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“The Weak are Meat, the Strong do Eat”

Metamodernist Predacity in David Mitchell’s *Cloud Atlas*, *The Thousand Autumns of Jacob de Zoet*, and *The Bone Clocks*

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Abstract

This thesis sets out to provide insight in the theme of predacity within David Mitchell's writing as well as contribute to a clearer understanding of the structure of feeling called metamodernism. The introduction explains the theory of predacity and metamodernism and how they will be employed in the two subsequent chapters. Chapter one will deal with the way predacity is explored and chapter two will analyse whether or not its exploration contributes to Mitchell's perceived metamodernist writing. The conclusion summarises the arguments made and gives suggestions for future research.

Keywords: *Predacity, David Mitchell, Metamodernism, Cannibalism in Literature, Moral Didacticism, Close Reading.*

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Introduction

David Mitchell is one of the most well-known authors since the turn of the millennium. His most famous novel is *Cloud Atlas* (2004), which garnered international attention, especially after its eponymous film adaptation from 2012. *Cloud Atlas*, Mitchell's third novel, was shortlisted for the Booker Prize. Since then, his novels have been a popular subject of recent scholarly research. This research has focused on the intertextuality in Mitchell's novels, but, increasingly, more specific themes have emerged, such as the novels' complex narrative techniques,¹ fragmentation,² and predacity.³ The last theme is one that has seen very little academic interest and will benefit from more research.

David Mitchell has written seven novels in total, with his eighth, *Utopia Avenue*, set for release July 14th 2020. His first novel, *Ghostwritten*, appeared in 1999 and won the John Llewellyn Rhys Prize (for authors from the Commonwealth aged under 35). Since then, Mitchell has gained further attention. Both *Black Swan Green* (2006) and *The Thousand Autumns of Jacob de Zoet* (2010) were longlisted for the Booker prize. *Cloud Atlas* (2004), probably Mitchell's most awarded novel, was shortlisted for the Booker Prize, won the British Book Awards Literary Fiction award and the Richard & Judy "Book of the Year" award. In 2014, *The Bone Clocks* was also longlisted for the Booker Prize and won the 2015 World Fantasy Award.

The reason *Cloud Atlas* sold so many copies is of course multifaceted, but for some reason many people took a liking to the novel, as can be gleaned from the many literary prizes it was awarded, gaining Mitchell both economical, as well as symbolical capital. Scholars

¹ Sarah Dillon, "Introducing David Mitchell's Universe: A Twenty-First Century House of Fiction," in *David Mitchell: Critical Essays*, edited by Sarah Dillon, (Canterbury: Gylphi Limited, 2011): 12.

² Will McMorran, "*Cloud Atlas* and *If on a winter's night a traveller*: Fragmentation and Integrity in the Postmodern Novel," in *David Mitchell: Critical Essays*, edited by Sarah Dillon, (Canterbury: Gylphi Limited, 2011): 156.

³ Peter Childs, "Food Chain: Predatory Links in the Novels of David Mitchell," *Études anglaises* 68, no. 2 (2015): 183.

such as Will McMorran, but also David Mitchell himself,⁴ state that predacity is one of the main themes of the novel, and that it also performs a major role in other novels.

On 2 and 3 September 2009 an international David Mitchell conference was held. In his essay that spawned from the conference, Will McMorran suggested that *Cloud Atlas* contains “[a] metaphor of narratological consumption and predacity [that fit] the themes as well as the structure of *Cloud Atlas* well – each tale is consumed by the next to come along.”⁵ *Cloud Atlas* contains what many critics refer to as a ‘Russian doll structure’, meaning that of all the six stories it contains, first the first half is told, then the sixth is given in full, only to return and finish every second half like a boomerang. After also reading *The Bone Clocks* and *The Thousand Autumns of Jacob de Zoet*, similar themes of predacity emerged. Wondering how predacity is explored in David Mitchell’s writing, marked the start for this thesis. Since there currently seems to be no theoretical framework that deals with predacity in literature, I have opted to use one of my own design. Because McMorran states the existence of predacity in *Cloud Atlas* and names examples of it in his essay, but does not provide an entire analysis of predacity in *Cloud Atlas*, *The Bone Clocks* and *The Thousand Autumns of Jacob de Zoet*, this thesis provides further exploration of the subject.

David Mitchell is also referred to as a metamodernist author.⁶ Metamodernism is one of the labels used to define a new trend in ‘post-postmodernist’ literature. This thesis researches how the theme of predacity is explored within Mitchell’s novels and how this may contribute to him being referred to as a metamodernist author.

⁴ David Mitchell, interview by James Naughtie, *BBC Radio 4 Bookclub* (3 June 2007): <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/b007mdcg>.

⁵ Will McMorran, “*Cloud Atlas* and *If on a winter’s night a traveller*: Fragmentation and Integrity in the Postmodern Novel,” in *David Mitchell: Critical Essays*, edited by Sarah Dillon, (Canterbury: Glyphi Limited, 2011): 165.

⁶ Cf. Nick Bentley, Nick Hubble, and Leigh Wilson, “Introduction: Fiction of the 2000s,” in *The 2000s: A Decade of Contemporary British Fiction*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 17. And Nick Bentley, “Trailing Postmodernism: David Mitchell’s *Cloud Atlas*, Zadie Smith’s *NW*, and the Metamodern,” *English Studies* 99, no. 7 (2018): 723.

Relevance

This thesis sets out to provide insight in the theme of predacity within David Mitchell's writing as well as contribute to a clearer understanding of the structure of feeling called metamodernism, using David Mitchell's work as an example, since he is both a popular author as well as an established metamodernist writer. Metamodernism is one of the labels used to define certain contemporary novels in the 'post-postmodernist' age. It will be further explored in the status quaestionis. The reason many people take an interest in David Mitchell's predacity can be because there is a growing consent and concern about climate change. Irreversible climate change could prove catastrophic to humanity and therefore predacious contrasts such as the Anchorites and the Horologists in *The Bone Clocks*, one murdering others to stave off death, the other being reincarnated every time they die, show us alternatives to our current way of life, which with a looming climate crisis could prove more relevant than ever. This interest in ethical engagement seems to be one of the core reasons David Mitchell can be considered metamodernist, therefore this thesis can also shed some light on the developments of contemporary metamodernist literature.

Thesis Structure

The remaining parts of the introduction will first provide a brief summary of all three novels, before tackling a status quaestionis of both predacity and metamodernism. Next, the methodology will explain the way in which this thesis plans to employ the theory mentioned in the status quaestionis. Chapter one will be concerned with how the theme of predacity is explored in three of David Mitchell's novels, namely *Cloud Atlas*, *The Thousand Autumns of Jacob de Zoet* and *The Bone Clocks*. This will be done by performing a close reading of the novels and analysing the ways that predacity is used. Chapter two deals with how the theme of predacity contributes to how David Mitchell's work might be seen as metamodernist. After

clearly stating what can be considered metamodernist, ways in which predacity is explored in the novels can be used to identify how its exploration contribute to David Mitchell's perceived metamodernism. The conclusion will summarise the arguments made in both chapters and respond to the research question of this thesis: how does the exploration of the theme of predacity contribute to the perceived metamodernism of David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas*, *The Thousand Autumns of Jacob de Zoet*, and *The Bone Clocks*?

