“NOVEL GLOBALISM,” THE TRANSNATIONAL EXOTIC AND SPECTRAL COSMOPOLITANISM: DAVID MITCHELL’S FICTION

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Abstract

This essay argues that David Mitchell’s *Ghostwritten* and *Number9Dream* present exoticism of a particular kind, one where the exotic takes the form of the uncanny and its inherently “foreign” component. The uncanny, it argues, renders the everyday itself exotic because the foreign is embedded within the everyday, unlike the traditional exotic. Mitchell also maps the interconnectedness of cultures and the breakdown of the Cultural Self/Other boundaries, of categorizations such as “native” and “exotic.” Through this incorporation, or intersection, of the cultural Other as uncanny encounters and doublings, Mitchell offers, I argue, a *spectral cosmopolitanism*. This spectral cosmopolitanism is not really an intellectual project but one of randomness and chance encounters.

**Keywords:** David Mitchell, exoticism, uncanny, transnationalism, cosmopolitanism.

“LA NUEVA GLOBALIZACIÓN,” EXOTISMO TRANSNACIONAL Y COSMOPOLITANISMO ESPECTRAL: LA FICCIÓN DE DAVID MITCHELL

Resumen

Con el presente trabajo se intentará demostrar que las obras de David Mitchell, *Ghostwritten* y *Number9Dream*, presentan un cierto tipo de exotismo donde lo exótico se distingue por su carácter misterioso,
y por su componente más característico: lo ‘extraño’ o ‘foráneo.’ Este carácter misterioso convierte lo cotidiano en exótico, ya que lo extraño es en sí mismo inherente al día a día, a diferencia de lo que se considera como tradicionalmente exótico. Mitchell además planifica los entrelazamientos entre culturas, y la caída de las fronteras entre el ‘Yo’ y el ‘Otro’ cultural, de categorizaciones tales como ‘nativo’ y ‘exótico.’ Con esta incorporación, o intersección, del Otro cultural entendida como una serie de encuentros o desdoblamientos misteriosos, quisiera proponer que Mitchell ofrece un cosmopolitanismo espectral. Este cosmopolitanismo espectral no es en realidad un proyecto intelectual, sino uno de contingencia y de encuentros fortuitos.

**Palabras clave:** David Mitchell, exotismo, misterioso/extraño, transnacionalismo, cosmopolitanismo.

A Western writer writing about non-Western regions or cultures invariably runs the risk of being immediately accused of exoticization and “orientalism.” So what about an author who situates his novel in eight countries? Would that constitute some kind of pan-orientalism, a globalized orientalism? Even if it is situated in European cities, besides Hong Kong, Tokyo, Mongolia?

Pico Iyer described David Mitchell’s 1999 novel, *Ghostwritten*, as embodying a “novel globalism,” a descriptor that, I think, best captures Mitchell’s work in *Ghostwritten* and *Number9Dream*, especially if we pay attention to the multiple connotations of the term “novel” here. Mitchell’s fictional worlds in *Ghostwritten* (which moves from St Petersburg to Mongolia to Hong Kong to Japan to Ireland to London) and *Number9Dream*, present a particular kind of exoticism, while *Cloud Atlas* and more recently in *The Thousand Autumns of Jacob de Zoet* Mitchell offers us yet another form. My paper deals with Mitchell’s exoticism in two specific novels, *Ghostwritten* and *Number9Dream*. Before I go on to discuss Mitchell’s brand of exoticism, a brief note on how I am employing the idea of the exotic itself.

Exoticism results from the intrusion of the distant, the foreign (in terms of space, culture and time) into the present and the everyday. The exotic is the “realization of the fantastic beyond the horizons of
the everyday world” (as G.S. Rousseau and Roy Porter defined the Enlightenment exotic, 15). It is an aestheticizing process through which, in Graham Huggan’s definition, “the cultural other is translated, relayed back through the familiar” (ix). “At a time of unstable boundaries, imaginary portrayals of that which is outside familiar perimeters... [became] a means of understanding the changing demarcations between inside and outside,” writes Christa Knellwolf of eighteenth century European exoticisms (10). The exotic was at once fantasy and the historical response to otherness and difference (11). Thus the exotic is primarily about the foreign, difference and the distant as these impinge upon a culture. If we take the culture as the Self, the exotic is its Other.

