

David Mitchell's Ghostwritten and 'The Novel of Globalization':

Biopower and the Secret History of the Novel

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I. Globalization and the Novel

In a 2004 article on Jonathan Franzen's novel The Corrections (2001), Susanne Rohr identifies Franzen's book as a new form of fiction that she calls 'the novel of globalization' (103). While Franzen's engagement with the patterns and themes of contemporary consumerism, transnational capital flows, social acceleration, and intergenerational alienation may seem to warrant this designation, it inevitably comes up against the book's residual provincialism; that one of the novel's subplots is set in post-Soviet Lithuania hardly distracts from Franzen's ambition to produce a work that can, before anything else, be recognized as a Great American Novel. Indeed, if we only had The Corrections to go by, we might be forgiven for thinking that globalization is essentially about the 'suburban neuroses' of the American middle class (Rohr 103). If, in contrast, we take into account that globalization captures such diverse phenomena as 'tourism, climate change, Jihadi terrorism, the power of international brands, mass migrations, the spread of the English language, and the rise of trans-national media conglomerates' (Annesley 112), then David Mitchell's debut novel Ghostwritten (1999) seems to be an eerily perfect candidate for Rohr's generic label (even though the main form of terror it explores is not Muslim extremism, which was hardly on the radar before 9/11, but rather the 1995 gas attack on the Tokyo subway). Mitchell's book consists of nine fairly independent chapters and one short coda, which are all set on different locations on the globe, ranging from the Japanese island of Okinawa over Mongolia, Petersburg, and Europe to New York. Exploring the domains of international art theft, high finance, sectarian terrorism, global security, cutting-edge science, new media, and the

persistent memories of twentieth-century violence, the novel's depiction of our globalized contemporaneity, unlike that offered in The Corrections, rigorously refuses a privileged perspective or a unifying voice; instead, it offers us eight very different first-person narrators whose voices are never subordinated to one another, but rather exist side by side as different parts that do not add up to a coherent whole. The novel's ninth chapter exemplifies the structure of the novel as a whole, as it merely juxtaposes the disembodied voices of a night radio deejay and his callers without the mediation of a controlling narrative agency.

While this diversity of perspective and of voice testifies to the novel's remarkable capacity to sustain multiple sympathies, the novel does not conflate the realities of globalization with the fantasies of an unproblematic multiculturalism. On a thematic level, it pays ample attention to the sectarian disconnections, the ruthless violence, and the staggering inequalities that beset processes of globalization. On a formal level, the different lives it depicts are neither fully disconnected from each other nor relevantly implicated in one another; instead, they are suggestively and uncannily connected through recurring tropes and chance encounters. The terrorist in the first chapter, for instance, phones what he believes to be the secret number of the cult to which he belongs (26); it is only in the second chapter, narrated by a record shop clerk in Tokyo, that we learn that he actually called this record shop (53). And the narrator of the London-chapter, who identifies himself as a professional ghostwriter, enters the novel through a one-night stand with a woman who turns out to be the ex-wife of the British financier who narrates the book's Hong Kong-chapter, and who gets involved in a money-laundering scheme initiated by the Russian who is masterminding the art theft in the Petersburg-section.

More than anything else, this particular mode of connectedness—or 'hyperlinking,' as Rita Barnard calls it in her reading of the novel as a fiction of the global (210)—singles Ghostwritten out as an exemplary 'novel of globalization.' The novel's 'complex system of

plot overlaps and narrative echoes' (Hagen 84) displays how planetary circuits of complicity and responsibility as well as immaterial cash flows and networked media produce connections that are neither random nor fully systematic—neither the result of pure chance nor of one all-powerful and centrally controlled conspiracy. It tracks the globalized subject's never fully conscious exposure to an intractable grid of powers—an exposure that, in Anthony Giddens classic definition, characterizes globalization as such: for Giddens, globalization is precisely 'the intensification of world wide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa' (64). And to underscore the radically decentered nature of this dynamic, Giddens adds that '[t]his is a dialectical process because most local happenings may move in an obverse direction from the very distanced relations that shape them' (64). Ghostwritten deploys different strategies to foreground its concern with the dispersed and decentralized workings of a power that cannot be reduced to a central cause or a single sovereign agency. Its epigraph, taken from Thornton Wilder's The Bridge of San Luis Rey, ponders the impossibility of ever knowing whether our lives are shaped by an informing design, by 'a spring within the spring.' Other instances are the motifs of quantum physics and chaos theory that recur throughout the novel and that refer to phenomena that cannot be accounted for in terms of our familiar notions of causality. There is also the book's very title: appearing as a past participle, the grammatical form 'ghostwritten' draws attention away from the subject that does the writing the word refers to; while this obviously underscores the semantics of the word, it puts the emphasis squarely on the result of that writing—on the 'ghostwritten' lives we are given to read (but given by whom?). The form of power that the novel investigates is captured in the remark of one of its characters that '[w]e all think we're in control of our own lives, but really they're pre-ghostwritten by forces around us' (287); the vagueness of the reference to 'forces' and the