Cloud Atlas

Cloud Atlas consists of six novellas 'woven together' through similar themes (such as predacity) and references to the other stories, which were originally planned to be nine total.⁷ Mitchell has stated that all of the main characters (except Zachry in "Sloosha's Crossin' an' Ev'rythin' After") are meant to represent the same soul reincarnating each time, represented by the same comet-shaped birthmark, which is something he borrowed from Chinese literature.⁸ In Zachry's story, Meronym has the comet-shaped birthmark. It is possible for the same soul to be reincarnated in each story, since every story is set in a different time period. The stories also widely differ on aspects of setting, focalisation, genre and writing overall. The length of each story is roughly the same. Another device all stories except Zachry's share, is the fact that around the halfway mark, they are cut in half. This means that the overall story is told by first giving five 'first-half novellas', then telling the middle one as a whole and then returning to finish all of the first halves like a boomerang. If the stories were to be given a letter and its first half to be given the number one and its second half the number two, the novel's formula would look like this: a1b1c1d1e1f12e2d2c2b2a2. Many critics refer to it as a 'Russian doll structure'. The genres in which each story is told are, in order, a colonial travel diary situated on and around the islands in the Pacific Ocean, an epistolary novel set in

⁷ David Mitchell, interview by James Naughtie, *BBC Radio 4 Bookclub* (3 June 2007): <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/b007mdcg>.

⁸ Ibid.

interbellum Belgium told from the perspective of a bankrupt, aristocrat musician, a detective/thriller in California concerning an intentionally unsafely built nuclear reactor set in 1975, a contemporary comic tale of a publisher that gets incarcerated in a nursing home in Great Britain, a future interview in a dystopian Korea and an oral memoir told on post-apocalyptic Hawaii. The stories are interrelated with each other through common themes and characteristics and reference each other from one story to the other, e.g. the detective story is found as a manuscript by the publisher from the next story.

The Thousand Autumns of Jacob de Zoet

The Thousand Autumns of Jacob de Zoet is set from 1799 to 1817 on the artificially constructed island of Dejima, where Dutch merchants of the East India Company were allowed to stay, since they were not authorised to set foot on the mainland of Japan. Compared to Mitchell's more experimental novels like *Cloud Atlas*, *Jacob de Zoet* is a fairly traditional historical novel. Its main concern is its eponymous protagonist. He is a Dutch clerk within the East India Company (Dutch: *Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie*, oftentimes abbreviated to *VOC*). He can be described as honest and slightly naïve, starkly contrary to both the corrupt merchants in the Company, as well as many of the Japanese officials, touching on what Mitchell calls a universal theme: "what does an honest man do in a nest of vipers?"⁹ Jacob falls in love with Orito, a student midwife training under the Dutch doctor Marinus. Several parts are focalised from her point of view when she is kidnapped to a shrine on Mount Shiranui. It is here Lord Abbot Enomoto presides over a cloister of women who are routinely raped by his order of monks in order for their babies to be secretly offered to "the Goddess" in order to unnaturally extend his lifespan. Some chapters are told from other

⁹ "David Mitchell on 'The Thousand Autumns of Jacob de Zoet'," YouTube video, 6:33, "WNYC," July 19, 2010, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S5kEtjTdvMo>.

characters, such as Ogawa Uzaemon,¹⁰ one of the translators of the Guild of Interpreters. The book has five parts to it, each with its own chapters and breaks between paragraphs. Its themes include corruption, love, the differences and similarities between cultures, and predacity.

The Bone Clocks

The Bone Clocks has a similar structure to *Cloud Atlas* with its six novella-length stories and progressing timeline. Contrary to *Cloud Atlas*, *Bone Clocks* has its novellas in full and focuses mainly on one character, Holly Sykes, which is possible since the time leaps are not as considerable as in *Cloud Atlas*. The novel spans from 1984 to 2043, with roughly a decennium between each chapter. The first and the last story are told from Holly's point of view, whereas the others are all focalised by characters who are close to Holly in one way or other. Holly's life story is background to a much grander and longer war between the Horologists and Anchorites, factions consisting of immortal beings referred to as '*atemporals*' in the novel, different from 'normal' humans, who are derogatorily referred to as the eponymous 'bone clocks'. The factions are fairly archetypal good and evil. Horologists are naturally immortal, whereas the Anchorites sacrifice innocents to stave off mortality. Of the three novels discussed in this thesis, *Bone Clocks* leans most heavily into the fantasy genre while also perhaps showcasing Mitchell's theme of predacity clearest in the dichotomy between the two factions of atemporals. The stories respectively consist of Holly running away from home in her teens; Hugo Lamb, an amoral university student, having a brief affair with Holly before being groomed by the Anchorites; Holly's 'war junkie' reporter partner losing their daughter after Holly's sister's wedding; once successful author Crispin Hershey,

¹⁰ Mitchell mentions in his Author's Note that Japanese names are ordered with the family name first and it seems only logical to name the characters the same way as he is referring to them.

befriending Holly after meeting her at several literary events; Marinus, an Horologist¹¹ himself, fighting alongside Holly as the final confrontation between the two factions takes place; and finally, Holly living in ‘*Endarkenment*’ Ireland and caring for her granddaughter.

Status Quaestionis

In the following two paragraphs the concepts of predacity and metamodernism will be theorised and former research will be discussed. The methodology section will treat the way these concepts are utilised.

Predacity

There has not been a lot of research into the theme of predacity specifically, although many similar concepts exist in literary criticism, such as oppression in colonial (race), Marxist (class) or feminist (gender) contexts. However, there are some scholars who have written about predacity in literature, such as Peter Childs and Paul Ferguson. Childs observes that what the narrators of *Cloud Atlas* all have in common “is their common experience of political oppression and exploitation, whether colonial or corporate, economic or tribal.”¹² His distinction between the different forms that predacity can take, forms the basis of the theoretical framework of predacity utilised in this thesis, with the addition of cannibalistic predacity, since it is omnipresent in the novels and was too extensive to be ignored. An example of cannibalistic predacity is the massacre of the Moriori people and their subsequent consumption by Maori in *Cloud Atlas*. Such acts of consuming others for personal, selfish gain, either literal or metaphorical, are abundant in the Mitchellian universe and part of what this thesis sets out to do is to map the various predacious acts and events in his novels. To

¹¹ Since the fifth chapter is called “An Horologist’s Labyrinth”, apparently Horology and its derived nouns are pronounced with a silent ‘h’.

¹² Peter Childs, “Food Chain: Predatory Links in the Novels of David Mitchell,” *Études anglaises* 68, no. 2 (2015): 193.

map all predacity in *Cloud Atlas*, *The Thousand Autumns of Jacob de Zoet* and *The Bone Clocks*, each will be classified in one of the five categories mentioned; tribal, colonial, corporate, economic or cannibalistic. Chapter one will deal with the way this predacity is explored and chapter two will analyse whether or not its exploration contributes to Mitchell's perceived metamodernist writing.

