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論大衛·米切爾《雲圖》中的多重體裁：
超越敘事準則

Multiple Genres in David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas*:
Beyond the Narratological Norm

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Multiple Genres in David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas*:

Beyond the Narratological Norm

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To my parents





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國立政治大學英國語文學系碩士班

碩士論文提要

論文名稱：論大衛·米切爾《雲圖》中的多重體裁：超越敘事準則

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論文提要內容：

本論文旨在探討大衛·米切爾 (David Mitchell) 的小說《雲圖》中的體裁，其敘事結構上的多元性。大衛·米切爾於《雲圖》中敘述六個故事，採用六個體裁，利用將故事中斷的展開方式連結多個故事角色的生命故事。故事角色們來自不同身份、性別、國家、時代背景，且角色間並無直接接觸，卻藉由觀看接收，觸動了角色間的連結，推動故事進行。由於此小說敘事結構上的多重複雜性，綜觀過去批評家的評論從不同論點出發試圖歸類此小說的複雜的敘事結構，因難用單一種學說將其定義，而使得《雲圖》在體裁的歸類上尚未出現一致的共識。《雲圖》結構上有著許多後設元素，卻仍存在著無法單以後設小說解釋的觀點。而本論文試圖基於此觀點，加入浸入式劇場 (Immersive Theater) 的角度，用以解釋結構上中斷帶來讀者選擇的效果、角色們於不同故事中位置的變動，以及貫穿於整本小說中的主題性。此論點的加入，得以解釋《雲圖》中多重文本的設置、文本敘事中斷進而提供讀者的選擇權、以及主要角色身兼說話者與觀看者的特性，冀提供讀者在《雲圖》結構的多元性有新的詮釋視角。

關鍵字：大衛·米切爾、《雲圖》、體裁、浸入式劇場、劇場的、變動的位置、多樣性、結構



Abstract

This thesis explores the narratological structure in David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas*. The novel is divided into six individual stories, each told in a different generic mode and each focusing on a different protagonist; these six protagonists come from different countries and social backgrounds, hold different religious or political beliefs, and have very different life stories. Each protagonist develops a connection to the previous story's protagonist by interacting with a specific item such as a journal, a film, music, etc. featured in the preceding story. By absorbing information from these items, the protagonists connect to one and another, and each story becomes an essential movement in the broader storyline. Critics have analyzed *Cloud Atlas* from various perspectives, but the novel's generic multiplicity makes defining it as a part of a specific genre difficult. Indeed, critics have not reached a consensus about the novel's genre. Even though *Cloud Atlas* has some metafictional elements, it contains other characteristics that do not fit this classification. Based on this point, this thesis adopts a theatrical angle and points out the similarities between *Cloud Atlas*' structure and that of immersive theater to explain how the interruptive narration enables readers to choose their preferred reading sequence, places the protagonists in mutable positions that allow them to function as both speakers and spectators, and facilitates thematic consistency throughout these six distinct stories. In utilizing this theatrical angle to examine the structure of *Cloud Atlas*, this thesis elucidates the effect of interruptive narration, the transfer of authorship to readers, and the protagonists' mutable positions in the novel, thereby providing readers a new way of understanding the narratological structure in *Cloud Atlas*.

Keywords: David Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, genre, Immersive theater, theatrical, mutable position, multiplicity, structure



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Chapter One

Introduction

In 2004, David Mitchell, an English author and screenwriter, published *Cloud Atlas*, which won two prominent awards: the British Book Awards for Literary Fiction (2005) and the Richard and Judy Book Best Read of the Best Book Year Award (2005). *Cloud Atlas* is composed of six stories, told by six different narrators, which span six different time periods, six different countries, and seven different continents. Furthermore, the novel divides each of the six stories into two main sections: the first half and the second half. Mitchell organizes each of the six narratives in such a way that the first half of each story continues the previous story's second half in recursive order. The recursive nature of *Cloud Atlas*'s organization could also be represented thus: $1^1 2^1 3^1 4^1 5^1 6^1 6^2 5^2 4^2 3^2 2^2 1^2$. Each of the six narratives involves diverse—and complex—issues, such as human nature, racism, imperialism, and religion. Additionally, Mitchell gives each story its own title and distinguishes each by employing different genre forms. As Justine Jordan's review states, *Cloud Atlas* is “a remarkable book . . . [that] knits together science fiction, political thriller and historical pastiche with musical virtuosity and linguistic exuberance” (Jordan, “Preview 2004: Fiction”). Because of its unique structure, *Cloud Atlas* has garnered book awards and, in 2012, it was adapted for a film of the same name (directed by Lana Wachowski, Lilly Wachowski, and Tom Tykwer).

Indeed, *Cloud Atlas*'s structure is non-linear and complex, which leads to the film adaptation receiving both negative and positive reviews: “The main criticisms

leveled against the film related to the handling of the narrative and the approach to casting and performance, but the same areas also generated the most positive accolades” (Donna Peberdy 170). Like the novel, the film’s narration also consists of six separate movements that comprise one story. Such a dynamic and complex narrative structure, in both the novel form and the film adaption, catches the audience’s attention; if one attempts to ascertain what Mitchell is trying to convey in his work, then one must consider why Mitchell uses such a postmodern narrative pattern.

Cloud Atlas’s narrative structure seems to test readers’ patience. For example, the novel provides no table of contents, but does offer title pages at the beginning of each half-story. Each half-story means that each story is divided into two sections, which only unfold a half story. As John Mullan explains: “With these six narratives nested one inside another, there are ten jumps between genres” (Mullan). On the one hand, the novel’s structure disrupts readers’ attention; on the other hand, its organization seems to heighten readers’ curiosity for discovering clues about the connection among six stories, which are strewn among the novel’s diverse, shorter narratives. On this fine point, Aaron Francis Schneeberger notes that “*Cloud Atlas*’s matryoshka doll structure . . . abruptly breaks each story mid-section, and sometimes mid-sentence, only to complete these narratives in reverse order as the novel concludes” (544). Mitchell’s use of this “matryoshka doll structure,” as Schneeberger describes it, to obstruct the reader’s comprehension while simultaneously intensifying his or her curiosity.

Furthermore, *Cloud Atlas*’s contribution to the postmodern literary project is clear. David Mitchell claims that he was inspired to write *Cloud Atlas* by the

postmodern work of Italo Calvino (Brown 79). Calvino's novel, *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler*, inspired Mitchell to "write a novel whose narratives would be returned to, and completed in reverse order" (Mitchell, "Guardian Book Club"). However, many critics consider *Cloud Atlas* as a piece of metafiction because it entails multiple digressions and is interspersed with numerous independent narratives. Nonetheless, there is not yet a consensus among critics about the novel's genre. John Mullan notes that *Cloud Atlas* is a "multi-genre novel," (Mullan) while Kevin Brown claims that the novel is "postmodern" because it "breaks traditional narratives structure" (78). Nick Bentley, however, points out that "several critics have suggested that Mitchell's work gestures beyond the postmodern" (8). Such a lack of critical consensus clearly indicates that, either way, *Cloud Atlas*'s genre hybridity makes it difficult to classify.