With globalization, the distant Other is no more distant. Beamed into drawing rooms, downloadable onto hand-held devices and consumed at eateries, the distant and different are commonplace. The exotic is consumed and encountered every day. In such a context, where does one seek, or find, the exotic? David Mitchell’s transnational exotic in *Ghostwritten* and to a limited extent *Number9Dream* is necessitated by globalization itself, where there are no more exotic places to be experienced and frontiers have vanished. The exotic messes up, in Mitchell’s fiction, the everyday.

Mitchell’s early work, this paper argues, is an exploration of the exotic in the age of globalization. Mitchell, however, refuses to simply situate the exotic at the peripheries of the known world (as the traditional exotic always is). Instead, the exotic constantly impinges upon, and intersects with, the everyday. Such a process of exoticisation takes recourse, in Mitchell’s work, to the uncanny. The exotic manifests as the uncanny for, as we shall see, the uncanny is about the foreign as well. Mitchell’s *Ghostwritten* and *Number9Dream* situate the exotic alongside, and as, the fantastic and the foreign (whether an individual’s or as the cultural Other) within the everyday, even as it addresses transnationalism and transculturation. Reality, the worlds in video games, dreams, flesh-and-blood people and spirits merge (most powerfully in the form of the “noncorpa” in *Ghostwritten*, whose “life” is woven into the cultural revolution in Mongolia, and who hopes to stop wars, end corruption and prevent ecocide). As long as the uncanny, and its “foreign” stays within the domain of an individual’s dreams, nightmares and illusions, the tale is just another cyberpunk (and *Number9dream* is such a text). It
is when Mitchell proceeds to make the uncanny a cultural uncanny, in what approximates to the politics of the uncanny, that the text becomes something else altogether.

Through the uncanny’s ghosting and doubling, the merger of the home with the foreign, Mitchell also maps the interconnectedness of cultures and the breakdown of the Cultural Self/Other boundaries, of categorizations such as “native” and “exotic.” Through this incorporation, or intersection, of the cultural Other as uncanny encounters and doublings, Mitchell offers, I argue, a spectral cosmopolitanism.

There are, as can be seen, two key stages here: (i) the uncanny and its spectralizations that bring the exotic “home” and thereby transform our sense of “home” and (ii) the cumulative effect of such spectral encounters and engagements is the rise of a cosmopolitan self, and a cosmopolitanism that is spectral. Eventually the two combine to produce a spectral cosmopolitanism that is a posthuman vision about a new heuristic — of the interconnectedness of life and a sense of companion species.

**Uncanny Ghostings**

The uncanny, as Sigmund Freud famously demonstrated (1919), is about the human sense of “home and “not-home.” It is about the human’s perception of a place as akin to but not quite home. Hence, a certain hesitation, or epistemological uncertainty, leading to a “crisis of perception” marks the uncanny event/place (Weber 1132). This makes the uncanny a neighbor of the fantastic (Tatar). The uncanny mixes form, defies easy boundary-marking and distinction (embodied, as Rodney Giblett points out, in the topos of the wetlands, with their shifting borders, the mix of water and land, the absence of clear boundaries, etc, 32-4). The uncanny in its Scottish etymological origins, Nicholas Royle points out, offers us “uncertainties at the origin concerning colonization and the foreign body, a mixing of what is at once old and long-familiar and what is strangely ‘fresh’ and new; a pervasive linking of death, mourning and spectrality” (12). This definition, in one pithy sentence, captures Mitchell’s Ghostwritten. Death, mourning and spectrality are precisely what make up the tale.