Metamodernism

Linda Hutcheon made it perfectly clear in the epilogue of her book, *The Politics on Postmodernity*: "The postmodern moment has passed, ... Post-postmodernism needs a new label of its own, and I conclude, therefore, with this challenge to readers to find it – and name it for the twenty-first century."¹³ Perhaps this is exactly what motivated Vermeulen and Van den Akker to publish "Notes on Metamodernism" in 2010. They define metamodernism clearest in perhaps their most often cited line:

Ontologically, metamodernism oscillates between the modern and the postmodern. It oscillates between the modernist enthusiasm and a postmodern irony, between hope and melancholy, between naïveté and knowingness, empathy and apathy, unity and plurality, totality and fragmentation, purity and ambiguity.¹⁴

This means metamodernism does in fact not break definitively with either modernism or postmodernism. Rather, it eclectically employs elements of both to create something new. Just as there is no "the" postmodernism,¹⁵ to define what metamodernism precisely encompasses, remains somewhat vague. After all, as Vermeulen and Van den Akker stated five years after "Notes on Metamodernism" on their eponymously titled website:

¹³ Linda Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernity* (New York/London: Routledge, 2002), 181, quoted in Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker, "Notes on Metamodernism," *Journal of Aesthetics and Culture* 2, no. 1 (2010): 3.

¹⁴ Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker, "Notes on Metamodernism," *Journal of Aesthetics and Culture* 2, no. 1 (2010): 5-6.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 4.

Metamodernism, as we see, [sic] it is not a philosophy. In the same vein, it is not a movement, a programme, an aesthetic register, a visual strategy, or a literary technique or trope. ... For us, it is a structure of feeling.¹⁶

Vermeulen's and Van den Akker's labelling metamodernism a 'structure of feeling', reminds one of postmodernism's unwillingness to be clearly defined as or be encapsulated in one mere philosophy. They mention a structure of feeling as being something that is widespread enough that it can be called structural, but not being able to be reduced to one particular strategy.¹⁷

Metamodernism is a subject of, understandably, recent scholarly research, since it tries to define, establish and understand certain trends and ideas in contemporary literature from the mid-2000s onwards that have been noticed by multiple scholars, oftentimes under different names,

including post-postmodernism (Nealon), beyond postmodernism (Stierstorfer), after postmodernism (Potter and Lopez), altermodernism (Bourriaud), metamodernism (Vermeulen and van den Akker), digimodernism (Kirby), the new puritans (Blincoe and Thorne) and the new sincerity (Kelly), amongst others.¹⁸

These developments will be labelled metamodernist in this thesis. Because of its relatively young age, metamodernism is still being defined and explored with different publications every year. Since Mitchell is also called a metamodernist author,¹⁹ and after establishing predacity as one of the main themes within Mitchell's writing, it is very likely that the theme of predacity contributes to him being a metamodernist author, logically leading to my research question: how does the exploration of the theme of predacity contribute to the

¹⁶ Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker, "Misunderstandings and Clarifications: Notes on 'Notes on Metamodernism'," *Notes on Metamodernism* (June 3, 2015), <https://www.metamodernism.com/2015/06/03/misunderstandings-and-clarifications/>. (Underlining in original)

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Nick Bentley, Nick Hubble, and Leigh Wilson, "Introduction: Fiction of the 2000s," in *The 2000s: A Decade of Contemporary British Fiction*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 16.

¹⁹ Cf. Nick Bentley, Nick Hubble, and Leigh Wilson, "Introduction: Fiction of the 2000s," in *The 2000s: A Decade of Contemporary British Fiction*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 17. And Nick Bentley, "Trailing Postmodernism: David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas*, Zadie Smith's *NW*, and the Metamodern," *English Studies* 99, no. 7 (2018): 723.

perceived metamodernism of David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas*, *The Thousand Autumns of Jacob de Zoet*, and *The Bone Clocks*? The hypothesis is that the theme of predacity within the oeuvre of David Mitchell contributes to him being a metamodernist author in 1) stating a clear alternative to predacious behaviour and thus having a constructive, rather than nihilistic moral, and 2) showing that sincerity and kindness persevere above human's innate predacity, at least in the Mitchellian universe, which shows that the novels adhere more to metamodernist sincerity than postmodernist irony.

One of these structural characteristics is the way metamodernist art interacts with both modernism and postmodernism. This is precisely what Vermeulen and Van den Akker meant with the Greek prefix 'meta-'; metamodernist art with, between and beyond both modernism and postmodernism. The way it interacts with each is different. It tends to take the modernist enthusiasm, optimism, and techniques and take postmodern irony along, but instead of using it in a nihilistic, 'nothing-mattered-all-along' way, metamodernism uses it to criticise societal or humanitarian problems artists see in the world. Whereas postmodernist irony tends to be nihilistic in its views, metamodernist irony tends to be reconstructive. Sometimes both ironies can be hard to be distinguished from each other, and one novel being labelled as postmodernist does not necessarily exclude it from being labelled as metamodernist as well, as is the case for example for David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas* and Zadie Smith's *NW*, as Nick Bentley states:

In many ways both David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas* (2004) and Zadie Smith's *NW* (2012) are typical postmodern novels in their use of fragmented form, multiple narratives, and complex models of identity and characterisation. However, [...] they are also interested in [...] exceeding or moving beyond postmodern scepticism and

identifying the potential for reconstructive (rather than postmodern deconstructive) possibilities.²⁰

From Bentley's quote it becomes clear that just like the case with modernism and postmodernism, a great deal of similar characteristics can be noted between the former two and metamodernism, such as fragmentation, multiple stories within the same novel, and a complicated design regarding characters that appear within the novel. However, metamodernist authors add a set of grounded ethical rules to their novels.²¹

The term metamodernism was not first coined by Vermeulen and Van den Akker, although their 2010 paper "Notes on Metamodernism" started off the first scholarly discussions on metamodernism. In a nutshell, Vermeulen and Van den Akker notice a shift in tendencies that "can no longer be explained in terms of the postmodern."²² They argue that their newly found 'structure of feeling' is somewhere with, between and beyond (post) modernism and invite other scholars to voice their opinions on the subject.

The answer mostly came in the form of David James and Urmila Seshagiri's 2014 "Metamodernism: Narratives of Continuity and Revolution". James and Seshagiri build on Vermeulen and Van den Akker's metamodernism, although one of the key components, namely postmodernism, is conspicuous by its absence. "Metamodernism: Narratives of Continuity and Revolution" deals exclusively with what can be observed as a resurfacing of interest in modernist forms and techniques.

In 2018 a special issue of *English Studies* was released (99, no. 7) entirely dedicated to metamodernism. Although the issue mentions both 'strands' of metamodernism, the one first published in 2010 by Vermeulen and Van den Akker, containing both modernism and

²⁰ Nick Bentley, "Trailing Postmodernism: David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas*, Zadie Smith's *NW*, and the Metamodern," *English Studies* 99, no. 7 (2018): 723.

²¹ Nick Bentley, Nick Hubble, and Leigh Wilson, "Introduction: Fiction of the 2000s," in *The 2000s: A Decade of Contemporary British Fiction*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 17.

²² Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker, "Notes on Metamodernism," *Journal of Aesthetics and Culture* 2, no. 1 (2010): 2.

postmodernism in its ‘definition’, seems to be the more dominant one. It also seems rather odd that James and Seshagiri exclude an entire philosophy – if one is inclined to refer to postmodernism as such – during which a lot of metamodernist authors either published books, read them or were otherwise affected by them. Therefore in this thesis metamodernism will be defined mainly by using the core of Vermeulen and Van Den Akker’s “Notes on Metamodernism”.