Mitchell stresses the story's completeness and the connection among multiple stories, which is different from postmodern novels. As Kevin Brown says, "Mitchell uses metafiction and intertextuality differently from those who have come before him, using such devices as a way of forcing the reader to consider the importance of narrative in one's life and the world, in general" (78). Although Mitchell is inspired by Calvino's *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler*, he does not leave each story remain unfinished—thus disqualifying it, as I argue, as purely a work of metafiction. Instead, Mitchell emphasizes the completeness of a structure and thus organizes the novel with a mirror-like structure that seems to distinguish the work from metafiction. To further this line of argument, Kevin Brown argues that Mitchell stresses "the power of narration" (78), and that Mitchell connects each narrative with the others, through to the final story. Notably, Mitchell also writes the novel's first story as an object such

as prose, music, and letters that then appear in the next story. For example, the character Robert Frobisher (who narrates the second story) reads a half-book written by the character Adam Ewing (who narrates the first story). Additionally, the second story's epistolary narratives then become letters in the third story and are read by the character Luisa Rey (who narrates the third story), and so on. To pull off such narrative complexity well, Mitchell uses multiple forms of media, such as books, music, letters, and even a movie, to connect the relationships among characters throughout the novel's independent stories. In fact, Mitchell uses "such devices as a way of forcing the reader to consider the importance of narrative in one's life and in the world" (Brown 77). These diverse forms of media thus remind readers of details from the novel's previous stories; doing so creates continuity among the six stories, thus constituting one cohesive novel.

Cloud Atlas retains elements of metafiction, yet is also "bigger" than the genre boundaries imposed by metafiction. According to Patricia Waugh, metafictional techniques highlight the fictionality of a text and remind readers to notice a text's fictional nature:

Metafiction is a term given to fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality. In providing a critique of their own methods of construction, such writings not only examine the fundamental structures of narrative fiction, they also explore the possible fictionality of the world outside the literary fictional text. (2)

David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas* is a novel that involves many metafictional elements: it is constituted of six independent (yet intertwined) stories, employs the technique of

interruptive narration, combines multiple stories into one novel, and more. However, Mitchell does not intentionally emphasize the fictionality of his novel; instead, he engages with nonfictional topics, such as the outbreak of violence among the Maori, the Moriori, and the crew of the HMS *Chatham*. Mitchell also raises issues of cloning and technological development and engages with apocalyptic themes. Mitchell seems to have an interest in conveying these ideas to his readers, which may explain why *Cloud Atlas*'s structure also has some key differences from a purely metafictional work. If one were to define this novel as purely a piece of metafiction (which, by definition, stresses a text's fictionality), such a definition might distract readers' attention away from Mitchell's emphasis on these social topics and their messages.

The novel is, indeed, subtly different from metafiction, and this thesis argues that employing the methodology of immersive theater brings clarity to two crucial points: the optional reading pattern offered to the reader and the recurring theme among all six stories. As a result, my analysis challenges the often accepted definition of this novel as merely a piece of metafiction; as such, my analysis thus fills a critical gap in the critical literature on *Cloud Atlas*. First, as I have already argued, the novel's organization is comparable to $1^1 2^1 3^1 4^1 5^1 6^1 6^2 5^2 4^2 3^2 2^2 1^2$, a formulation that represents the novel's fragmentary sections (which often impedes the reader's comprehension). However, readers can also choose the order in which they read *Cloud Atlas*. For example, one could read the novel by following its original organization. Another might read each complete story from the first to the sixth and the other could begin with the sixth story and then read loop around to the first story. This freedom given to the reader seems to be by design because Mitchell completes the last part of each story with a unity of the structure and organizes the novel by

using fragmentary sections of inserting a title page before beginning of a story without listing chapter numbers.

A second way *Cloud Atlas* is subtly different from metafiction is its thematic coherence: each story is united with its other counterparts through the consistent theme of predation. By the shifting role among narrators and the shifting form of stories, these techniques, which are different from the narratological norm, bring about that predatory behavior might not just happen in this novel but also happen around society.

In addition to its recursive structure, *Cloud Atlas*'s complex storyline also emphasizes reader participation by offering the reader freedom to explore the story in his or her own way. As such, I examine *Cloud Atlas*'s narrative structure and its genre variation. Furthermore, I utilize the viewer's perspective of the story's structure through the methodological lens of the immersive theater experience. Thus, this thesis expands the criticism of *Cloud Atlas* to include a new theoretical angle, that of exploring *Cloud Atlas*'s varied genre attributes based on an understanding of metafiction and immersive theater. This methodological approach does not restrict *Cloud Atlas* merely to the field of prose fiction, but expands critical engagement with *Cloud Atlas* to explore the dramatic (and theatrical) elements nascent in the novel. By employing the theoretical angle of the immersive theater experience and on defining *Cloud Atlas* as a form of metafiction, this thesis explores two narrative elements of the novel: first, the optional reading pattern and, second, the recurring theme of predation among all the individual stories that constitute *Cloud Atlas*.

Literature Review

Cloud Atlas has the capacity to explore many socio-political issues because it has

six different stories of thematic coherence bound together in one book; despite its coherence, however, the novel also relies on narrative ambivalence. Notably, Casey Shoop and Dermot Ryan analyze “the presence of Big History in *Cloud Atlas*,” indicating that “the importance and critical resonance of *Cloud Atlas* lies precisely in the timeliness of this structuring ambivalence” (93). The notion of “structuring ambivalence” is imperative to understanding *Cloud Atlas*; Kevin Brown argues that, when postmodern novelists focus on metafiction, they often emphasize “a fiction not to be mistaken for fact” (78). In contrast, as Brown argues, Mitchell emphasizes the connection between reality and fiction: “While Mitchell might raise a concern about the relationship of fiction to reality, he ultimately comes down clearly on the side of the power of narrative, unlike many postmodern authors who were uncomfortable” (78). To further this point, Bentley quotes O’Donnell’s to explain Mitchell’s writing styles: “With its mixture of genres, voices, and styles, fluctuating between recognizably traditional narrative modes and those more visibly reflexive and contemporary, Mitchell’s fictions resists easy classification, yet it bears some of the traces of the ‘metamodern’”(9). Some critics agree that *Cloud Atlas* is metafiction, yet others argue that *Cloud Atlas* is not merely metafiction but is composed of a multiplicity of genres.

The structure of *Cloud Atlas* is similar to the play-within-a-play or the story-within-a-story technique. In “Finding Stories to Tell: Metafiction and Narrative in David Mitchell’s *Cloud Atlas*,” Brown indicates that “whenever [*Cloud Atlas*]the novel’s structure is discussed . . . many critics point out “the story-within-story structure” (77). Notably, all six storylines in *Cloud Atlas* are the main storyline to constitute into a book. There is not a clear distinction to differentiate these stories as

the primary storyline or the secondary plot. When exploring the-story-within-story technique, one must maintain a distinctive boundary between the novel's primary storyline and its secondary plot. Additionally, the secondary plot might not influence the primary one, nor might the-story-within-a-story interrupt the primary plot.

Although *Cloud Atlas* is constituted of six stories, no singular story itself functions as either a secondary plot or as a story-within-a-story. As such, readers can focus on different issues, even while reading the same novel. If *Cloud Atlas*'s structure had employed the story-within-a-story technique, it would be difficult to explain why time functions chronologically from the first through the sixth stories.

Some of the nascent dramatic elements of the novel are found in the way each section of the novel (which are not identified in a table of contents) is similar to scenes in play. When readers are reading *Cloud Atlas*, they are akin to the audience who need to build up each detailed information into a complete plotline. For example, in play, multiple incidents are interspersed throughout the actors' demonstration, and each act and scene reveals only limited information to the audience. Thus, the audience must exert effort and gather information by putting details together while watching a play unfold in a series of different, yet connected, scenes. *Cloud Atlas* leverages a similar structural technique in that its plot unfolds gradually, one half-chapter at a time, beginning with the first story and followed by the next five. Because a reader, reading *Cloud Atlas*, is not bound to follow the novel's chapters in order, some may opt for Mitchell's original chapter organization. Other readers, however, may prefer reading each entire story from the first one to the sixth one continuously, while still others could read the novel by beginning with the sixth story and ending with the first one. Either way, the critical point is that Mitchell creates an open-ended

experience for readers, which they can choose, and thus have a unique reading experience. Notably, something akin to an open-viewing experience can occur in the immersive theater as well: the audience can decide how to watch a play on its own once an audience member has entered the immersive theater.