What we can therefore suggest, immediately, is that the uncanny is a space of uncertain perceptions, of feelings (Freud in fact opened his
essay with a reference to the uncanny as something to do with qualities of feeling) of ghostly events and places, of epistemological ambiguities and borderless worlds. It is a space of suspected secrets, of the familiar within the strange, of strained perceptions, of resemblances and doublings. The foreign as uncanny could be either fantasy (which, we must remember, was a mode of exoticism as well), or historical/real. The foreign as uncanny could be dreamworlds or alternate realities, or even a cultural Other.

In *Ghostwritten* Marco, by turns a Marxist, a Christian and a Buddhist, is the ghostwriter: “I really am a writer. A ghostwriter” (270). Does ghostwriting make him less than a “real” writer? That our lives are scripted by those we might never know is a central premise here: “Our own lives ... are pre-ghostwritten by forces around us” (296). This theme of lives being scripted by unknown people is something I shall return to later. Others seem to somehow converge on us, for as Nicholas Royle puts it, the uncanny “may be construed as a foreign body within oneself, even the experience of oneself as a foreign body” (2, emphasis in original). This experience of the foreign as a part of our-selves, the figure of the foreigner as a part of our life, at least in a fleeting moment, is the uncanny that makes up the spectral cosmopolitanism of *Ghostwritten*.

The ghostly, the dream, the supernatural are not external, but central to the everyday. The uncanny resides at the heart of the everyday — the premise on which *Ghostwritten* works, but a theme visible in other texts as well. “Trust what you dream. Not what you think,” says a character in *Number9Dream* (389).

Eiji of course lives in two worlds — the concrete, real one, and his own fantasies and alternate worlds. Two points need to be made here. The first point is, the everyday and the real are not clearly set apart from the alternate world. Mitchell’s uncanny shows the alternate intersecting with, or doubling, the real, informing the real. In Mitchell’s often breathless prose the alternate world does seem more real than the William Gibson-like, cyberpunkish world of glass-and-steel Tokyo that Eiji lives in. Second, the alternate reality that Eiji occupies also changes in each of the eight parts of the novel (part nine is blank, suggesting it is unwritten). Eiji’s way of coping with his life is to escape into other worlds.

Benjamin Hagen has pointed out presciently that ghosting and doubling are constitutive of the self in Mitchell’s *Ghostwritten* (2009).
For example, as Marco does the ghost writing for Alfred, one of the stories Alfred wants him to record is his, Alfred’s, encounter with the ghost of himself (*Ghostwritten* 285-88). But the uncanny is not just a ghosting or doubling: it is the persistence of dreams as foreign within the heart of the real. I propose that the uncanny is the recognition that the foreign, the alternate and alterity, occupy at least one corner of existence. Hagen comments: “by equating the self with a ghost or double [Mitchell] questions the origin of the subject through a duplication of subjectivity in which the self is a simulacrum of the self” (85). Ghosts, dreams, myths and figures—the foreign and the exotic—from video games are as much characters in Eiji’s real-life perceptions as are the memories of his “lost” sister, his missing father and some vague memories of his mother. While on the one hand it might be simpler to dismiss Eiji as psychotic for his over-reliance on the ghostly and the shadowy, on the other, Mitchell keeps us guessing whether these other worlds are merely figments of the boy’s imagination or they intersect with his reality.

I want to advance the argument that the perception of alternate realities, ghosts, doublings—the uncanny, in short—renders the self exotic to itself. Software, alternate realities, dreams and video games become constitutive of the self. Indeed the self seems to be programmed by something other than it-self. Christopher Johnson has pointed to developments in engineering and techno-science that give us a technological uncanny. The self is not an autonomous self anymore: “We are animated and agitated by a power or program that seems to violate our most intuitive sense of self-determination” (131-32). Feelings—affect—are manipulated by programs and codes. Or, stories. And Mitchell’s work is situated within such a technologized, globalized world in *Number9dream*. The world, whether real or generated by a computer program, or the immersive environment of a story, impinges on to the self, the self incorporates the world. The foreign is not “out there,” distant and unreachable, it is within. Eiji, for example, is unable to separate the stories he reads in the “study of Tales” section (which has a “Goatwriter”) and his own life.