Methodology

This thesis will answer its research question by employing a close reading of the exploration of predacity within Mitchell's texts and subsequently categorising it within the five types of predacity discussed in the theory part of this introduction. The majority of this thesis will consist of the close reading and categorising of this predacity. In chapter two the results of chapter one will be analysed and discussed whether or not Mitchell's exploration of predacity contributes to the perceived metamodernism of his works.

The five categories of predacity that will be treated are tribal, colonial, corporate, economic, and cannibalistic. Instead of discussing the novels chronologically, they will instead be discussed by theme. Every time a noteworthy instance of predacity appears, it will be categorised and discussed within its category. Placing all the thematically similar instances together should prove more insightful than a chronological one, since all instances are grouped together.

In chapter two the theoretical framework of metamodernism will be used to identify how the exploration of the theme of predacity in David Mitchell's novels can contribute to the way in which his novels can be construed as metamodernist.

Chapter 1: Predacity in *Cloud Atlas*, *The Thousand Autumns of Jacob de Zoet*, and *The Bone Clocks*

This chapter will deal with how the theme of predacity is explored in David Mitchell's novels *Cloud Atlas* (2004), *The Thousand Autumns of Jacob de Zoet* (2010), and *The Bone Clocks* (2014). The novels will be discussed by theme, meaning that the parts of all three novels that pertain to the same form of predacity will be grouped together. The predacity explored in Mitchell will be categorised in either tribal, colonial, corporate, economic or cannibalistic forms of predacity. This will also be the respective order in which the themes will be discussed.

Tribal Predacity

The first clear example of tribal predacity within *Cloud Atlas*, appears in "Adam Ewing." It is the story of the Moriori and Maori, the indigenous peoples of the Chatham Isles. The Moriori are described as a pacifist people by Mr D'Arnoq, whose son Elijah is a predacious character in *The Bone Clocks*. They believe the spilling of others' blood kill their own *mana*, their soul or life-force as well as their standing in the community.²³ D'Arnoq explains the demise of the Moriori in five steps: colonial oppression by the English, by the annexation of Moriori lands, economic/environmental rapacity by the sealers who overhunt the seal population, the introduction of European rats and cats who hunted the birds and eggs the Moriori relied on for food, the European illnesses and last, the tribal oppression by the Maori, who invaded the Moriori lands and proceeded to kill and, on occasion, consume Moriori.²⁴ Maori differed from their Moriori counterparts in their stand on pacifism, whereas Moriori believed bloodshed would kill their own soul, Maori were known to engage in wars

²³ David Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas* (London: Sceptre, 2014), 12.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 15.

with neighbouring populations.²⁵ Just like the sealers “turning the surf pink with seals’ blood,”²⁶ the Maori similarly kill and eat more than is necessary to sustain them. This is what I believe is the inclusion of Mitchell’s theme of predacity: to showcase that there is almost always a choice, a clear dichotomy between Carnivores,²⁷ those willing to do anything necessary to increase their lifespan, and those who choose not to. This gives most of Mitchell’s novels a clear distinction between archetypal ‘Good and Bad,’ which is especially evident in *The Bone Clocks* in the war between ‘The Anchorites’ and ‘The Horologists’.

In the middle story of *Cloud Atlas*, “Sloosha’s Crossin’ an’ Ev’rythin’ After” another prime example of this dichotomy can be found: the peaceful Valleysmen and the slaving Kona tribe. The first time the Kona tribe is introduced, they are immediately presented as being the clear predators of the story by murdering Zachry’s father and abducting his brother to sell as a slave. There is even an implication of cannibalism when the Kona chief licks the blood off the blade he used to slice Zachry’s father’s throat with,²⁸ but there are no further implications of Kona cannibalism. However, there are clear examples of predatory behaviour by Kona, including the massacre of Valleysmen, subsequent slaving, and the rape of both girls and boys.²⁹ This military victory of Kona over Valleysmen makes Zachry question whether it is better to be savage than to be civilised. When asked the Socratic question what those words mean he answers that savages do not have laws, whereas civilised people do. The Valleysmen have laws against murder for example, barring murderers from participating in society.³⁰ Meronym explains that the main difference between Valleysman and Kona is their view on the future:

²⁵ Jared Diamond, *Guns, Germs, and Steel* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2005), 55-6, quoted in A.A.L. Bracke, “Ecocriticism and the Contemporary British Novel,” (PhD dissertation, Radboud University, 2012), 142.

²⁶ David Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas* (London: Sceptre, 2004), 13.

²⁷ David Mitchell, *The Bone Clocks* (London: Sceptre, 2014), 476.

²⁸ David Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas* (London: Sceptre, 2004), 251.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 303-7.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 316.

*The savage sat 'fies his needs now. He's hungry, he'll eat. He's angry, he'll knuckly. He's swellin', he'll shoot up a woman. His master is his will, an' if his will say-soes "Kill" he'll kill. [...] Now the Civ'lized got the same needs too, but he sees further. He'll eat half his food now, yay, but plant half so he won't go hungry 'morrow. He's angry, he'll stop 'n' think why so he won't get angry next time. He's swellin', well, he's got sisses an' daughters what need respectin' so he'll respect his bros' sisses an' daughters. His will is his slave, an' if his will say-soes, "Don't!" he won't, nay.*³¹

This passage paints a paradoxical picture of the power dynamics between the Valleysmen and the Kona, since in the literal sense the Kona rule over the Valleysmen now, but according to Meronym since their will rules over them, their current existence seems unsustainable, whereas the Valleysmen have mastered their will and will therefore, presumably, survive.

Colonial Predacity

The first lines of the first story within *Cloud Atlas*, “The Pacific Journal of Adam Ewing”, seem to evoke *Robinson Crusoe*, as observed by Paul Ferguson.³² Both stories (specifically “Adam Ewing”) touch on similar subjects: both are set in tropical, ‘remote’ locations in the world, where the protagonists believe they, “the White Man”,³³ have the obligation to bring civilisation to the location where they are stranded. However, although Crusoe is stranded seemingly indefinitely, Ewing needs to wait for repairs on the ship on which he is travelling. Ewing, an American himself, is no stranger to colonial notions of English superiority: “If there be any eyrie so desolate, or isle so remote, that one may there resort unchallenged by an Englishman, 'tis not down on any map I ever saw.”³⁴

³¹ David Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas* (London: Sceptre, 2004), 318. (Original italics)

³² Paul Ferguson, ““Me eatee him up”: Cannibal Appetites in *Cloud Atlas* and *Robinson Crusoe*,” *Green Letters: Studies in Ecocriticism* 19, no. 2 (2015): 149.

³³ David Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas* (London: Sceptre, 2004), 12.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 3.

Racist notions of white superiority shared by many of the characters in “Adam Ewing” are abundant throughout the story, e.g.: ““The best of ’em [i.e. “the black races”] is not too good to die like a pig!” one shouted. “The only gospel the Blacks *savvy* is the gospel of the d—d whip!””³⁵ Adam himself holds the belief that “to *civilize* the Black races by conversion should be our mission”³⁶ and although he is first against abolition, by the end he decides to join the abolitionist movement despite his father-in-law’s imagined objections.

