused neologisms, and more supernatural elements of the subplot, and the narrative engages with Mitchell's customary thematic concerns: the potential for global society to forge new collectivities and configurations necessary in overcoming current cultural inequalities and corrosive ecological practices prevalent under global capitalism. And yet, the supernatural register in *The Bone Clocks* also becomes an aperture through which to explore individual and communal ethical agency. By resisting the abstract escapism of fantasy fiction, the novel demonstrates the genre's innate capacity to reach beyond the limits of realism and imagine potential dystopian crises on the horizon. The Horologists' war functions as a wider metaphor for humanity's capacity for conservation and supra-national collaboration versus the human tendency towards entropic decline and self-preservation. Mitchell 'risks fantasy' in order to 'address mortality from an impossible dimension beyond its limits as, paradoxically, a condition necessary and sufficient to human survival' (O'Donnell 2015, 166). In an attempt to '[r]edraw what is possible' through the inter-relationships of human and supernatural entities, the novel gestures towards fantasy fiction's capacity to extend future discussions of cosmopolitanism in new and innovative directions, offering an insight into the fragile and uncertain terrain of twenty-first century life (Mitchell 2014, 135).

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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