If the uncanny, as Freud has argued, is something one does not know one’s way about in, the characters in *Ghostwritten* and *Number9Dream* are in perpetual quests: the worlds they inhabit are unstable, borderless, at once home and not-home. Eiji’s quest for his father—it doesn’t get
more Freudian, does it?— his memory of his drowned twin sister, his surreal dreams of visiting his father, the bio-borgs—who are uncanny look-alikes of humans, and function as body doubles of important people in Mitchell’s Japan—of the metropolis all lend an eerie atmosphere to the characters’ lives.

The non-corpa, which occurs as a disembodied voice in one chapter of *Ghostwritten* and then a voice on the radio as well as an omniscient eye in the sky, is the ur-uncanny, if one wants to conceptualize it. The *OED* defines the uncanny as being of a “supernatural character,” and the non-corpa corresponds to that.

If our stories, realities and selves are “pre-ghostwritten” by somebody else, then it is possible that we figure in somebody else’s story as well. This is precisely what Mitchell explores.

**From Uncanny Encounters to Spectral Cosmopolitanism**

The uncanny in the Victorian period was linked, if Allan Lloyd Smith is to be believed, to “specific features of culture, such as imperialism and the fear of what is brought back from the colonies” (285). In the globalized world the cultural uncanny is the presence of such “foreign” features within the everyday, at once familiar and strange. The cultural uncanny that generates the exotic in Mitchell is these ghostly presences intersecting with the everyday life of people.

Berthold Schoene correctly points out that Mitchell imagine[s] globality by depicting worldwide human living in multifaceted, delicately entwined, serialized snapshots of the human condition, marked by global connectivity and virtual proximity as much as psychogeographical detachment and xenophobic segregation. (50-51)

Moving from crowded metropolises like London to Hong Kong to Mongolia and the “last” corner of Ireland, Clear Island, Mitchell does indeed represent the world as “open” and interconnected in a clear imagining of globality. However, Schoene’s argument about Mitchell’s cosmopolitan imagination ignores a significant mode through which this interconnection is achieved.

Exoticism is characterized by a decontextualization (Huggan 16), when an object is isolated from its “original” context and made to circulate
within other frames of reference. This implies a recontextualization in a wholly new context. During the colonial period the Other culture was a commodity situated “out there” and then reframed within imperial exhibitions simultaneously underscoring their distant difference as well as their incorporation within a metropolitan discourse (see Barringer and Flynn, on colonial exhibitions) as the exotic. In the age of globalization, the Other culture is not distanced or framed as singular. Instead it is messily plunged into a circuit of consumption, as part of the great cultural “flows.” A reterritorialization of the Other occurs where the Other is constitutive of global flows. Mitchell does not posit pockets of Otherness, rather he shows how Otherness intersects with the global producing a new aesthetic. The exotic, in this reading, is the imagining of multiplicities all aligned along a continuum in a fetishizing of difference.

I am working “exoticism” through both its meanings: as radical otherness and as a process through which this otherness can be brought into the experience of the traveler.¹

I propose that Mitchell’s cosmopolitanism is itself exotic, for it presents and imagines multiple foreign cultures and places as interconnected. That is, cosmopolitan thinking in Mitchell acknowledges and recognizes difference — a hallmark of the exotic — but does something more. The exotic in Mitchell’s cosmopolitanism essentially deploys and engenders a sentimentalism. By this I mean to suggest that tragic circumstances, accidents and coincidences rather than conscious attempts to meet or “face” the Other throw people of different cultures together. People (Caspar and his Australian girlfriend Sherry) meeting on trains, the fortuitous rescue of Marco by Mowleen from a certain road accident (273-76), a random military operation, and conspiracies bring people together. The transnational exotic is the process of random, nearly metaphysical, uncanny meetings through which Otherness enters the worlds of the characters. We are struck by the randomness of meetings, chance encounters and cultural negotiations in Ghostwritten. To read these random acts of the contact zones is to engage in wishful thinking that all of want to be “citizens of the world” (cosmopolitans).