Unlike postmodern novel that emphasize a work's fictionality, Mitchell's metafictional techniques reinforce the relationship between fiction and reality and, most notably, do so by way of incomplete—yet connected—chapters. *Cloud Atlas* unifies its individual stories by interrupting each story at the midway point and then picking the narrative back up in the next story. For Mitchell to achieve such narrative completeness by way of interruption is unusual. Here, I argue that if one were to experience the novel's incomplete chapters as part of a theatrical setting, then one might more easily understand *Cloud Atlas*'s structure; this is what I mean when arguing that *Cloud Atlas* has nascent dramatic elements.

Methodology

In this thesis, I will analyze and identify nascent elements of theatricality within the novel, without denying the framework of prose fiction in *Cloud Atlas*. Given the framework of fiction, *Cloud Atlas*'s appearance on the literary scene is a unique writing style concerning the definition of the novel. This thesis, therefore, examines *Cloud Atlas*'s in the context of immersive work as a way to understand the novel's structure and the organization of its chapters.

First, I argue that the novel's skillfully constructed structure and the open-ended reading pattern show equal distribution of power between the story itself and the reader. That is, unlike a reader-response analysis, which emphasizes the reader's experience, my analysis stresses narrative and thematic elements and the reader's

choice to engage in an optional reading pattern based on the novel's fixed framework that readers cannot alter the development of plot but they could decide how to read.

Mitchell creates coherence among the novel's six stories by inserting a specific object in one story that is then carried over into the next. However, the connection emerges not because of the object itself, but actually from the character engaging with that object. Central to my point is that these characters perform an action, such as reading, watching a film, or believing in a goddess, and that such actions make the characters take on the role of a reader (or, in some cases, the role of a listener) in the story itself. Most importantly, a representative object also influences the narrator. This forms the foundational point on which I found my argument: that these stories are not utilizing the story-within-a-story technique, but rather, characters, within stories, constitute a series of incidents and actions that necessarily influence the events within the next story. These stories create a movement, or a series of actions, rather than being embedded stories within one dominant plotline or stories-within-stories. Furthermore, such a technique shares elements of theatricality: when David Ball refers to a play's movements, he explains that "An event is anything that happens. When one event causes or permits another event, the two events together comprise an action. Actions are a play's primary building blocks" (11). Because the characters in each story perform actions that "absorb" his or her own story, characters' action move the entire storyline forward. However, the protagonists of this novel behave as both speakers and as listeners. Such scenarios are also foundational in the immersive theater experience when actors assume both a performer and a spectator role.

Recently, as the emergence of immersive theater experience, directors demonstrate the styles of the immersive theater are multiple. Immersive theatre encourage the audience, as an observer, to roam around in the theater to watch scenes that they are interested in. The audience could decide their preferred order to watch. Nandita Dinesh says that “immersive theatre is a hard-define genre, as Josephine Machon has indicated, ‘because it is not one’” (21). As the pioneer of immersive theater, Punchdrunk (a theatre company) dedicated itself to creating a place in which individual audience members could choose how they wanted to experience a play. Felix Barrett, the founder of Punchdrunk, says that “no two audience members within the space have the same shoe and every evening the experience you’ve has is yours and yours alone” (Barrett). With the development of immersive theater, an increasing number of genre forms emerges in immersive theater because, as Jason Warren notes, the three styles of ‘current forms’ of immersive theater follow according to the degree in which the audience can alter the plot’s development. For example, as in the case of Punchdrunk, there is a space designed within the theater that the audience “is free to explore” (6). The audience can walk around the physical space of the theater without influencing the unfolding plot of the play. On the other hand, the audience’s reaction influences the plot’s development, which is what Warren calls ‘Guided Experience’. The movement of that plotline requires strong audience participation. Warren explains that : “the audience is integral: the piece cannot take place without at least one audience member present” (6). It depends on the director’s intent, and on what way the director wants the audience to become immersed in the play. Some directors encourage an audience to watch a play many times so that any one part of a performance does not repeat; yet others encourage the audience to roam throughout

the theater so that performances in each space can repeat continuously until the play's end.

An actor in an immersive theater is similar to a narrator in *Cloud Atlas*. Each performs both as a narrator/performer and as a listener/spectator. In this thesis, by applying my analysis alongside immersive theater, I show that *Cloud Atlas*'s multiple stories cohere into one overarching narrative. In the end, *Cloud Atlas*'s complex structure draws readers' attention to their actual reading experience using a kind of "free pattern" based on a designed framework that is similarly employed in the immersive theater experience.

Organization of the Chapters

Besides the introduction, this thesis consists of three body chapters, which are followed by the conclusion. In Chapter Two, I briefly summarize the novel's six stories and lay out the chronological order from the first story to the sixth story. Then I analyze *Cloud Atlas*'s structure as one that combines six inter-dependent stories into one cohesive novel. Chapter Two also examines the interruptions that divide each of the six stories into half-sections, which also provides an open-reading pattern for readers. Finally, I argue that such a structure provides a similar experience as the "viewing-experience" in an immersive theater setting.

Chapter Three expands the ideas associated with the immersive theater experience and focuses on how each story's structure, which is based on a division into two parts, extends a potential new framework for readers to choose their own reading pattern. Then, by analyzing the similarities between the viewing experience in an immersive theater and the structure of *Cloud Atlas*, I examine the ways in which such a structure helps one grasp the potential purpose behind the series of

interruptions, as well as examining the reader's power to choose his or her own reading experience.

Chapter Four focuses on the interrelationship of the narrators of each of the six stories and explores the novel's recurring themes. Then, I connect the similarities between the position of narrators in *Cloud Atlas* and that of the actor's position in immersive theater. The narrator's attitude of behaving as both a speaker and a listener might provide readers with a new angle from which to analyze the meaning of the narrator's shifting position, which is determined by each narrator's actions, such as reading or playing music. It implies that the reader could also influence his or her society by reading (or listening to others) and narrating their own story as well, whether reading this novel or other books. Readers themselves are also 'speakers' and 'listeners' and can productively share their beliefs in society, which is valuable for the community because every person has the power to influence others.

In Conclusion, I demonstrate that in this thesis I have examined *Cloud Atlas* alongside the norms of theatrical narration. That is, I include methodological aspects of the immersive theater experience as a way to provide a new methodological angle for analyzing *Cloud Atlas*. This thesis tries to fill a deficiency I perceive in the critical literature of *Cloud Atlas*, which tends to categorize *Cloud Atlas* as constituted of multiple genres instead of one specific genre. Thus, this study thus seeks to provide readers with another perspective with which to understand *Cloud Atlas*'s structure and meaning, by utilizing theatrical narratology.



Chapter Two

The Intertwined and Plotlines in *Cloud Atlas*

Without understanding the narrative, we often feel we don't understand what we see. We cannot find the meaning. Meaning and narrative understanding are very closely connected . . .

— Horace Porter Abbott, *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative*

The complex structure in *Cloud Atlas* breaks the narratological framework of fiction in that it seems there are six independent stories but they connected with each other. As Kevin Brown argues, Mitchell “begins with the narrative technique from Calvino, but shifts the focus from the technique itself to raise broader questions” (79). In *Cloud Atlas*, Mitchell portrays six protagonists who come from different countries and social backgrounds, hold different religious or political beliefs, and have very different life stories. Furthermore, six short stories has six genres: autobiography, the epistolary novel, mystery, memoir, the dialogue, and the oral narrative (see Table 1).