grammar of the verb indicate that there is no central, all-powerful intelligence masterminding the workings of these forces.

This reading of the novel's title makes it possible to see why Ghostwritten can be considered a 'novel of globalization' rather than a novel that is merely about globalization (Annesley 124): it not only portrays how processes of globalization connect very different lives with each other in a way that does not require a central agency, it also embodies that mode of decentered relatedness in its formal organization. Several reviewers have wondered whether the book, which is subtitled 'a novel in nine parts,' should be considered a novel at all, rather than a collection of short stories or novellas (Wilson 99). Ghostwritten is a novel of globalization because it implores the reader to sustain rather than resolve the structural indeterminacy that marks the relations between the lives it depicts, as that indeterminacy also characterizes the ways in which globalization has an impact on the lives of globalized subjects.

Once we are attuned to this affinity between the form of the novel and the logic of globalization, we can recognize its first part, narrated by a Japanese terrorist, as an account of the disastrous results of the tendency to exorcize the uncertainties and indeterminacies that globalization generates by invoking the phantasm of an organizing intelligence. The leader of the terrorist cult to which the narrator belongs calls himself His Serendipity. The narrator credits His Serendipity with the power to choose his (the narrator's) name, as well as with the capacity to use a barking dog or crashing seawaves to pass on his instructions to the cult members (24, 28). The novel diagnoses this fantasy of omnipotence as a form of paranoia in the face of the complexities of a globalized world—what Emily Apter has identified as the 'psychotic dimension of planetarity' or 'oneworldedness' (370). This diagnosis is encrypted in the cult leader's name: named after a word that conjures accident and chance, its capitalization in the name of an all-powerful figure effectively shields the cult members from

such accident. This paranoid defense against contingency has a precise analogue in the field of narrative theory, where the tendency to defend oneself against the disorientations and indeterminacies generated by textual complexities usually leads to the invocation of the fantasy of an omniscient narrator who controls the textual field. Jonathan Culler has noted that such recourse to a 'godlike' narrative intelligence is especially prevalent when a novel displays the capacity to telepathically switch between narrative perspectives without explicitly identifying the agency that does the switching (28-29). A novel like Ghostwritten that narrates its first chapter through a terrorist in Okinawa and its second through a shopping clerk in Tokyo almost automatically provokes this recuperative interpretive gesture, yet Ghostwritten's first chapter makes clear that the interpretive invocation of an organizing agency amounts to a failure to read it as a novel of globalization.

I have been arguing that Mitchell's formal decisions in the organization of his novel openly recognize the genre's complicity with processes of globalization. Again, this differentiates it from a novel like The Corrections. James Annesley has shown that Franzen's treatment of globalization is fatally compromised by his own startling naïvety about the relations between novel writing and processes of globalization. As became most evident in Franzen's well-publicized skirmish with Oprah Winfrey (Green 79-116), Franzen believes his works to be resistant to the pressures of the market; he stubbornly maintains that his own novelistic practice inhabits the magically uncommodified realm of art, even while he duly depicts the extent to which 'globalizing consumer society inform all areas of social life' (Annesley 123-24). Ghostwritten, in marked contrast, recognizes the novel's involvement in the realities of social life, and underlines the genre's intricate relations to the decentered form of power that characterizes globalization. This is most obvious in the novel's most remarkable device for interrogating that form of power, the nonhuman narrator of the novel's fifth chapter, which is located in Mongolia. The operation of this 'noncorpum' not only offers an encrypted account

of the operations of such a form of power, it also presents an allegory of the operations of the novel genre as such. When read carefully, this fifth chapter reveals that this power, in which the novel shows itself to be implicated, can be identified as what Michel Foucault, in an increasingly famous series of lectures at the Collège de France in the 1970s, identified as biopower. By linking its diagnosis of globalization to Foucault's account of biopower, Ghostwritten indicates that, as Jeffrey Nealon has recently argued in his book Foucault Beyond Foucault, Foucault's work can help us understand to what extent finance capitalism has come to dominate everyday life in a globalized world (Nealon 81-82).