¹ Charles Fosdick has argued that exoticism as process implies translation, transportation and representation where the potentially threatening is domesticated (14).
This randomness constitutes Mitchell’s transnational exotic and produces a cosmopolitanism that creates, and preserves, pockets of difference, but also suggests the possibilities of random, unconscious, sentimental and *spectral* connectedness between these pockets. The foreign in this transnational exoticism does not negate difference, but it also does not suggest a “global soul” (to borrow the title of Pico Iyer’s work), actively seeking to understand or assimilate difference. This transnational cosmopolitanism does not try to frame difference either.

The exotic, as Christa Knellwolf has argued, is primarily about contexts: where is the object being observed located and from which vantage point is it being viewed? In Mitchell’s fiction, I argue, the different is being viewed not from a vantage point like an omniscient god-like eye but from a horizontal, randomized and planar point. This means, simply, that the different, the Other, is *adjacent* to the viewing point, even if this proximity is accidental. In other words, what I am proposing is that in the transnational exotic, the different is not out there, or unique: the difference is *proximate* with us. I am invoking the image of proximate and adjacent exotic to suggest a planar, leveled exoticism where the multicultural lives led in metropolises do not always generate a cosmopolitan consciousness, but does not situate the exotic “out there” either. The uncanny is the presence of the Other in proximity producing a spectral cosmopolitanism.

The transnational exotic is the accidental cosmopolitan, or more accurately, a *spectral cosmopolitanism*. The spectral, as Pheng Cheah points out, is a form of “inhuman culture,” between nature and culture (388). This adequately describes, I think, the kind of cosmopolitanism we can discern in Mitchell’s fiction. As early as 1999 John Tomlinson had argued that “the paradigmatic experience of global modernity for most people … is that of staying in one place but experiencing the displacement that global modernity brings to them”(9). Benedict Anderson in his influential work had written:

> Why are these events so juxtaposed [in reportage, on TV]? What connects them to each other? Not sheer caprice. Yet obviously most of them happen independently, without the actors being aware of each other or what the others are up to. The arbitrariness of their inclusion and juxtaposition … shows that the linkage between them is imagined. (33)

"Novel Globalism," The Transnational Exotic and Spectral Cosmopolitanism
Anderson, I believe, is far more accurate in his evaluation of the cosmopolitan condition, and approximates to what I have termed ‘spectral cosmopolitanism.’ In an earlier work I have argued that the cosmopolitan outlook is an intellectual project, characterized by the coexistence of multiple identities and cultures and the inclination to, and desire for, the absorption and understanding of new cultures (Nayar, Postcolonialism 178-79). The point I want to make, at the risk of perhaps downplaying Mitchell’s narrative and stylistic achievement, is that no character in Ghostwritten tries to consciously seek to understand or absorb an Other culture. There is no intellectual project here, neither for the characters nor for us. What we see are various differences laid out on a more or less equal/level playing field and rhizomatically interconnected with each other purely by chance. True, it is cosmopolitan in the sense there is no hierarchic organization or ranking of cultures in Mitchell. But suggesting that differences meet by accident rather than through agential effort is to show cosmopolitanism as a result of chaos rather than consciousness (a defect somewhat remedied in The Thousand Autumns of Jacob de Zoet). There is no attempt at a cosmopolitan outlook or attitude.