Table 1
The Structure of *Cloud Atlas*

	Sequence	The Title of Story	Genre
The First Halves	The 1st	“The Pacific Journal of Adam Ewing”	Diary
	The 2nd	“Letters from Zedelghem”	Epistle
	The 3rd	“Half-Lives: The First Luisa Rey Mystery”	Mystery Novel
	The 4th	“The Ghastly Ordeal of Timothy Cavendish”	Memoir
	The 5th	“An Orison of Sonmi-451”	Dialogue
	The 6th	“Sloosha’s Crossin’ an’ Ev’rythin’ After”	Oral Narrative

The Second Halves	The 6th	“Sloosha’s Crossin’ an’ Ev’rythin’ After”	Oral Narrative
	The 5th	“An Orison of Sonmi-451”	Dialogue
	The 4th	“The Ghastly Ordeal of Timothy Cavendish”	Memoir
	The 3rd	“Half-Lives: The First Luisa Rey Mystery”	Mystery Novel
	The 2nd	“Letters from Zedelghem”	Epistle
	The 1st	“The Pacific Journal of Adam Ewing”	Diary

Source: Wei-Han Hsu.

However, despite the genre diversity, Mitchell coheres each story with the others by using specific symbols, such as birthmarks. In each story, for example, there is a character who functions either as the story’s a narrator or as a significant character that has a birthmark. Will McMorran agrees, stating that “the comet-shaped birthmark offers a symbol for the connectivity that binds together and transcends the individual stories to make of the novel a unified whole” (297). Moreover, each narrator has a connection with the previous story’s narrator; this connection is demonstrated by the current narrator interacting with specific items from the previous story, such as a journal or a novel. Such narrative attributes indicate that each of the six stories is not wholly independent of the others. Thus, *Cloud Atlas* is not a collection of short stories. As McMorran argues: “the birthmark is the author’s signature—a sign of the author’s hand, and a sign that the novel is a novel, rather than a collection of short stories” (297).

Yet Mitchell does intentionally divide each of the six short stories into two sections: a first and second half. Furthermore, Mitchell seems to base this division on merging six stories together into a novel. *Cloud Atlas* opens with the first half from the first to the sixth story and then continues with the second half from the sixth stories to the first one. Such a technique demands that we explore the following questions: Why does Mitchell choose to create a series of interdependent short stories

rather than just one story with one consistent narrator? And why does Mitchell decide to divide each of the six stories into two parts rather than unfold six stories without interruption? When readers encounter this novel, these questions may likely emerge. The novel is thus unusual because it utilizes such a challenging organizational structure and utilizes six different genres. To discuss the function such a unique narrative structure serves, we must first grasp what theme Mitchell most wants to convey to readers.

In this chapter, I argue that the structuring device in *Cloud Atlas* is particularly relevant to immersive theater, which holds similar assumptions about providing spectators an open-viewing experience based on a fixed framework. First, I explain the message Mitchell conveys and why he uses a non-linear organization. This, in turn, naturally leads to the notion of immersion and helps explain the novel's narratological technique. Finally, I will analyze why examining this novel from the angle of immersive theater provides a more comprehensive understanding of the novel's meaning than an approach based on defining the novel merely as a piece of metafiction.

Metafiction

In "Finding Stories to Tell: Metafiction and Narrative in David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas*," Kevin Brown argues that "What Mitchell is trying to do through his metafiction is similar to those postmodernists in that he wants to force the reader to question his or her reality, using the story-within-a-story technique to explore the next level outside the story, which is the reader's reality" (80). Brown's notion strikes me as apt, namely that Mitchell emphasizes what this novel could inspire in readers regarding remodeling a piece of details in the storyline. When the partial stories

interrupt the reading process, the function of that is similar to the function of metafiction, in order to emphasize fictionality, distracts readers' reading. However, if Mitchell had used the story-within-a-story technique in *Cloud Atlas*, then regarding numerous stories as the story-within-a-story technique would overlook the serious problem posed by the chronological movement within and among the six stories. When encountering the story-within-a-story technique, readers often easily differentiate between the main plotline and that of the story embedded within the primary narrative. Also, the story-within-a-story technique would not function in such a way as to interrupt the process of reading. Finally, I argue that Mitchell uses six inter-related stories to enrich the theme of predation in *Cloud Atlas*.

Why does Mitchell delineate six stories rather than one story in *Cloud Atlas*?

In *The Paris Review*, the writer and interviewer Adam Begley notes that “cannibalism features prominently in *Cloud Atlas*” (186). In the interview, Mitchell replies to Begley’s comment, saying that “one of my serial-repeating themes is predacity—and cannibalism is an ancient and primal manifestation of predacity” (186). In *Cloud Atlas*, the timeline of the stories is chronological and the six stories are set in different countries, such as England, Belgium, South Korea, etc. The structure that Mitchell employs productively represents predation everywhere and anytime: by intentionally setting the stories in six different time periods and in six or seven places, Mitchell thus enriches his theme of predation. I state that Mitchell chooses to delineate six stories in one novel is to explore the diverse dimensions of the theme present in this novel that: predation happens in every human society and in all time periods.

Furthermore, each of the six stories presents different levels of predation. In fact,

the relationship between perpetrator and victim is not necessarily a binary opposition. As Mitchell said in his interview with Begley, “An innocent antelope got ripped to shreds-but what about poor Mrs. Cheetah and her six adorable cheetah cubs? Did I want them to get so thin and hungry that the hyenas pick them off one by one? Then what about the poor baby hyenas?” (186). The author thus delineates the cruelty in its manifold manifestations in the novel. Next, I will briefly summarize the six stories, periods, and countries, which may help readers understand a more detailed description of the theme of predation in this novel (see Table 2).

Table 2
The periods and counties in *Cloud Atlas*.

The narrator	Period	Country
Adam Ewing	1848-1850	New Zealand, French Polynesia, the United States of Hawaii
Robert Frobisher	1931	England, Belgium
Luisa Rey	1975	The United States
Timothy Cavendish	Late 20 th Century	England
Sonmi-451	Imagined Future	South Korea
Zachry	Post-apocalyptic World	A Hawaiian Island (A post-apocalyptic tribe)

Source: Wei-Han Hsu.

1. “The Pacific Journal of Adam Ewing”

Narrator: Adam Ewing.

Period: 1848-1850.

Location: Chatham Island, New Zealand /Raiatea, French Polynesia/ Honolulu, the United States of Hawaii.

1) Part I:

Adam Ewing is a San Francisco-based notary. The story opens with him on Chatham Island, which officially became part of the Colony of New Zealand in 1842.

Because the ship, which Adam Ewing takes on called *Prophetess*, needed repair. One day, Ewing witnesses a black man being flogged in public by a group of natives. Later, Mr. D'Arnoq, a member of a church in Chatham Island, is dining with Ewing and is telling the history of Chatham Island. He describes the Moriori, who are the island's natives and are a peace-loving people; for example, they forbid violence among their people. As white settlers arrives in increasing numbers and as other free settlers arrives (from the time of Lieutenant Broughton of HMS Chatham in 1791 on), the Moriori have succumbed to the Maori's power and were enslaved. (The Maori have temporarily landed Chatham Island and left before, so the Moriori assume that the Maori would leave the Island soon.) Later, Ewing notices that Autua is a Moriori and was the one being flogged by the Maori in public. Eventually, Autua saves Ewing's life in Part II.

2) Part II:

On his way to Honolulu, the captain, Molyneux, lands on Raiatea, which is the second largest of the Society Islands, to conduct trade with the priest. One day, Adam feels sick and Dr. Henry Goose claims that Ewing's ailment comes from a parasite. Goose then administers a drug to Ewing because the doctor actually wants to steal Adam's property in the room. Ewing is too weak to fight Goose, who is trying to force-feed Ewing more drugs. Finally, Autua wrestles Goose to the ground and brings Ewing to the church, asking for help in Honolulu. In the end, Ewing becomes an abolitionist and dedicates himself to "shaping a world I want Jackson [Ewing's son] to inherit, not one I fear Jackson shall inherit" (508).