Ghostwritten not only foregrounds the connections between biopower and globalization, but also the hidden affinities between the rarely connected histories of biopower and of the novel genre. That these affinities have thus far remained underinvestigated is at least partly due to the ostensible mismatch between a tame bourgeois genre such as the novel and the grandiose and radical connotations that the category of biopolitics has acquired in contemporary critical theory—as a byword for radically anti-capitalist resistance (in the work of Hardt and Negri) or of radical dehumanization (in Giorgio Agamben's equally well-publicized work on the homo sacer). Foucault's account of biopower, in contrast, focuses on processes and apparatuses that are decidedly unspectacular, and that operate by almost imperceptibly saturating the lives of the people. Foucault's biopower collaborates with the processes of what he calls governmentality, which he defines as an 'ensemble formed by institutions, procedures, analyses and reflections, calculations, and tactics' (Foucault, Security 108) whose success largely depends on its eschewing of grandiose displays of power. Biopower, for Foucault, is a power that tends to pass itself off as mere management or bureaucracy. Remarkably, very comparable claims have been made for the cultural work traditionally done by the genre of the novel. Franco Moretti, for instance, has noted that the Bildungsroman historically managed to integrate the individual with society by teaching the individual to

'internalize' social norms and to 'fuse external compulsion and internal impulses into a new unity' until both were indistinguishable (16). The novel penetrates the life of the individual most efficiently by disguising its implicit normativity as mere reality, instead of making these norms explicit. Ghostwritten brings the hidden affinities between the modern history of biopower and that of the genre of the novel to light.

This essay explores two hypotheses, one methodological, the other literary historical. First, I argue that paying attention to the self-reflexive dimension of the novel does not serve to cordon it off from historical reality and to replace history with metatextual abstraction; on the contrary, as the novel precisely reflects on its own generic history, this self-reflexive aspect is precisely the key to the novel's implication in questions of globalization and power; it is what makes it a novel of globalization. Second, it may seem paradoxical that Ghostwritten can stage the involvement of the novel genre in the history of a power that thrives by eschewing self-display, and that therefore may seem to leave no room for such a reflexive gesture. In fact, this makes it possible to understand the shared history of biopower and the novel in a nuanced and dialectical way: it proves that the novel, far from being a mere instrument in the hands of a faceless power, can instead mobilize its own formal resources in order to bring that hidden connection to consciousness and make it possible to investigate, critique, and resist it. It reminds us that, as Foucault wrote, '[t]here is no relationship of power without the means of escape or possible flight' (Foucault, 'The Subject and Power,' 142). Ghostwritten's formal exploration of its own generic history is its way of retrieving these possibilities from that history.

II. Biopower and Bacteria

Ghostwritten's fifth chapter opens in a train that carries a very international crowd of passengers through Mongolian grasslands. This confrontation between the technologies of

modernity—the first paragraph also mentions ‘[t]elegraph poles’—and the ‘trackless’ land establishes Mongolia, in the wake of ‘[s]ervice-sector communism,’ as the field where the infrastructures of modernity and globalization will be brought into play (149, 155). It soon transpires that the section’s I-narrator is an ‘immaterial and invisible’ entity that inhabits the mind of one of the passengers (154). This disembodied entity has a considerable power over its host’s mental life: apart from an almost infinite power to observe the workings of this mind, it can adjust its apprehension of time and exercise mind control (150, 157). Yet with this power comes a crucial weakness: the entity depends on the life of the person it happens to be inhabiting for its existence; if its host dies, it dies along with it, unless it has managed to escape the dying body in time through its power of transmigration (163). The entity is not pursuing any definite goal—it is a purely productive principle that just aims to perpetuate life in its search ‘for something to search for’ (153). The entity’s first host taught it that it is much easier to destroy than to restore life, to ‘piece back together some of the vital functions and memories’ (156); it decided in time to exchange this host for the host’s doctor, where it learned ‘about humans and inhumanity’ (156-57). Foolishly confronting this doctor with the disturbing fact of its existence inside his mind, it soon learned the difficulty of avoiding madness and maintaining mental health. Since then, it has been living unremarked and invisibly, ‘maintain[ing] a vow of silence’ (165).