This means Ghostwritten might be an embodiment of a “novel globalism,” but to rate it as an attempt to either create a world novel or as signifying a cosmopolitan outlook, as Schoene suggests, is to willfully ignore the exoticism inherent in merely preparing a mosaic of differences — which is what both these novels ultimately become. The transnational exotic is this mosaic where cultures meet and separate, meet and separate, in an endless proliferation of uncanny accidental encounters. The contact zones are ephemeral. Thus, when Marco saves Mowleen from being hit by a cab, there is the ephemerality of an encounter, loaded with angst and sentiment, but nothing more. Mowleen proceeds to Ireland and her family, to be eventually taken away, under duress, by the American military to aid in their missile program, and Marco goes his way.

While Mitchell resists the temptation to offer “authentic” accounts of difference or cultural iconicity — which would attract the charge of exoticism, of course — by aligning all cultures along a great chain of coincidence, he manages to offer us an anecdote- or incident-based exoticism. This is a theatrical strategy, where people run into each other, mysterious encounters bring people face-to-face with the (cultural)
other, and so on. The characters therefore become players in Mitchell’s decentralizing, postmodern exoticism.

Exoticism is the surprising conjunction of random elements, but does not approximate to a conscious, political cosmopolitanism. Another interpretation of this play of exoticism is possible. Exoticism emerges, as commentators have noted, around times of cultural anxieties (Gallini). Mitchell’s postmodern, transnational exoticism with interconnecting, cross-cultural flows appears at a time when critics of globalization have been crying themselves hoarse about cultural homogenization, Americanization and McDonaldization. By producing narratives where worlds, rather than stay apart, collide and intersect while preserving their differences, Mitchell generates an exoticism of chiasmatic encounters. He does not propose assimilation, rather he suggests a mutuality of several streams running alongside each other, intersecting at points, and then diverging again. In short, what I am proposing is that Mitchell’s transnational exoticism is a response to threats of homogenization by showing different cultures being separate yet with the inherent possibilities of intersection. If, as Charles Fosdick notes, a “postcolonial exoticism [is] dependent on processes of reciprocity and exchange … [and] postcolonial mobility has opened up previously unimagined spaces of heterogeneity, cultural interaction and diversity” (21), Mitchell’s brand of transnational exoticism cleverly presents interactions and heterogeneity, but in minimal, non-threatening ways.

Mitchell does not suggest an assimilative apparatus of globalizing cultures (which Huggan sees as generating the postcolonial exotic, 28). Rather he sees exoticism as the inevitable product of the supernatural, metaphysical cultural economy. Understandably, this randomized intersection of different cultures, the accidental cultural encounters and contact zones produced hints at something metaphysical—“supernatural” is a word that has often been used to describe Mitchell’s work, with good reason—and surreal.

What we do not see in Mitchell is the spectacle of differences retained in their pristine uniqueness. What we see is a spectacularization of intersecting differences, an exoticism of rhizomatic connections. Unlike the routine exoticism of the global north, there is no emphasis on marginality. What Mitchell does is to show how events in Mongolia or Tokyo somehow have resonances in London or Hong Kong. Spectral
cosmopolitanism is the strange, ghostly and inexplicable connections that constitute everyday life in a spectral globality (or is it a globalization of the spectral?).

Spectral cosmopolitanism does not always entail a knowledge of the other. The domain that lies beyond comprehension and knowledge is that of the other, standing in opposition to empirical, rational and “modernized” knowledge systems. Conversely, one cannot fully “know” the other, as David Punter has argued, because it is incommensurable (Punter 74). The uncanny is itself about a crisis of perception, an epistemological uncertainty, as every single commentator on the uncanny has pointed out. The move from the uncertainty of the uncanny to the canny is via knowledge (the word “canny” itself implies knowledge). Spectral cosmopolitanism in Mitchell is precisely this: the epistemological uncertainty of perception, of ghostly encounters that leave us uncomprehending of the Other, of events and people that do not fit into our scheme of things. It is in these uncertain, unstable (uncanny) encounters with the Other that the spectral cosmopolitanism emerges. If the uncanny is the space of uncertainty, then this same space is at once created by, and inflects, the cultural encounter with Others. Spectral cosmopolitanism is the ephemeral yet powerful experience of the Other, leaving fleeting impressions of who or what one has encountered, which does not enlighten us about the Other in any significant ways, but has had some impact upon us. It is between nature and culture, governed by laws we do not understand (the uncanny is adjacent to the fantastic).