2. "Letters from Zedelghem"

Narrator: Robert Frobisher

Period: 1931

Location: London, England and Bruges, Belgium

1) Part I:

Robert Frobisher writes a series of nine letters in 1931 to his male lover, Sixsmith, to explain his process of pursuing his dream of becoming a musician. Frobisher's dream is stymied, however, when he is kicked out of a musical academy because he has run up a huge amount of debt. Now, Frobisher is headed to Belgium from England, and en route, he decides to apply for a position: a transcriber for Vyvyan Ayr, an aging reputable musician in Belgium. Frobisher believes that, in Zedelghem, the older musician's house, he not only will find a place to live but also that he will attain his musical goal.

At first, Vyvyan Ayr is discontented with Frobisher's musical ability. Later, however, Ayr decides to hire Frobisher as a transcriber. One day, Frobisher reads a partial journal written by Adam Ewing during the nineteenth century (Ewing being the first narrator of the previous chapter). Next, Frobisher asks Sixsmith to locate the second half of the book. Meanwhile, Jocasta, the wife of Ayr, has an affair with Frobisher. Frobisher points out that Jocasta "plays with that birthmark in the hollow of my shoulder, the one you [Sixsmith] said resembles a comet" (Mitchell 85).

2) Part II:

Frobisher composes his music, which he names "Cloud Atlas Sextet." However, Frobisher catches Ayr trying to plagiarize his work and thus realizes Ayr has ulterior motives. In turn, Ayr curses Frobisher, claiming that no one would ever hire him if Frobisher leaves. Frobisher quarrels with Ayr and quits his job; before leaving, however, Frobisher discovers the second half of Ewing's journal in Ayr's

room and takes it. In the end, Frobisher expresses his love to Sixsmith and sends his completed manuscript of “Cloud Atlas Sextet,” along with the rest of Ewing’s book, to Sixsmith before Frobisher shoots himself in a hotel.

3. Half-Lives: The First Luisa Rey Mystery

Protagonist : Luisa Rey

Period: 1975

Location: California, United States

1) Part I

In the third story, Rufus Sixsmith, the one who received Frobisher’s letter in the previous story, reappears. He is an eminent and aged physicist and, as the story begins, Sixsmith has a dilemma over whether he ought to reveal the nuclear scandal. By chance, Sixsmith and Luisa Rey (a reporter) take the same elevator; suddenly, the elevator malfunctions due to a power outage. As they wait for the elevator to function again, they have a short conversation. Rey tells Sixsmith about her deceased father, who was a police officer and a renowned Vietnam War reporter. Rey admires her father’s memory. She implies that she, too, wants to be a reporter, just like her father and also chase prominent and newsworthy incidents—instead of the work she currently does, which is reporting the town’s gossip. Sixsmith shows Luisa a picture of a woman and says she is his niece, Megan. When Sixsmith finally decides to express his worry about the truth of the malfunctioning nuclear power plant that will inaugurate soon, the elevator suddenly functions again.

Later, Sixsmith decides to indicate the damage caused by nuclear power plant, which is due to malfunctioning equipment. Eventually, Sixsmith is assassinated by Bill Smoker, a professional killer, but Rey reads a report that claims Sixsmith

committed suicide. Rey suspects foul play and pretends to be his niece, Megan, at the scene of Sixsmith's death. Rey is able to retrieve Sixsmith's belongings, including his letters from Frobisher in which Frobisher mentions his birthmark. Luisa notices that, coincidentally, she also has a birthmark between her shoulder blade and collarbone. The chapter ends with Bill Smoker ramming his car into Luisa's car because he wants to destroy a file that reveals the damage of the nuclear power plant (which is in Rey's car). Bill Smoker tries to kill Rey. When Rey drives her car passing a bridge, Bill Smoker accelerates the car to make Rey fall into the river trapped inside her car.

2) Part II

However, Luisa Rey survives Smoker's attack and actually keeps the Sixsmith report. To uncover the truth, Rey continues to investigate the case. She also buys the compact disc with the recording of "Cloud Atlas Sextet." Finally, she successfully writes a news story that reveals the series of illegal incidents plotted by Lloyd Hook, the former Federal Power Commissioner.

4. The Ghastly Ordeal of Timothy Cavendish:

Protagonist: Timothy Cavendish

Period: Late twentieth century or early-twenty-first century

Location: London, England and Hull, England

1) Part I

Mr. Cavendish is an aging publisher who owns an unprofitable press. One of Cavendish's authors, Dermot Hoggins, participates in an awards presentation; Hoggins is displeased because the only review of his book, "Knuckle Sandwich," is negative (which was written by Mr. Felix Finch). Finch, who is also in the restaurant during the presentation, again publicly criticizes Hoggins's book, saying that it is

terrible—and worse, does so in a room filled with authors and reviewers. Finch then provokes Hoggins; Hoggins responds by grabbing Finch and throwing him out of the twelfth-story window. Finch dies; however, the incident launches Hoggins's to incredible success—in fact, his book sells out within two days.

Soon, Cavendish uses the profits from Hoggins's book to pay off the debt he owes on his press. However, Hoggins's nephew demands that Cavendish share the revenue, threatening that if Cavendish does not acquiesce, then he will kill Cavendish. However, Cavendish has already used all the revenue to pay off his debt; he cannot give any more money to Hoggins's nephew and thus Cavendish calls his brother for help. Cavendish's brother then plans to send him to a remote place for several days. On the way there, Cavendish reads a manuscript called "Half-Lives: The First Luisa Rey Mystery," written by Hilary V. Hish. Cavendish assumes that Hilary V. Hish, a female author, writes this story with a pseudonym. The story refers to the story of Luisa Rey (a character from the third story in *Cloud Atlas*). Surprisingly, the place to which Cavendish's brother has sent him is actually a nursing home, and Cavendish cannot leave there without his brother's permission.

2) Part II

Cavendish decides to escape from the nursing home. He rereads Luisa Rey's story and longs for the second half of the manuscript and says "I, too, have a birthmark, below my left armpit, but no lover ever compared it to a comet" (Mitchell 357). In the nursing home, Cavendish makes a few friends and, together, they successfully escape from the nursing home. In the end, Cavendish contacts the author of Rey's story to retrieve the story's second section, and decides to write a novel of his crazy experience. Also, "Knuckle Sandwich," Hoggins's book, is adapted for film,

and Cavendish finally has enough money to pay Hoggin's nephew and his staff at the publishing house.

5. An Orison of Sonmi-451

Protagonist: Sonmi-451

Period: The Future.

Location: Neo Seoul, South Korea

1) Part I

This chapter's story is set in South Korean's Neo Seoul and the protagonist is Sonmi-451, who is actually a clone (which is also called a 'fabricant'). Sonmi-451's function is providing services for others and working; here, she works in Papa Song's restaurant as a server. As a fabricant, her role is to work for and to worship her owner: Papa Song. A fabricant's food is soap, which eliminates a fabricant's memory and lowers its learning capacity. One day, Yoona-939, another fabricant and one of Sonmi-451's coworkers, leads Sonmi-451 into a storage room; inside the room they feel surprised because they do not know any of the items. Later, Yoona-939's strange behaviors are observed by Seer Rhee, a supervisor in Papa Song's restaurant, such as knowing an increasing number of vocabulary words and demonstrating the capacity to interact with humans. In an accident, while working at the restaurant, Yoona-939 dies. When Sonmi-451 misses her coworker, she suddenly realizes that experiences such a range of emotion is unusual for a fabricant; then she, too, discovers a birthmark on her body. However, Sonmi-451 represses her emotions and secretly controls the amount of soap she eats each day.