In addition to English colonialism, *Cloud Atlas* also mentions the Maori “apt pupils of the English in ‘the dark arts of colonization’”³⁷ when they annex the Chatham Isles.

[A]mbushes & a night of infamy beyond nightmare, of butchery, of villages torched, of rapine, of men & women, impaled in rows on beaches, of children hiding in holes, scented & dismembered by hunting dogs. Some chiefs kept an eye to the morrow & slew only enough to instil terrified obedience in the remainder. Other chiefs were not so restrained.³⁸

The inclusion of Maori colonisers in the novel shows the reader that colonial predacity, the practice of annexing countries and subordinating its peoples, seem to be part of the human experience everywhere on Earth.

“Adam Ewing” contains one more instance of predacity that I will include into colonial predacity since the story is set in colonial times: the ongoing rape of Rafael the cabin boy perpetrated by Boerhaave’s crew until Rafael hangs himself. The way it is explored, shows that Ewing is at first ignorant of the crime and fails to pick up on it, until told by Goose that “the unnatural crimes of Sodom were visited upon the boy by Boerhaave & his “garter snakes.” Not just on Christmas night, but every night for many weeks.”³⁹ After Ewing learns this he tries to get an inquiry into Boerhaave and his crew, but fails. The exploration of this

³⁵ David Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas* (London: Sceptre, 2004), 17. (Original emphasis)

³⁶ Ibid., 16. (Original emphasis)

³⁷ Ibid., 14.

³⁸ Ibid., 15.

³⁹ Ibid., 518.

predacity is reminiscent of moral didacticism by the author that one has a moral obligation to stand up when they notice wrongdoings.

The entire novel of *Jacob de Zoet* is filled to the brim with instances that can be interpreted as acts of colonial predacity, since it is a novel set in colonial times at a place where colonial trade was being driven. One of those instances appear during the introduction of Daniel Snitker: “‘How [...] is a man to earn just reward for the daily humiliations we suffer from those slit-eyed leeches?’”⁴⁰ There are many more instances where racist remarks are being uttered, like: “‘In Surinam,’ he yells, ‘they know how to train stinking Negroid dogs like you!’”⁴¹ or when there is referred to the inhabitants of Dejima as “‘bad-smelling Dutchmen’”⁴². One of the novel’s themes is the distrust the Japanese and the Dutch have of each other and how, by learning of each other’s languages customs, this distrust can sometimes be bridged.

Corporate Predacity

In *Cloud Atlas*’s detective/thriller story, “Half Lives: The First Luisa Rey Mystery”, the main predacity comes in the form of corporate predacity. The Seaboard corporation has built an intentionally faulty nuclear power plant, since they secretly hope to show the dangers of nuclear power to promote the oil industry. The scientists that helped design the plant are either intimidated, blackmailed or killed by Seaboard or Bill Smoke, a hitman hired by Lloyd Hooks. Hooks also gives orders to assassinate the CEO of Seaboard, Alberto Grimaldi, to take his place. The author shows the reader the cutthroat hierarchy and the lengths corporations are willing to go to in order to turn more profit. With a group of people protesting outside the nuclear reactor, Mitchell is again giving us two archetypically opposing factions in which he can show one is right and one is wrong. It is clear to see that the murderous, avaricious

⁴⁰ David Mitchell, *The Thousand Autumns of Jacob de Zoet* (London: Sceptre, 2010), 10.

⁴¹ Ibid., 358.

⁴² Ibid., 357.

Seaboard corporation is a purely predatory world, and in the words of Adam Ewing “a purely predatory world *shall* consume itself.”⁴³ Interesting to note here is the character of Milton, Hester Van Zandt’s bodyguard of sorts, who secretly shares information with Seaboard for money and Joe Napier, the almost retiree security guard of Seaboard, who betrays Seaboard, since his conscience does no longer allow him to support the corporation: they almost seem to mirror one another. This story is set against a background of corporate greed and environmentalism, while also showcasing the predacious, sexist way males sometimes encounter this story’s protagonist, Luisa Rey. The predacity in this part of the novel is quite straightforward and can be categorised for the most part as corporate oppression, e.g. when Bill Smoke is running Rey off a bridge with his car and corporate exploitation, e.g. when the scientists who designed the plant are blackmailed into silence.⁴⁴

Though “The Ghastly Ordeal of Timothy Cavendish” is mostly comical in tone, the story does contain some instances of predacity that could occur in nursing homes. The tyrannical sisters Noakes who run the nursing home are a good example of the form in which institutionalised corporate predacity would work, but the many references to age shows another Mitchellian predacity: that of death preying on the living, one of the few instances of predacity where most characters in Mitchell’s novels have no choice in the matter whether or not they adhere to it or not.

“The Orison of Sonmi~451” sketches a grim dystopian future where the ideology of capitalism has brought about a reign of a hypercapitalistic ‘corpocracy’, wherein there is no separation of government and corporations, but the corporations themselves rule. The shape this form of government takes is very totalitarian in nature: citizens are required by law to spend a specified amount of their capital depending on their income. To accommodate all these mandated expenses the government has created fabricants to use for menial labour.

⁴³ David Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas* (London: Sceptre, 2004), 528. (Original emphasis)

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 103.

Fabricants are clones created by the corpocracy to serve ‘pureblooded’ (sic) ‘consumers’. The fabricants come in stem types, hence Sonmi’s denomination as being of the type ‘Sonmi’ and being the 451st fabricant of this type, presumably. They are used as slaves in ‘Papa Song’s’, a fast-food restaurant reminiscent of McDonald’s, with its colour scheme of “reds and yellows”⁴⁵ and its “golden arches”⁴⁶. The fabricant servers of the restaurant are artificially subdued and ‘dumbed down’ by their main food supply, Soap. They make nineteen hour work days, have no vacation days and work for twelve years. They are promised ‘Xultation’, retirement in Hawaii. The Xultation turns out to be a lie; instead after twelve years of service, they are slaughtered like animals and manufactured into the very food they themselves consume, Soap, as well as the food they serve at Papa Song’s, completing its own perverted circle of life, from ‘wombtank’ to fabricant and back again, with every excess going to consumers who are better off financially, all for economic gain.

The Marxist nightmare of this story is amplified by the way it is told: the interview between the unnamed Archivist and Sonmi is again a way to show that the narrative itself is another layer of corporate predacity. Another way in which this becomes apparent is in the naming of the rebel organisation, Union. I believe this not to be just a literal rallying cry for abolition, but also a figurative play on words where corporate oppression can be opposed in the way of unions. In the end Sonmi states that she spotted the ploy perpetrated by the government: she is being used as a way to scapegoat fabricants as a whole since “it provides Nea So Copros with the enemy required by any hierarchical state for social cohesion.”⁴⁷ She defends her decision to go through with writing her *Declarations* by quoting Seneca’s warning to Nero: “No matter how many of us you kill, you will never kill your successor.”⁴⁸

⁴⁵ David Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas* (London: Sceptre, 2004), 195.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 209.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 364.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 365.