Mitchell’s spectral cosmopolitanism suggests, I argue, a vision of companion species, of co-existence and hyperconnected lives. In a globalized world with an increasing sense of hyperconnected lives (in the digital domain), we experience uncanny connectivity, influence and impact. Our lives ghostwritten by somebody else, somebody we might never meet, gives us a cosmopolitanism that is at once felt but not knowable. It is in this gap between a feeling of connectivity (a ghostly feeling, like déjà vu) and an uncertainty about what happened that the spectral nature of cosmopolitanism’s connected lives arises. Mitchell’s spectral cosmopolitanism is essentially, therefore, a posthuman vision about companion species.

Mitchell’s spectral cosmopolitanism, of uncanny encounters with strangers, is a posthuman vision of the need for a new heuristic, of the
world's interdependency. His fiction echoes the recent work of Donna Haraway, in the cognitive sciences and in the posthumanities. Haraway in her more recent work has been proposing the idea of “companion species,” symbiogenesis (from the work of biologist Lynn Margulis, whose ideas have also been taken up by African American sci-fi writer, Octavia Butler) and dependency. Haraway argues that the very word “species” etymologically proposes response, respect and responsibility, proceeding from the word “specere,” meaning both “to see” and “respect” (17-23). Thus to behold a species is to respond with respect, to acknowledge that this Other is a part of us. This in no way negates the Other, neither does it assimilate the other. “Species” is about the acknowledgement of difference, and the recognition that the difference is what makes us, and what we must respond to, with respect. If there is an ethics to Mitchell's exoticisation, it would be this: the Other intersects with us in ways we cannot understand, nor predict. Judith Butler has proposed that once I recognize that my life and death are connected to yours in ways I do not understand, that my death could be the result of a random act on the part of somebody I do not know (or will), then it becomes difficult to see the Other as anything less than “connected” to me, as constitutive of my world (20). When in Ghostwritten Mitchell writes that “our own lives ... are pre-ghostwritten by forces around us” (296) he is proposing such an uncanny linkage. We become cultural and individual companion species, adjacent to, constitutive of the Others. This itself becomes a response to globalization. The world evolves in a symbiogenesis, in unexpected, uncanny ways because of these random, metaphysical connections.

Cognitive scientists Francisco Varela et al in their The Embodied Mind demonstrate how the mind is not a homogenous unity but a “disunified, heterogeneous, collection of processes” (106-07). More importantly, “what counts as an agency ... a collection of agents, could, if we change our focus, be considered as merely one agent in a larger agency” (107). Mitchell’s distributed agency theme in both Ghostwritten and Number9Dream is a posthuman vision. Minnesota University Press in 2007 has launched a new series, Posthumanities. The write-up on the series is illuminating and captures much of what the discipline, of the posthumanities, is likely to become:

Posthumanities situates itself at a crossroads: at the intersection of “the humanities” in its current academic
configuration and the challenges it faces from “posthumanism” to move beyond its standard parameters and practices. Rather than simply reproducing established forms and methods of disciplinary knowledge, posthumanists confront how changes in society and culture require that scholars rethink what they do—theoretically, methodologically, and ethically. The “human” is enmeshed in the larger problem of what Jacques Derrida called “the living,” and traditional humanism is no longer adequate to understand the human’s entangled, complex relations with animals, the environment, and technology.

Series editor Cary Wolfe points to a “wet” version of posthumanism in which the “human is enmeshed in the larger problem”—at once biological, ecological, and ontological (http://www.carywolfe.com/post_about.html, 22 July 2011). I have elsewhere proposed that the humanities itself needs to be reinvented as the posthumanities, whose discipline I defined as the

- theoretico-political examination of the human in the age of technology; the rights of posthumans; the arts, literature and poetics of posthuman thought; the history of notions of life in its various inclusions, exclusions and hybridizations that distinguish between ‘bare life’ and political life, or human and animal; and the question of species and species-borders. (Nayar, “Posthumanities” 7)

Mitchell’s is a text that offers us a vision of this posthumanized, hybridized, interconnected world where human agency is dependent upon the agency of several others, many of which might be non-human.