One night, Chang, a male member of Union in Mount Taemosan, asks Sonmi-451 whether she wants to go away from the restaurant. Now Sonmi-451 knows that

she has no choice but to leave because someone has discovered that she is ‘abnormal,’ (i.e., having emotions). If she does not leave, she fears that she will be killed, just like Yoona-939. When Sonmi-451 finally decides to leave the restaurant, she sees the outside world for the first time. Sonmi-451 then studies at a university and becomes a valued experiment in a research project aimed at her enlightenment. However, while studying at the university, she is bullied and scolded by classmates because of her identity(a fabricant); later, a professor decides to make Sonmi-451 study by herself and gives her electrical equipment for learning. Also, a professor asks Hae-Joo Im to assist Sonmi-451’s study. One day, Hae-Joo Im plays a movie with Sonmi-451. Sonmi-451 is drawn to watch a particular movie, *The Ghastly Ordeal of Timothy Cavendish*, in which an actor plays an aged man trying to escape from a nursing home. An unexpected crisis interrupts their viewing. The members of Unanimity, arriving at the university, is trying to capture Sonmi-451 when they find out that she is in a university. Hae-Joo Im confesses that he a member of Union, an opposite group of Unanimity, Hae-Joo Im and Sonmi-451 run away from the university.

2) Part II

The second half of this story describes a group of Unanimity and its members who chase Sonmi-451 because they are upset about the details emerging from the research project. During the same period, Sonmi-451 writes a declaration to appeal for securing equal rights for fabricants. The fifth story features an archivist, who is a member of Unanimity that had been chasing Sonmi-451 and asks a series of questions to record Sonmi-451’s thoughts. Afterward, Sonmi-451 confesses that she has already known that Union and Unanimity cooperate to lead her to write a declaration, which could prove that the fabricants’ danger that she incites revolution. Sonmi, then,

expresses that her idea would be played on the media many times, which is enough for her. Sonmi-451 realizes that she will be killed soon; at the end of her life, she asks to watch the movie, *The Ghastly Ordeal of Timothy Cavendish*, which refers to Cavendish's story.

6. Sloosha's Crossin' an' Ev'rythin' After :

Narrator: Zachry

Period: The Distant Future (post-apocalyptic world)

Location: Zachry's Valleymen tribe on a Hawaiian island

1.2) Part I & Part II

This story's narrative combines English and the local language of an abridged English. Zachry witness his father and brother killed by the violent and rival tribe, Kona. Here, Zachry is depicted as healing from his many traumas and overcoming his personal evils, Old Georgie in mind. Meronym, who is a Prescient women, is from an advanced tribe named 'Prescience Isle' and she approaches the Valleymen tribe to gather information and learn about its culture. The information she wants could help rebuild Meronym's hometown. At first, Zachry does not believe that Meronym has good intentions until she saves his sister's life. Also, Zachry believes in Sonmi, a goddess. When Old Georgie haunts Zachry's mind, he prays for Sonmi's help; Meronym respects Zachry's religious beliefs and helps him overcome his fear of witnessing his father and brother killed fiercely by the Kona.

In the end of the story, the Kona tribe invades the Valleymen tribe, and Zachry and Meronym fight together. The Kona kill many people in the Valleymen and occupies their land. Zachry decides to join Meronym's tribe and he believes that Meronym is 'the' person for him because she has a birthmark just like Sonmi's.

Stories and Readers

In *Cloud Atlas*, Mitchell emphasizes the incredible diversity and impact of predation. What is Mitchell's purpose in doing this? What influence does he hope to have on his readers? Patrick O'Donnell argues that Mitchell conveys that readers, too, are complicit:

Mitchell composes here and throughout his fiction a view of narrative survival and responsibility aligned with orality—the passing on of stories told from generation to generation, taking on alternative forms over time—as well as with the scriptural and the discursive, the writing down of multiple narratives that are entrusted to readers who are engaged in drawing connections between the trans migratory identities and dispersed events of his novels. (21)

Thus, the function of these unfolding, interdependent stories is to heighten readers' emotions and create an opportunity for readers to reflect on their own experiences. This is why Mitchell chooses to divide his six stories into different sections.

Why does Mitchell choose to divide these six stories into two distinct parts rather than unfold six stories without any interruption?

When Mitchell interrupts the stories, he is, in fact, intensifying the unity of *Cloud Atlas*. As Begley notes in his interview with Mitchell, Mitchell felt “a bit cheated that Calvino hadn't followed through with what he'd begun” (184) when he read *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler* at eighteen years old. Mitchell even recounts hearing a voice in his head say: “What would it actually look like if a mirror were placed at the end of the book, and you continued into a second half that took you back to the beginning?” (Begley 184). Mitchell then puts this idea into practice in his third

novel, *Cloud Atlas*. Even though Mitchell chooses to unfold all six of his stories alongside interruptions, he nonetheless emphasizes the novel's coherence.

To reiterate: Mitchell creates six stories within one novel, which helps him further elaborate varying levels of predation, as well as people's complicity in predatory behavior. The question that follows naturally is, why is incomplete narration better for elaborating the theme of predation than ordering six stories without interruption? First, if Mitchell were to order each story, one after the other without interruption, it would lower the primacy of the overarching plot.

(Furthermore, it may render this novel more similar to a short story collection.)

Rather, Mitchell coheres the stories using specific motif, such as birthmarks. In each of the six stories, a character has a birthmark on his or her body. Additionally, Mitchell further creates coherency through establishing that each story's narrator has a deep connection with the previous story's narrators. He does this by incorporating specific items throughout the stories, such as a character's journal or novel. Such incorporation demonstrates that each story is not independent from the others, but rather, together, they each make up one novel. Mitchell purposely uses the birthmark motif to heighten the connection among characters, which undoubtedly stresses the unity of the novel as a whole. Additionally, the partial sections suspend readers' feelings, which helps further the plot's movement.

Second, Mitchell essentially offers readers the opportunity to choose their own reading patterns based on a fixed frame. For example, readers can follow Mitchell's organization: reading the first half of the first story through to the sixth story and then reading the second half of the sixth story to the first one. Or, readers can read each story straight through the first to the sixth one without interruption. they even can read

the complete story by beginning with the sixth story to the first one. Even though the plot remains unchanged, the varying reading patterns give the reader an individual, solitary reading experience. In addition, the novel's end is ambiguous, giving readers a degree of freedom to interpret *Cloud Atlas*. Deciding what the end of *Cloud Atlas* depends on whether readers regard the first story or the sixth story as the 'true' ending of *Cloud Atlas*:

Cloud Atlas thus reminds us that the act of framing is a matter of subjective interpretation rather than objective identification—how we map the novel in our minds will ultimately rest upon whether we privilege Ewing's fragile optimism or the bleak post-apocalyptic world of 'Sloosha's Crossin'' as the ultimate message of the novel. (McMorran 293)

The reader's experience is essential, whether one prefers the first or the sixth story as the preferred ending. As McMorran says, "*Cloud Atlas* offers the ultimate philosophical litmus test for its readers, a means of separating the optimists from the pessimists. When all is said and done, it is left to the reader to choose where to end – with Adam or with Zachry – the first man or the last" (303). *Cloud Atlas* stresses the importance of readers exploring the value of society, and does so by asking the reader to choose for himself or herself either the first or the sixth story as the ending. As such, readers can make a kind of narrative collage based on a personal meaning ascribed to the story by determining one's own reading pattern.