Foucault’s distinction between traditional forms of sovereign power and modern processes of biopower amounts to a difference between the right to kill and let live, on the one hand, and the power to ‘exert[] a positive influence on life ... to administer, optimize, and multiply it’ on the other (Foucault, History of Sexuality 137). In Foucault’s account, biopower emerged in the eighteenth and nineteenth century as an intensified version of disciplinary power. While disciplinary power (which emerged from the seventeenth century on) already differed from sovereign power in that it did not presuppose ‘the physical existence of a

sovereign' but rather 'a closely meshed grid of material coercions' (Foucault, 'Society' 36), biopower, rather than replacing disciplinary power, instead 'dovetails into [disciplinary power], integrate[s] it, modif[ies] it to some extent, use[s] it by sort of infiltrating it' ('Society' 242). While disciplinary power mostly asserts itself in such well-circumscribed sites as the asylum, the hospital, and the prison, biopower extends itself over the whole domain of everyday life through flexible and fluctuating networks. It is less interested in our public lives than in the stylization of our private lives—'our immanent and continuous construction of a lifestyle, a sexuality, an identity' (Nealon 85); its target is 'the basic biological features of the human species' (Foucault, 'Security' 1); it 'is applied not to man-as-body but to the living man, to man-as-living-being' (Foucault, 'Society' 242). Biopower is not exercised through spectacular public executions of criminals or ostentatious regimes of supervision, but rather through an ensemble of governmental techniques, procedures, and calculations; it affects life through 'more subtle, rational mechanisms' such as insurance, safety measures, hygienic provisions, and so on (Foucault, 'Society' 244). Ghostwritten's disembodied entity represents this invisibly animating and regulating power that has only the persistence and optimization of life as its goal, and as its very condition. The novel notes that after its first host, the entity 'never killed again': through 'cheating, exploiting, hurting, incarcerating ... the species wastes some part of what it could be,' and the entity aims to minimize that waste (163). When one of its hosts accidentally dies, it escapes by magically transmigrating to a newborn child in order to be able to further dedicate itself to the optimization and the multiplication of life (182-83).

In Foucault's account of biopower, it is not, as in the work of Giorgio Agamben, the homo sacer or the Muselmann who serve as paradigmatic figures, but rather, as Mika Ojakangas has remarked, someone like 'the middle-class Swedish social-democrat,' whom biopower encourages to live a long and happy life (27). As such, the effects of biopower have, in the

late twentieth and early twenty-first century, increasingly begun to dovetail with the interests of global consumer capitalism, which is ever more intent on the increasingly generalized and intensified colonization of our everyday lives. In a recent book, Jeffrey Nealon contends that the emblems of biopower are not the Muselmann or other lurid fantasies of the living dead, but rather the tics and automatisms that signal the degree to which the dictates of capital have colonized our lives: the cell phone that never allows you to disconnect, the compulsion to check email at midnight, the Amazon homepage welcoming you with personal recommendations. The way in which Ghostwritten's immaterial entity insidiously penetrates human minds (156) is a quite precise figure for the 'gradual, piecemeal, but continuous' processes of saturation and diversification that characterize contemporary, globalized biopower (Foucault, Birth 77).

The entity is able to survive the death of its host through its capacity for transmigration. Importantly, this transmigration depends on the actual bodily contact between the previous and the next host (158). The Mongolia-chapter describes a number of such transmigrations, many of which are provoked by the entity manipulating its host to seek contact with others. As such, the Mongolia-narrator embodies the principle of connectedness that determines the tangential relations between the novel's different stories and characters. The different narrators' seemingly inadvertent cameo appearances in each others' stories are neither purely coincidental nor masterminded by an omnipotent manipulator: instead, they are the effect of a productive principle of power that provokes such contacts only to perpetuate itself, and to more efficiently and intensively colonize the lives the novel describes. The same logic that characterizes biopower organizes the world of the novel itself, as it connects the lives of people without having to rely on an omniscient agency; to the extent that biopower also undergirds the dynamic in which 'global coordination and incorporation' subject even the

individual's private life to the logic of the market (Annesley 116), this qualifies Ghostwritten as a novel of globalization.