Economic Predacity

On the first page of *Cloud Atlas*, Dr Henry Goose explains to Adam Ewing that the very beach they are standing on was indeed a “cannibals’ banqueting hall,”⁴⁹ where the former is collecting human teeth for later sale to someone who uses these “human gnashers”⁵⁰ to fashion denture sets for the nobility. Thus the reader is acquainted with the novel’s first predator. This introduction reveals a great deal about Dr Henry Goose and foreshadows his actions later on in the book. It shows his avarice and his determination to obtain riches no matter the consequences. He describes his Machiavellian view on life perfectly himself, when he reveals his true identity to Adam: “’Tis absurdly simple. I need money & in your trunk, I am told, is an entire estate, so I have killed you for it. [...] The weak are meat, the strong do eat.”⁵¹ Most of Mitchell’s predators seem centred on this same principle, they wish to metaphorically, although sometimes literally, consume those they regard as inferior in order to selfishly gain something. Dr Henry Goose pretends he is a surgeon who befriends Ewing and, as rightly observed by the next stories’ protagonist, who also reads Adam’s diary: “he [Ewing] hasn’t spotted his trusty Doctor Henry Goose (*sic*) is a vampire, fuelling his hypochondria in order to poison him, slowly, for his money.”⁵² Goose tricks Adam into believing a Polynesian worm has taken nest in his brain, administering ‘medicine’ that will slowly kill Ewing, since Goose believes Ewing’s trunk contains considerable wealth. This Polynesian worm, a parasite, is another predacious metaphor for how Goose treats his patient, nestling deep inside his brain to try and live off the other’s life.

The primary predatory theme in *Cloud Atlas*’s second story is more parasitical in nature, rather than outright violent. Robert Frobisher, “Letters from Zedelghem”’s protagonist, can be considered a predator of sorts: at the start of the story he is skipping on

⁴⁹ David Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas* (London: Sceptre, 2004), 3.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid., 523-4.

⁵² Ibid., 64.

hotel bills and outrunning his debtors, who in turn prey on him. In an attempt to flee the people to whom he owes money, he decides to run off to Belgium and try and be amanuensis to Vyvyan Ayrs, a composer no longer composing because of his near blindness and his physical disability, due to what is later revealed are the consequences of syphilis. Frobisher compares himself to “[w]hiskered mandarin ducks honk[ing] for bread, exquisitely-tailored beggars – rather like myself”⁵³ and even admits that “I’ve [Frobisher] manipulated people for advancement, lust, or loans, but never for the roof over my head.”⁵⁴ His predacity can be categorised as economic exploitation, although after about sixteen days, Ayrs actually offers him a position as amanuensis as well as a small salary, making their relation less parasitic in nature. *Letters* sets out as Frobisher being the main predator in this story, especially when he starts to cuckold Ayrs by sleeping with his wife, but about halfway through, it becomes apparent that Ayrs himself has parasite-like qualities as well: he demands Frobisher write music for him, for which Ayrs wants to take credit. Ayrs blackmails him stating that if Frobisher leaves without his consent, he will ruin his reputation, claiming that he raped his wife, which cements Ayrs’s position as the evil predator in this story. What sets Ayrs apart from Frobisher, is that according to Frobisher, Ayrs is “hankering after immortality”⁵⁵ through his music, whereas Frobisher’s bleak view on the matter is that composers simply compose to pass the time. Just as other carnivores, the author imbues Ayrs with a craving for immortality through predacious means, since he would become famous by stealing something from someone else. This immortality seems to be the opposite of the way Frobisher wants to compose music: he wants to write music “because winter is eternal and because if one didn’t, the wolves and the blizzards would be at one’s throat all the sooner.”⁵⁶ This shows two different views on (im)mortality, the same as with the Anchorites and the Horologists, where

⁵³ David Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas* (London: Sceptre, 2004), 56.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 57.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 82.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

one actively pursues it by predating others and one has come to terms with his own mortality, like Marinus dying at the end of *Jacob de Zoet*, and lives on without predating others.

Just as “Adam Ewing” is set to the background of colonial times, which emphasise its predatory themes with scenes of “that casual brutality lighter races show the darker,”⁵⁷ “Letters” is set just after the atrocities of the First World War, which sometimes pokes its head to the foreground, such as when Frobisher visits a war cemetery in Zonnebeke in search of his brother’s grave, much like slavery or racism sometimes does in “Adam Ewing”. These themes bring with them an extra layer of predacity to the stories, especially since Belgium was the country that was predated by Germany during the Great War and where a considerable part of the fighting was done, aligning Frobisher, the protagonist, with Belgium, the place where “Letters” is set.

Jacob de Zoet contains a clear, historical example of economic predacity: the Dutch East India Company, where corruption runs rampant. At the beginning of the novel it seems that one man lies at the root of this corruption: Daniel Snitker, the former Chief of Dejima. However, soon the titular protagonist finds out there is rarely a soul on the artificial island that is not corrupt; either smuggling illegal goods or stealing items that belong to the East India Company. To De Zoet’s chagrin the new Chief Vorstenbosch also proves corrupt. This form of economic predacity is interesting: it seems like the opposite of corporate predacity, since instead of corporations exploiting its workers, the workers are exploiting the corporation, which is one of the factors that spell out the doom for the East India Company later on in the novel. Snitker proceeds as a turncoat for the English, showing that he is willing to forsake all ideals for profit, contrary to De Zoet. Just as *Cloud Atlas*’s Seaboard Corporation, the East India Company is another purely predatory microcosm that consumes itself, but instead of the corporation exploiting its workers, the workers rob the corporation blind.

⁵⁷ David Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas* (London: Sceptre, 2004), 31.

Because of the way Hugo Lamb in *The Bone Clocks* exploits his acquaintances for money and fame, he can also be considered an economic predator. The ways in which predators are dealt with in “Myrrh is Mine, Its Bitter Perfume”, which is focalised through Lamb’s character, seem to foreshadow the ways destiny deals with predacity in Mitchell’s universe: Hugo Lamb’s friend and literary critic Richard Cheeseman gives bad literature reviews and in turn is set up by author Crispin Hershey in a later chapter. The beautiful women his friends meet during New Year turn out too good to be true, and their pimps extort them for money later, somewhat similar to how the Anchorites’ offer seems too good to be true at first and comes with a price later on.⁵⁸ The now-demented brigadier whom Hugo is supposed to care for during his civics-class hours teaches him how to cheat at cards and how to fake passports and in turn, Hugo sells the brigadier’s hefty stamp collection. Even Hugo notes the simile: “When I look at Brigadier Reginald Philby, I’m looking down time’s telescope at myself.”⁵⁹ Most predators in *Bone Clocks* seem to encounter some form of karma sooner or later.

Cannibalistic Predacity

As mentioned in the paragraph about colonial predacity, the “Adam Ewing” seems to evoke *Robinson Crusoe*, as observed by Paul Ferguson.⁶⁰ The readers who are familiar with Defoe’s work are then right to also expect cannibalism further on in the story, as Mr D’Arnoq explains that “[o]n Waitangi Beach fifty Moriori were beheaded, fileted, wrapped in flax-leaves, then baked in a giant oven with yams & sweet-potatoes.”⁶¹ Astrid Bracke provides a great insight in how the Maori were able to kill and subsequently consume what could be

⁵⁸ David Mitchell, *The Bone Clocks* (London: Sceptre, 2014), 173-4.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 123.