Cloud Atlas stresses six stories' interrelationship and utilizes such an unusual structure to reinforce the consistent theme in this novel. It is different from the metafiction that emphasizes its fictionality. In this chapter, I argued that Mitchell uses these six stories to demonstrate the great diversity of the many forms that predation

can take. Furthermore, the function that interruption serves in the novel is to create coherence among the multiple stories. In the next chapter, I focus on the novel's structure and examine it by analyzing the novel alongside the techniques used in the immersive theater setting; doing so provides a more comprehensive understanding of the novel's overall meaning.





Chapter Three

The Optional Reading Pattern in *Cloud Atlas*

Many critics suggest that *Cloud Atlas* is composed of diverse genres, even though they examine this novel from diverse methodologies. For example, Mark Blackwell considers the novel as experimental fiction and points out other works of hybrid genres, such as Jonathan Swift's *Tale of a Tub* (1704) and Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home* (2006). Likewise, Blackwell claims that *Cloud Atlas* is also a genre hybrid: "The artful contemporary analogue of this experimental practice can be found in a genre-weaving tour de force like David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas*" (145). Christy Cobb, however, utilizes "the Bakhtinian concept of chronotope" (51) and "polyphonic dialogism" (51) to indicate the genre flexibility of *Cloud Atlas*. She writes: "Characters separated by hundreds of years and living half a world apart dialogue with one another. This beautifully written text fulfills Bakhtin's description of the novel as liberated from the confines of typical convention" (51). Thus, Blackwell and Cobb both suggest that *Cloud Atlas* is a mixed-genre novel, even though they analyze this novel from different theoretical frameworks.

Cloud Atlas has, in fact, a heterogeneous genre. If one defines this novel merely in terms of one specific genre (such as metafiction), then one may not be able to account entirely for the theme of predacity, the connection among all of the narrators, and the interaction between the reader and the novel's narrators. I seek to fill this critical gap in the criticism on *Cloud Atlas* by arguing that this novel's structure is similar to immersive theatre. To explain the unity among the multiple stories and the

optional reading patterns in *Cloud Atlas*, I utilize the theatrical framework of immersive theater to make up the deficiency I perceive in defining this novel merely as metafiction. Additionally, utilizing the angle of the immersive theater(regarding this novel involving both metafictional techniques and the formation of the immersive theater)could more comprehensively convey the theme in this novel. After exploring the narrative framing of the novel, I do regard *Cloud Atlas* as metafiction, but I also offer a reading that employs the approach of immersive theater, which also accounts for the novel's flexible narrative structure and the novel's overall unity. This chapter thus focuses on the metafictional technique of interruption and further explains that such a technique empowers readers to create their own subjective reading experience, which is akin to an audience's experience in an immersive theater.

The Structure of Interruption & Optional Reading Pattern

In a work of metafiction the unexpected break within and among chapters emphasizes the works' fictionality. *Cloud Atlas* has a similar structure, with the first half of the first story stopping, unpredictably, mid-paragraph and with a final, fragmentary sentence:

Sunday, 8th December- Sabbath not being observed on the Prophetess, this morning Henry & I decided to conduct a short Bible Reading in his cabin in the "low-church" style of Ocean Bay's congregation, "astraddle" the forenoon & morning watches so both starboard & port shifts might. (Mitchell 39)

Then, the text continues on a new page within the second story; furthermore, the second story is written in the epistolary form: "Sixsmith, Dreamt I stood in a china shop so crowded from floor to far-off ceiling with shelves of porcelain antiquities, etc.

that moving a muscle would cause several to fall and smash to bits” (Mitchell 43). Incomplete stories such as these prevent a reader from fully comprehending the novel, even after having completed it. This organizational structure seems to resemble the broken chapters readers encounter in a piece of metafiction. Notably, often it is only when readers finish reading *Cloud Atlas* that they realize the novel’s structure is symmetrical. In fact, the structure is a loop: the first half of each of the six stories creates one clear sequence with the second half of each of the six stories in reverse chronological order. The cessation of each of the stories in *Cloud Atlas* does often hinder a reader’s comprehension, just as metafiction does; yet, metafiction rarely has a symmetrical order and a complete the story, whereas *Cloud Atlas* has both.

Christy Cobb argues that “*Cloud Atlas* . . . [is] often called a postmodern novel . . . [and] the settings and historical eras vary drastically between stories and are not presented in chronological order. Yet, the characters interact with one another across space and time, [which is] evidence of the Bakhtinian concept of chronotope” (51). I do not entirely agree with Cobb’s claim of the novel’s non-chronological order because it seems that she might be overlooking the choices that Mitchell gives to readers. At first, readers might assume that the organization is illogical and they may not understand the relation among the six major characters until after they have finished the whole book (as I mentioned in chapter two, the six stories are ordered chronologically, from the first story through the sixth, and then proceeding chronologically through the second half of the six stories, but in reverse order). Hence, it is only once the reader has read the six stories entirely that he or she realizes that the time period of the first story through to the sixth spans from the 1800s to the post-apocalyptic world. In the novel’s original organization, indeed the order is not

chronological because, in the novel's middle, the organization continues with the second half of the six stories in a recursive way. Nevertheless, considering that Mitchell divided the stories into two sections and omitted chapter numbers, in a way, he hands the authorship over to the readers, who can thus determine on their own how to read *Cloud Atlas* based on the fixed framework of the established storyline. *Cloud Atlas* provides readers a framework for readers to choose the order in which to read the six stories. As such, if we consider only one reading pattern (i.e., the original organization) then indeed, this novel's plot does not unfold chronologically. However, because Mitchell gives readers a opportunity to have an individual reading experience, *Cloud Atlas* does have a plot that unfolds chronologically if the reader chooses to read the entire novel beginning with the first and then follow through to the last without interruption.

A defining characteristic of metafiction is its emphasis on the interaction between narrators and readers. Likewise, Mitchell also stresses this interaction by embedding an interactive structure within each story. In *Cloud Atlas*, each fragmentary section is like one piece of a bigger collage. These unpredictable interruptions often impede readers from discerning the novel's overall plot in the midst of reading each individual story, but the function of each interruption is actually to create the option for readers to decide on their preferred reading pattern.

Cloud Atlas can be examined through the theoretical lens of immersive theater because only this method can more accurately interpret two aspects of the work: first, the way the reading pattern is determined by readers and, second, the unity of the six short stories within the novel. As such, rather than leveraging these literary theories in my approach to *Cloud Atlas*, I choose a theatrical method for analyzing the novel's

structure. The notion of immersive theater combined with metafictional techniques equips one to examine the generic hybridity novel. Furthermore, *Cloud Atlas* helps readers gain a new perspective with which to understand the way structure can function in the novel.

Immersive Theater

Immersive theatrical work dissolves the boundary between the audience and actors, and invites the audience to move their physical bodies while enjoying a play. As Rose Biggin points out about immersive theater: “[the] interactive work . . . [creates a] role [that] the audience has to play” (66). As the audience members immerse themselves in a play, they can then determine how to watch a play according to their preference.