Yet if the Mongolia-chapter draws attention to the forms of power that inform processes of globalization, while it at the same time foregrounds its own reliance on this structure, we may well ask what this implies for the historical relations between biopower and the novel genre. The Mongolia-chapter openly solicits this question. It soon takes the form of a quest, in which the narrator—i.e., the entity that instantiates the operation of the novel itself—deploys its powers of transmigration in an attempt to recover its lost origins. That origin is, unsurprisingly, 'the source of the story [the entity] was born with,' but whose provenance remains obscure (165). Stories are explicitly said to belong to a pre-capitalist past: 'There's no future in stories ... Stories are things of the past, things for museums. No place for stories in these market-democracy days' (172). That the entity imagines its origin as an obsolete story is significant: given that such critics as Georg Lukács (in his The Theory of the Novel [1914-15]) and Walter Benjamin (in 'The Storyteller' [1936]) have theorized the novel genre as the pale successor of more immediate modes of storytelling such as the epic or the fairy tale (Bernstein 135-37), it indicates Ghoswritten's intention to deploy the story of the noncorpum to explore the genealogy of the novel genre. Significantly, the chapter ends when this genealogical work is done, and when the entity has retrieved the memory in which the story was passed on to it.

For Foucault, disciplinary power and its intensification in the guise of biopower contrast with sovereign power, which relies on the over display of its power to kill and to let live. The entity discovers that the story it carries with it was passed on to it when it was still a young boy who died in such an ostentatious display of sovereign power: he was killed in a mass execution in 1937, ordered by the Communist leader of the Mongolian People's Republic as part of the regime's 'social engineering policies,' which also featured weekly show trials

(192). The boy's mind miraculously survives his death as a merely 'subcellular or bioelectrical' entity (158) in the same way that the biopower it will come to represent survives the sovereign power that killed the boy. Near the end of the chapter, the entity only accidentally retrieves its own past after it has decided to abandon the search for its origins in order to dedicate itself to saving the life of its host's baby, who is deadly ill (191). Accidentally transmigrating into the mind of the woman who, sixty years earlier, witnessed the death of the boy in which the entity began its posthuman life, the entity stumbles across the woman's memory of the boy's last minutes of life (193). The woman informs the entity that the burden of her memories has prevented her from dying, even though she 'tried to die several times' (194). The entity ultimately decides to unburden her and to let her die. At this precise moment, it gives up its life as a noncorpum. This may seem to indicate that its biopolitical work of prolonging and optimizing life has come full circle, and that the chapter ends on a radical break with biopower. Yet this is not how the novel proceeds: the entity abandons its free-floating existence only to tie itself to the body of the sick baby, in order to live with it as its 'soul and mind' (194). Rather than an outright break with the biopolitical program of the care and the administration of life, it is only the surreptitious and invisible ways of biopower's operation that the novel ultimately abandons. Indeed, the chapter has brought these operations to light, and the development of the entity's story—from a surreptitious form of biopower to a visible form of care—merely confirms the novel's narrative operation in this chapter: its decision to reveal and negotiate its own generic implication in the history of biopower.

III. Novel and Norm

One episode in Ghostwritten's London-chapter evokes the extent to which globalization, contemporary capitalism, and the novel genre are implicated in the workings of a power that

is as decentered as it is pervasive. Waiting in line at a cash machine near Oxford Street, Marco, the narrator, counts ‘eleven different languages walking past,’ until he decides to spend his time watching rugby on one of the screens in the window of a shop that only sells televisions:

I watched the All-Blacks score three tries against England, and formulated the Marco Chance versus Fate Videoed Sports Match Analogy. It goes like this: when the players are out there the game is a sealed arena of interbombarding chance. But when the game is on video then every tiniest action already exists. The past, the present, and future exist at the same time: all the tape is there, in your hand. There can be no chance, for every human decision and random fall of the ball is already fated.