In human and social geography in the age of globalization and electronic linkages we see a similar trend, as posthumanism speaks of the interconnectedness of human-non-human linkages. Mitchell, in the figure of the non-corpa and the “zoo-keeper,” questions the limits of the human by showing how the “human” is configured only through close imbrications with the non-human. The human life, or fate, is, in this posthuman vision, the result of an “infolding of the world” (qtd. in Panelli 82). Posthumanist commentator Neil Badmington suggests that we “attend to what remains of humanism in the posthumanist landscape”
(15). Mitchell’s uncanny leading to a spectral cosmopolitanism is an argument for a “vital topology” that extends far beyond us, and that is not of our making alone ... it is focused ... on displacing the hubris of humanism so as to admit others into the calculus of the world” (Panelli 82). Ruth Panelli refers to this as the “dynamism of a more-than-human world” (82), a phrase that captures Mitchell’s agenda in his early fiction. What Mitchell calls for, I suggest, is a new heuristic, a sense of the world’s interconnectedness.

In *Ghostwritten* several tragedies, for example, are connected: the Aum sect killer, Neal, the old woman in Mongolia, her niece in Hong Kong. Latunsky, the art thief, is connected to Jerome (who is Alfred’s friend, Alfred being the man for whom Marco is doing the ghostwriting in London). Latunsky is based in Petersburg, and is left there for the police to find there by Subahtaar, the Mongolian secret police officer. Before leaving her Subahtaar informs her that her boyfriend Rudi was money-laundering for a Mr Gregorski, and the money-laundering firm’s operative, Neal, had died (259). Nick’s maid, with whom he has an affair, is the old woman’s niece. The London publisher Tim Cavendish, who Alfred hopes will publish his book, is the brother of the guy who runs the Hong Kong based law firm where Neal worked. After the law firm collapses, Cavendish declines to publish Alfred’s book — which Marco is ghostwriting (303. Marco also goes to bed with Katy, Neal’s ex-wife). Cavendish is also the guy who publishes the writings of Serendipity, the cult leader. The subway gas attack is engineered by this cult. And then there is the non-corporeal being that/who inhabits information channels and communications satellites, and wishes to kill evil humans but cannot because the principles of its race (of ghosts?) prohibit it from doing so.

While it might seem far-fetched to propose that Mitchell’s work seems to rely upon a metaphysical concept of fate, *Ghostwritten* comes close to this suggestion. This commonality of “fate” is the exoticisation of interconnected cultures, worlds, people and places across geographical spaces and times. Mitchell thus proposes an exoticism of connections, not of separations. In a sense, therefore, Mitchell is offering a new form of globalism, where fate and tragedy link all of us.

If, as Hardt and Negri have argued, “Empire” is now decentered, fluid, mobile and without limits —not unlike spectrality— then spectral
cosmopolitanism is the cultural arm of this globalization. Exoticism works with fragmentation and dismemberment, where fragments of a culture, or particular objects, are synecdochic of a culture as a whole (Fosdick 21). Mitchell’s postmodern play ensures that the fragment of any culture is the best we can hope to see. Thus violence is the synecdoche for Mongolia and China, the CIA-FBI ruthlessness for the USA, spiritualism for Japan, music and romance for youth anywhere etc. But what is significant is that this form of transnational exoticism is itself a code for the simultaneous fragmentation-dismemberment and interconnectedness of a globalized world. That Mitchell chooses to show this via the metaphysical-supernatural is a different matter. Perhaps the uncanny is a descriptor of all contemporary lives, as companion species, in the world of spectral cosmopolitanism.

WORKS CITED


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