⁶⁰ Paul Ferguson, “‘Me eatee him up’: Cannibal Appetites in *Cloud Atlas* and *Robinson Crusoe*,” *Green Letters: Studies in Ecocriticism* 19, no. 2 (2015): 149.

⁶¹ David Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas* (London: Sceptre, 2004), 15.

considered their own people. She argues that the Maori first needed to Other the Moriori and dehumanise them:

This Othering was achieved through slavery and colonization, and the manner in which they killed the Moriori and treated their corpses. As one survivor, quoted by Jared Diamond, recalls, “[The Maori] commenced to kill us like sheep” (53). [...] In other words, the Moriori were killed and prepared for food like animals.⁶²

Bracke notes the simile between the Othering done by Maori in “Adam Ewing” and the Othering by pureblood consumers in “Orison”. The difference between the two seems to be that the Maori first Othered the Moriori before consumption, whereas Nea So Copros is secretly already consuming its inferiors and is using Sonmi’s narrative as a way to condone it further down the line.

The clearest example of predacity in *Jacob de Zoet* comes in the form of cannibalistic predacity at the hand of Lord Abbot Enomoto of the Mount Shiranui Shrine. The nuns he recruited by buying them off of their families are routinely raped by the Abbot’s monks, although the sisters themselves talk about being ‘Engifted’. After their children are born, the monks forge letters and pretend the babies have descended the mountain and live normal lives, whereas in actuality they are consumed by the Lord Abbot. The mountain shrine secretly harbours what is referred to in *The Bone Clocks* as a “pre-Shinto psychodecanter”,⁶³ a device that can turn human lives into “Oil of Souls”,⁶⁴ which can subsequently be “imbibed”⁶⁵ to stave off mortality. This process is almost identical to that in *The Bone Clocks*, although the process is explained more clearly in *The Bone Clocks*. When Ogawa Uzaemon confronts the Lord Abbot about his practice’s morality, the Lord Abbot defends this practice by comparing it to Adam Smith’s early ideas of capitalism:

⁶² A.A.L. Bracke, “Ecocriticism and the Contemporary British Novel,” (PhD dissertation, Radboud University, 2012), 142.

⁶³ David Mitchell, *The Bone Clocks* (London: Sceptre, 2014), 477.

⁶⁴ David Mitchell, *The Thousand Autumns of Jacob de Zoet* (London: Sceptre, 2010), 511.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 350.

Survival is Nature's law, and my Order holds - or, better, is - the secret of surviving mortality. Newborn infants are a messy requisite - after the first two weeks of life, the enmeshed soul can't be extracted - and a fifty-strong Order needs a constant supply for its own use, and to purchase the favours of an elite few. Your Adam Smith would understand. Without the Order, moreover, the Gifts wouldn't exist in the first place. They are an ingredient we manufacture.⁶⁶

As has become clear by the examples of corporate predacity, Mitchell draws many predacious similes with the ideas of capitalism. Enomoto consuming the life force of new-born infants in order to stay alive for “more than six hundred years”,⁶⁷ marks him for being the most apparent predator in *Jacob de Zoet*. However, the fact that he does so by preying on women who are all disfigured in some way, which decreased their standing in Japanese society at the time, while stating that he does so in order to purchase favours and mentioning Adam Smith makes for a dark metaphor Mitchell seems to apply about capitalism in our current age.

Although *The Bone Clocks* does not contain the same amount of predacity *Cloud Atlas* does, due to its six chapters and leaps in time, both books resemble each other much more than *The Thousand Autumns of Jacob de Zoet* does. The first clear predator that crosses the reader's path is called Rhîmes, an Anchorite. Holly Sikes, who's life the entire novel is centred around, encounters him as a teenager when he murders two people. This sparks some exposition about the war that has been going on for centuries between so-called Horologists and Anchorites. Both factions consist of ‘*atemporals*’, immortal beings, although their manner of attaining immortality is very different. Horologists can either be ‘*Returnees*’ or ‘*Sojourners*’; “Returnees die, go to the Dusk, are resurrected forty-nine days later. Sojourners [...] just move on to a new body when the old one's worn out.”⁶⁸ Anchorites are mortal but

⁶⁶ David Mitchell, *The Thousand Autumns of Jacob de Zoet* (London: Sceptre, 2010), 350.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ David Mitchell, *The Bone Clocks* (London: Sceptre, 2014), 475.

stave off immortality through what Mitchell calls “a Faustian pact.”⁶⁹ They lure and murder ‘*engifted*’ people, “who show evidence of psychosoteric voltage or an active chakra-eye,” in order to ‘*decant*’ their souls into Black Wine “and for a season – three months or so – no cellular subdivision occurs in their bodies.”⁷⁰ This means that Horologists are immortal in what can be considered a natural, harm free way, whereas the Anchorites are similar to vampires in a way, leeching life from others to unnaturally prolong their own. At the end of the fifth chapter, which is entirely written from the point of view of an Horologist, the Chapel of the Blind Cathar, the headquarters of the Anchorites, is destroyed.

At the end of *The Bone Clocks* Mitchell shows the reader one form of predacity I decided not to include as a separate form: the predacity of human vs. nature. In Mitchell’s universe, in the year 2043, Holly mourns the way humans have interacted with the Earth, preyed on natural resources and animals, without giving back:

It’s grief for the regions we deadlanded, the ice caps we melted, the Gulf Stream we redirected, the rivers we drained, the coasts we flooded, the lakes we choked with crap, the seas we killed, the species we drove to extinction, the pollinators we wiped out, the oil we squandered, the drugs we rendered impotent, the comforting liars we voted into office – all so we didn’t have to change our cosy lifestyles.⁷¹

Mitchell seems to conclude in his predacity-filled books that most humans themselves are also merciless predators by standing idly by while human-induced climate change is destroying the planet.

⁶⁹ David Mitchell, interview by Claire Armitstead, *The Guardian Books Podcast* (26 September 2014): <https://www.theguardian.com/books/audio/2014/sep/26/david-mitchell-bone-clocks-podcast>.

⁷⁰ David Mitchell, *The Bone Clocks* (London: Sceptre, 2014), 448-9.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 549-50.

Chapter 2: Metamodernist Predacity

In this chapter the examples of predacity provided in chapter one will be used to illustrate how the way they are explored contributes to the way David Mitchell can be considered a metamodernist author. The examples will be used in the same order they appear in chapter one.

The first example mentioned under tribal predacity regards the Maori-Mori Mori relations. Examples using some form of archetypal good vs. evil dichotomy seem to be prevalent in Mitchell's writing, the clearest among them being the comparison between the Anchorites and the Horologists. The way both groups are framed – one harmless, pacific, and fewer in number, one aggressive, carnivorous, and oppressive – paints an archetypal picture of good vs. evil. The inclusion of this archetype within Mitchell's fiction seems to stem from a place of moral didacticism. Readers are shown an evil side to display what not to do or how not to act and are shown a good side to display what virtues they should value and how to act in a manner that is ethical.