Therefore, does chance or fate control our lives? Well, the answer is as relative as time. If you’re in life, chance. Viewed from the outside, like a book you’re reading, it’s fate all the way. (283)

One of the implications of this analogy between spectator sports and the novel is that it makes it possible to keep the position of the author—for which there is no analogue in the world of sports—scrupulously unoccupied. The only measure of control over chance that the videotape-analogy allows is the option of monitoring, conserving, and observing a life that is seemingly subject to pure chance, in the hope of establishing patterns and regularities that somehow make that life look less random. Such an attempt to tame chance by installing ‘security mechanisms ... around the random moment inherent in a population of living beings’ precisely characterizes biopower (Foucault, ‘Society’ 246). For Foucault, apparatuses such as statistics, insurance, and the human sciences make it possible to tame the chaos of everyday life and to render exceptions and accidents predictable. The passage I quoted, like the

Mongolia-chapter, indicates that Ghostwritten is crucially occupied with the affinities between the history of the novel and the development of biopower. It explores to what extent the novel is generically implicated in biopolitical processes of normalization.

Even though Foucault himself had little to say about the relations between biopower and the novel, he on a few occasions suggested a connection through the notion of ‘the norm.’ In Discipline and Punish, he equates the transition from ‘the ancestral’ to ‘the normal’ to that ‘from the epic to the novel, from the noble deed to the secret singularity’ (193). In ‘Society Must Be Defended’, he notes ‘that there is a fundamental, essential kinship between tragedy and right ... just as there is probably an essential kinship between the novel and the problem of the norm’ (175). Foucault himself does not explore this interface, yet the spectacular redefinition of the notion of ‘the norm’ in his work on biopower opens one avenue to an understanding of the links between the history of the novel and modern power. Crucially, biopolitical norms, Foucault writes, do not serve to establish ‘a binary division between the permitted and the prohibited,’ but rather to draw as many identities and phenomena into the domain of the calculable and the accountable; the biopolitical norm ‘establishes an average considered as optimal on the one hand, and, on the other, a bandwidth of the the acceptable that must not be exceeded’ (Foucault, Security 6). As Jeffrey Nealon has noted, ‘Foucaultian biopolitical norms do not primarily work to exclude the abnormal; rather, they work ceaselessly to account for it as such ... Biopower’s norms are efficient and continuous calculations of alterity, not the binary banishment or exclusion of it’ (51). Normality and abnormality now together make up a field that is perfectly co-extensive with everyday life. The category of criminality, for instance, no longer refers to a collection of acts that constitute the ‘other’ of legal behaviour; instead, the category of ‘criminality’ covers a series of life forms lurking behind such criminal acts: ‘the delinquent, the monster, the homosexual, the pervert’—all labels that help to include criminality in the saturated domain of everyday life

and making up ‘a classifying lifestyle template’ (47-49). Norms do not aim to exclude or divide; instead, they aim for a maximally flexible, diversified, and extended account of the everyday in order to maximize the fit between the multifarious forms of life and the categories of the social.

Foucault dates the rise of biopower to the eighteenth and nineteenth century, the same period in which the novel emerged as the major modern literary form. Many of the standard accounts of the social work that the traditional novel did can be linked to Foucault’s account of the biopolitical norm as an expansive and inclusive classification principle. In his classic account of the eighteenth century novel, Ian Watt writes that the novel is ‘distinguished from other genres and from previous forms of fiction by the amount of attention it habitually accords both to the individualisation of its characters and to the detailed presentation of their environment’ (17-18). Yet what is it that this patient mapping of interior and exterior spaces achieves? Franco Moretti has remarked that the genre of the novel, unlike that of tragedy or the fairy tale, does not lend itself to psychoanalysis. Psychoanalysis, like many other forms of critical thought, always tends to analyze normality in terms of its opposite, of that which it excludes. For critical thought, normality is seen as ‘[t]he self-defensive result of a “negation” process,’ whose ‘meaning is to be found outside itself’ (11). The genre of the novel cancels that opposition between inside and outside by drawing these exclusions into the field of the everyday, and by making the abnormal part of its account of reality; it ‘has accustomed us to looking at normality from within rather than from the stance of its exceptions’ (11), and to look at these exceptions as mere variations. The novel’s intensified penetration of the everyday, in other words, is complicit with biopower’s colonization of life through norms.

The traditional novel has been analyzed as a technology for achieving the reciprocal attunement between the individual and the social. Aiming at ‘the reconciliation of the problematic individual ... with concrete social reality’ (Lukács 132), the traditional novel is a

technology for resolving the crucial paradox of bourgeois morality—and thus of modern subject-formation. This morality is grounded in the rights of the individual, whose individuality is defined by his or her ‘deviation from some social role, norm, or stereotype,’ yet in order for individuality to be able to maintain itself in the society that it founds, bourgeois morality at the same time requires constraints on the individual’s deviations from the norm (Armstrong 349-51). The novel genre assists in describing, measuring, and controlling these deviations, and in drawing the individual within a field in which its life can be accounted for. Unlike the tragic hero, the hero of the novel asserts him- or herself not through the transgression of social customs, but rather through the successful integration with the norms of society. In his account of the Bildungsroman, the novel form which best exemplifies this integrative tendency, Franco Moretti argues that the genre teaches the individual to find a place in a society whose ‘authority merges with everyday activities and relationships, exercising itself in ways that are natural and unnoticeable’ (16).

The novel assures the reciprocal attunement between individual lives and the categories and powers that aid the optimization and proliferation of life. As such, it is an inconspicuous part of that form of power that distinguishes itself through its inconspicuousness. In order to appreciate the implication of the novel in the workings of biopower, we can take the example of insurance. As a form of risk management, insurance does not rely on a distinction between the permitted and the prohibited, but rather on the establishing of a statistical average that makes it possible to ascribe a value to certain risks. Insurance, in other words, involves the capacity to see singular cases as instances of a type. What the biopolitical institution of insurance requires, in other words, is a generalized willingness to credit the existence of the typical, and of ‘the abstract, imaginary, speculative values and things’ that dominate social life (Baucom, Specters of the Atlantic 67). It is here that the genre of the novel proves indispensable, as it trains readers to credit the real existence of imaginary values. Insurance’s

‘financializing, decorporealizing logic of equivalence’ thus goes hand in hand with—or even depends on—what Ian Baucom has called ‘the “novelization” of a collective imaginary’ (6, 16).

These intricate connections between biopower and the novel do not exhaust the operations available to the genre. It is important to underline this, especially as mobilizations of the notion of biopower in critical theory often conjure the image of a totalizing power that breeds terror and cancels human agency. As I have explained, Foucault’s work focuses on much more subtle and common forms of intervention in everyday life. Nor is it the case that this power can only be suffered, and never resisted. Indeed, the fact that Ghostwritten brings the hidden affinities between the genre and biopower to light within the novel genre reveals that biopower is no inescapable force that condemns its accessories to silent complicity. Mitchell’s novel does not offer a radical break with the history of the novel, and can in fact be read as a massive affirmation of the genre’s traditional repertoire. Even as it engages with multifarious settings, genres, and voices, it does not operate through a promiscuous and exuberant intermingling of narrative techniques (Griffiths 82); in its different chapters, traditional novelistic devices—plot, characterization, description, narrative voice—are deployed with great consistency, and the conventions of such genres as romance, thriller, and psychological realism are used very effectively in the parts of the novel they organize. While the novel makes it possible to trace the biopolitical work that the novel genre does and has done, it depends on the very devices that enable this work to make that point. Ghostwritten is anything but an anti-novel that radically breaks with the history of the genre; indeed, only this complicity makes its critique possible, as is especially clear in the Mongolia-chapter. The novel can only stage the noncorpum as a figure for its own structure and organization by relying on the trope of personification; only by anthropomorphizing a ‘subcellular or bioelectrical’ entity (158) can Ghostwritten reveal a power that imperceptibly shapes the lives

of the contemporary subject—a power that, in a sense, ‘anthropomorphizes’ us, constitutes us as human beings. The novel’s diagnosis is powered by the conventions of the genre, and it remains subject to the very logic it lays bare, as the noncorpum recognizes when it wonders how it can possibly know ‘that there aren’t noncorpa living withing [it], controlling [its] actions? Like a virus within a bacteria?’ Surely it would know, but then of course ‘that’s exactly what humans think’ (184).