Cloud Atlas can be considered a postmodernist novel in many ways: Nick Bentley notes that *Cloud Atlas* ticks many boxes for it to be called postmodern, such as the fragmented form of the interrupted novellas, its use of multiple narratives and complex models of identity and characterisation.⁷² But, as Bentley also suggests, Mitchell moves beyond postmodernist scepticism and identifies the potential for reconstruction, rather than postmodernist deconstruction.⁷³ He is a novelist who continues to use narrative techniques associated with postmodernism, but has reintroduced a set of grounded ethical positions.⁷⁴ This becomes clear with the examples provided above about moral didacticism. Hélène Machinal also mentions

⁷² Nick Bentley, "Trailing Postmodernism: David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas*, Zadie Smith's *NW*, and the Metamodern," *English Studies* 99, no. 7 (2018): 723.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Nick Bentley, Nick Hubble, and Leigh Wilson, "Introduction: Fiction of the 2000s," in *The 2000s: A Decade of Contemporary British Fiction*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 17.

that Mitchell's writing is rooted in postmodernity "but that it also transcends it by introducing a philosophical dimension that goes beyond the individual level to a more collective one."⁷⁵

On the basis of these arguments, as well as the observations made in the previous chapter and the way metamodernism is defined in the introduction, this makes a strong case for calling David Mitchell a metamodernist author.

At the beginning of *Cloud Atlas* Adam Ewing starts out as an anti-abolitionist and Mitchell could have opted to keep it that way. Instead, however, Ewing decides to join the abolitionist movement and at the very end of the novel imagines debating his father-in-law, who holds the opinion that Adam's abolitionist activism would amount to more than one drop in a limitless ocean. Ewing's answer evokes a feeling of hope: "Yet what is any ocean but a multitude of drops?"⁷⁶ By acknowledging the naïveté of modernist enthusiasm for social change, yet the knowingness that slavery is amoral, this imagined exchange of Adam's empathy and his father-in-law's apathy at the end of *Cloud Atlas* perfectly encompass Vermeulen and Van den Akker's definition of metamodernism.⁷⁷

The dichotomy between the Valleysmen and the Kona in "Sloosha's Crossin'" is similar to that of the Moriori and the Maori respectively. And although the reader does not find out the fate of the Kona tribe, Mitchell again seems hopeful for humanity's future since Zachry's offspring survived the Kona slaughter, since Zachry's child is still alive after Zachry's death.⁷⁸

The predacity of corporations in the novels remind the reader that "a purely predatory world *shall* consume itself."⁷⁹ In "Half Lives" the Seaboard corporation poses a danger to the environment, but luckily the evil oil corporation behind it all is stopped in time, which is

⁷⁵ Hélène Machinal, "Cloud Atlas: From Postmodernity to the Posthuman," in *David Mitchell: Critical Essays*, edited by Sarah Dillon, (Canterbury: Gylphi Limited, 2011): 129.

⁷⁶ David Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas* (London: Sceptre, 2004), 529.

⁷⁷ Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker, "Notes on Metamodernism," *Journal of Aesthetics and Culture* 2, no. 1 (2010): 6.

⁷⁸ David Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas* (London: Sceptre, 2004), 324-5.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 528. (Original emphasis)

reminiscent of the way Mitchell seems to advocate against climate change when speaking of the ‘deadlands’ in both “Orison” and at the end of *Bone Clocks*. The corruption within the East India Company proves destructive at the end, given it is one of the reasons for its downfall. The unwavering integrity of De Zoet during his Chiefship and more specifically the siege of Dejima, during which he loses his hat, which in turn reminds captain Panhaligon of his red-haired son and makes him decide to stop the siege, could also prove an example of metamodernist writing: the scene paints the irony of Panhaligon firing cannons at someone reminiscent of his son, yet leaves the reader hopeful when Jacob’s life is spared. Especially “Orison” and Enomoto’s mention of Adam Smith seem to highlight the dangers of the predacity of capitalism, which coincides with Vermeulen and Van den Akker’s belief that postmodern problems have led to metamodernist tendencies and seem to “have necessitated a reform of the economic system.”⁸⁰

The karmic ways in which predacity is punished in *Bone Clocks* are prime examples of Mitchell showcasing that his universe works by a metamodernist set of grounded ethical rules. This is perhaps best shown at the end of “An Horologist’s Labyrinth” when the Chapel of the Anchorites is destroyed, with most of the Anchorites dying as well. The cannibalism by the Anchorites, the Maori, Enomoto or the consumers in “Orison” can perhaps also be interpreted in a way that promotes vegetarianism, since the way the Earth is presented in “Orison” and *Bone Clocks*’s final chapter “Sheep’s Head” shows what devastating effects humans have on the environment and what a possible future could look like.

The predacity of archetypal good vs. evil dichotomies Mitchell uses in his novels supports the claims that his writing seems to adhere to metamodernist writing rather than postmodernist writing. The way his novels are infused with reconstructive hope, rather than nihilist pessimism, also underlines this argument.

⁸⁰ Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker, “Notes on Metamodernism,” *Journal of Aesthetics and Culture* 2, no. 1 (2010): 4.

Conclusion

This thesis set out to answer the question “how does the exploration of the theme of predacity contribute to the perceived metamodernism of David Mitchell’s *Cloud Atlas*, *The Thousand Autumns of Jacob de Zoet*, and *The Bone Clocks*?”. The introduction provided background knowledge on David Mitchell, his *oeuvre*, deeper insight on the three novels the thesis is based upon, and described the theory and methodology of predacity and metamodernism as well. Chapter one, the bulk of this thesis, detailed a close reading of predacity in the aforementioned novels, with the focus on how it is explored within Mitchell’s writing. Chapter two analysed the way predacity was explored and concluded that a strong case can be made that Mitchell’s writing is indeed metamodernist.

To summarise the arguments, Mitchell tends to portray two archetypal good vs. evil factions with antithetical philosophies – one pacifist, one predatory – and uses both to teach his readers ethical morality through moral didacticism. There are multiple ways one can identify Mitchell as a postmodernist author, but this set of grounded ethical rules that is included in all the novels treated in this thesis, make that his work can be established as metamodernist. The list of seemingly paradoxical markers of metamodernism as described by Vermeulen and Van den Akker can also be identified within Mitchell’s novels.

The theory and method used could both be labelled somewhat problematic, since the theory of predacity was based upon a single article and expanded upon by me. The method of close reading that formed the root for this theory however, was conventional and therefore fairly safe. The theory and method of metamodernism were easier to implement, since there was more literature available, but also sometimes proved problematic, since not every literary scholar refers to the developments in contemporary literature as metamodernism or observes these developments in exactly the same way. Not even all the scholars mentioned in the theory and methodology sections saw eye to eye to its exact definitions. However, it is also

very exciting to be contributing to the scholarly debate in this way and weighing in on what metamodernism entails exactly based upon all the sources read.

Scholarly objects that can and should be researched in the future are the more precise calibrating of metamodernism as well as viewing different contemporary authors or artists of any other medium, through its yet to be definitively determined lens, as well as the ever-expanding *oeuvre* of David Mitchell, with his newest novel, *Utopia Avenue*, set to be published on July 14th 2020. Since some groundwork has been laid for Mitchell's use of predacity in his novels, this is something that can be expanded upon by looking at other novels by his hand, his entire work, or it could be utilised to research whether other authors explore predacity in their novels in a similar way, metamodernist or not.

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