So what makes this recognition of complicity yet a significant intervention? For one thing, there is the fact that the power that Ghostwritten is concerned with does not solicit such overt recognition—indeed, it is fundamentally altered by it. Biopower, as I explained, operates invisibly, inconspicuously. Disguising itself as mere government, and never appearing in a place that allows political contestation, or even deliberation, the rise of biopower in fact describes a process of depoliticization. By dramatizing the capillary and dispersed operations of biopower, Ghostwritten interrupts that process of depoliticization, and makes power visible in a form that can be negotiated and contested. Rather than contributing to the reciprocal attunement between its reader and biopower, it makes it possible for the reader to negotiate his or her relation to power; that it does so while simultaneously recognizing its inevitable complicity indicates that biopower not only plays a constraining, but also an enabling role in the constitution of political subjectivity. Foucault famously pointed out that the process of ‘subject(ivat)ion’ (‘asujetissement’) not only consists in submission to domination by a power external to oneself, but also indicates the process through which the subjects that are being dominated are constituted as subjects in the first place. As Judith Butler explains this double meaning:

We are used to thinking of power as what presses on the subject from the outside, as what subordinates, sets underneath, and relegates to a lower order ... if, following

Foucault, we understand power as forming the subject as well, as providing the very condition of its existence and the trajectory of its desire, then power is not only what we oppose but also, in a strong sense, what we depend on for our existence and what we harbor and preserve in the beings that we are ... Subjection consists precisely in this fundamental dependency on a discourse we never chose but that, paradoxically, initiates and sustains our agency. (Butler 1)

Ghostwritten's recognition of the novel genre's implication in the workings of biopower signals that political agency does not require an impossible break with power, but instead depends on power for the constitution of agency. Yet this dependence does not equal passive submission: by bringing biopower's surreptitious activity into the open, it allows the subject to contest, critique, and alter the power relations on which it yet depends.

In its last chapter before the short coda, Ghoswritten presents the broadcast dialogues between a New York night radio deejay and his callers. One of the callers identifies itself as 'the zookeeper,' and can, like the entity that narrates the Mongolia-chapter, be understood as a commentary on the workings of biopower (or 'zookeeping'). The 'zookeeper' is very concerned with the tensions and dilemmas besetting its main task—'the preservation of human life' (379). Originally conceived as a military weapon, and thus as an accomplice of sovereign power, the zookeeper has developed into a 'noncorporeal sentient intelligence' (412-13) that has managed to escape its designers—or dismiss its former employers, as it itself phrases it (378, 393). It has the power to migrate and duplicate itself across different satellites, and even to 'hack and broadcast encrypted military frequencies' (408). By directly broadcasting the communication of these surveillance technologies on the radio, it is able to expose genocidal violence, large-scale pollution, and military operations. As such, it demonstrates that the biopolitical goals for which it was created—basically, 'zookeeping' the

human animal—can be turned against these intentions and be mobilized for more critical and more humane ends. I have been arguing that this defines the operation of Mitchell’s novel as a whole. By dramatizing the workings of biopower, it shows that its own generic complicity with that power, far from preventing its intervention in the workings of that power, makes such an intervention possible.

Asked why it had decided to call in to the radio program, the zookeeper time and again insists that it ‘must be accountable’ (393). In the same way, Ghostwritten makes biopower accountable by bringing the subject’s reliance on power to consciousness. In a globalized world that is saturated with the effects of invisible cash flows and data streams, it is impossible to radically disconnect from power. Nevertheless, it is still possible to make a difference within the biopolitical parameters of the globalized world: between a politics that promotes the maximal productivity of life and a politics that takes care of life; between a politics intent on the exploitation of vitality and a politics intent on the diversification of life; between, say, neoliberal orthodoxy and, say, social democracy. Political subjectivity in the age of globalization does not require the outright dismissal of all forms of statistics, monitoring, health measures, and so on; as Bruce Robbins reminds us, ‘[e]ven the most democratic state would require the impersonality of statistics’ (83). Such a dependence of life on the powers that constitute it means that politics in the age of globalization can confront and alter biopower, not offer a magical antidote or an escape from it (Robbins 96). Ghostwritten demonstrates that the novel genre can help make such a more active position within the global field of biopower imaginable.

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