According to Jason Warren, there are four styles of immersive theatre. Warren distinguishes each style depending on how the audience influences the play and whether an audience can directly alter a play’s plot. In *Creating Worlds: How to Make Immersive Theatre*, Warren describes immersive theater thus: “it’s [immersive theatre] on everyone’s lips. Every five minutes, a new ‘immersive’ event is announced and sells out—and if you’ve been to a few of these [plays], you’ll know that they often have very few similarities to each other” (5). Warren classifies and explains four forms of immersive theater experiences:

We can identify four different varieties of immersive work. I refer to these as Exploration Theatre, Guided Experiences, Immersive Worlds and Game Theatre. These aren’t established term that you’ll necessarily see used elsewhere; they’re helpful definitions I use that make it easier to be specific when we talk about immersive work. (5)

Immersive work stresses the audience's participation in the theatrical experience itself. For example, Guided Experience—one of the forms Warren identifies—is more thoroughly dependent on audience participation: “First, the audience is integral; the piece cannot take place without at least one audience member present” (Warren 6). In contrast, in Exploration Theater, the audience “is free to explore the space,” and the play itself is less dependent on audience participation; in fact, the play “is usually intricately designed and [is] a pleasure to be in regardless of the cast's action, and they [both the actors and the audience] can follow whatever strands of the story they wish” (6). Although in Exploration Theater the audience does not directly alter the plot, the environment of Exploration Theater does, nonetheless, encourage and lead the audience to create its own journey. Here, I argue that the physical arena of Exploration Theater is similar to *Cloud Atlas*'s structure: both works present a setting in which the audience/reader reproduces his or her subjective viewing/reading experience. Of all the four styles of immersive theater, the audience's role in Exploration Theater is most similar to that of *Cloud Atlas*'s readers.

Moreover, Biggin claims that the audience's movement does not change the plot; here, she uses an example from the play, *The Drowned Man*:

In immersive theatre, and particularly Punchdrunk's larger productions from *Faust* through to *The Drowned Man*, the way an audience member might actually affect the work is never overtly suggested. It might be implied in the moment of performance that one-on-one scenes are dependent upon an audience member's input, and where an audience member goes will affect what they see, but they cannot actively influence anything that occurs in performance. (66)

In other words, immersive work permeates the entire physical space of a theater—rather than just the stage—because the audience also occupies the theatrical space. In immersive theater, an established scheme leads the audience to choose and invent its own unique experience of participating in a play. The audience members get to choose which physical location within the theater they want to begin watching the play, which means that they also choose the order in which they experience the play’s scenes. In this way, each audience member creates his or her own sequencing, and thus his or her own subjective experience of the play itself in immersive theatre. Similar to an immersive theater experience, the reader of *Cloud Atlas* can also determine his or her preferred order in which to ‘experience’ the scenes unfolding, thus creating a unique reading experience.

On this point, Caroline Heim claims that “the actor’s performance [in a theater] influences the audience, and the audience member’s responses influence the actors” (2). Here, Heim explains that an actor’s performance and the audience’s response are integral parts of the dramatic unfolding itself. She notes that “audience response is a performance in and of itself and that in the diegetic world of the theatrical experience that actor and the audience are performers in this world” (7). Immersive theater stresses that each audience member creates his or her subjective viewing experience by participating in the play itself. The audience thus has the power to determine how to watch the play, which changes the audience’s position from assuming a passive role to an active role. The function of immersive theater is to make audience members focus on their feelings and emotions to underscore a deeper point: that no two people can have the exact same experience, even when occupying the same physical space or observing the ‘same’ play. As Felix Barrett contends, “No two audience members

within the space have the same shoe and every evening the experience you've has is yours and yours alone"(Barrett). Even if the audience watch the same play, no one would have the same experience because the feeling and experience are their own. The audience is like a speaker and a listener who has the power to influence others to share their feeling one another. Hence, the arena of immersive theater draws the audience's attention on themselves. The actor's performance influences the audience, and also, the audience's reactions influence the actor. Their behaviors both are a part of essential factors in a play.

Cloud Atlas's organization of each individual chapter (and thus each individual story) intentionally creates an interruption for the reader ; as such, the novel is similar to a work of metafiction, which also impedes the reading experience. Notably, *Cloud Atlas*'s six stories do eventually come to a satisfying completion in the end. Thus, the interruptions actually serve to integrate each story into one, overarching narrative. Furthermore, the interruptions allow readers to create a personal meaning of the story as a result of the novel's flexible reading options. Even though readers cannot change the plot itself, nonetheless, readers still do not have the same reading experience because they can choose the order in which they read the stories. Also, *Cloud Atlas* has six stories, and Mitchell provides an optional reading pattern to readers. Even if two readers read the novel with the same pattern, they might not have the same experience because they might focus on the different issues and might be touched by the different incidents in storylines.

Another way in which *Cloud Atlas* resembles immersive theater is that a part of each story within the novel functions similarly to a part of a scene in a play. In generic drama, the performance is constituted of scenes. In contrast to immersive theater, a

‘typical’ theater piece would be performed according to a pre-arranged order of scenes, one after the other. Instead, immersive work does not have a static organization of scenes. *Cloud Atlas* has neither a table of contents nor clearly-defined chapters. Rather, Mitchell provides a sense of structure to his work by incorporating a kind of title page at the beginning of each ‘half story,’ which occurs in the midst of each independent story, or ‘chapter. Both *Cloud Atlas* and immersive work, therefore, remove chapter numbers (which function as a pre-arranged, or static, order) or an unchangeable list of scenes. On this point, Deborah Prudhon argues that the audience member of an immersive theater experience must gather information himself or herself to construct a blueprint of the play’s plot. She writes: “The experience of the immersant is therefore not one of linearity, but of fragmentation. Even if they [the audience] decide to follow the same character through his or her entire loop, they [the audience] will still miss a major part of the show and the journey itself may be interrupted” (Prudhon 3). Likewise, readers of *Cloud Atlas* are confronted with a similar situation as a spectator watching an immersive work. For example, the reader might be puzzled about a fragmentary section of either a play or a novel, but he or she might read or watch the same work repeatedly. Again, Prudhon is apt here:

“Cultivating the frustration of the audience and the ‘mystery’ surrounding the story behind the show can be considered a way for the company to ‘trap’ the immersant and encourage them to come back in order to try and solve the narrative ‘puzzle’ ” (4).

The intricate plotline in *Cloud Atlas* and that of an immersive work serves to boost the spectator’s/reader’s participation because one must engage with the plot thoroughly and in a step-by-step manner.

In *Cloud Atlas*, Mitchell uses six different, yet related, stories to construct his

novel; he cuts each story off at its midway point and then organizes them in a mirror-like manner. Each of the six stories has its own genre and each is set in its own time period; yet together, they do form a chronological order spanning from the 1800s to a dystopian, distant future. Additionally, the title of each story is a clue for understanding the following context belongs to which story is and is presented before each new section. Such a design creates a flexible structure in that readers can determine the order in which they read *Cloud Atlas*. Alternatively, one can read the novel beginning with the sixth story and then progress to the fifth story, and then proceed to the fourth story and so on. In this way, Mitchell's readers can have a reading experience that resembles an audience determining its experience in immersive theater.

Examining *Cloud Atlas* from the angle of immersive theater equips the reader to explore the ways in which the novel's six stories present the motif of reprehensive objects, which furthers the novel's theme of predacity. Even though each of the six stories has a different historical background, predacity occurs everywhere and in each generation, which provides thematic continuity among the six stories—such a technique also resembles thematic unity among numerous incidents and movements in a play written for the immersive experience. Mitchell uses this unique structure to present the idea that predation assumes multiple dimensions. Moreover, the novel's interruptions also resemble a scene in an immersive play in which the audience experiences its journey by encountering each fragmentary performance in different physical spaces. If one were to define *Cloud Atlas* merely as a piece of metafiction, such a definition could only account for the interruptions in a way that stresses merely the fictionality of the work; as such, employing the lens of metafiction can explain

neither the symmetrical order of the six stories nor the novel's relationship to the consistent theme.

This chapter has considered how the six stories work to function, which is divided into two sections, their first halves, and their second halves. I conclude that, while such a division may impede a reader's comprehension, it nonetheless serves the greater purpose of allowing readers to choose their own reading pattern. This thesis focuses on both the organizational structure of the novel itself, the skilled architecture of multiple narrations, and the reader's capacity to invent or produce a subjective meaning of *Cloud Atlas* because of the novel's optional reading pattern. Coming from the angle of the immersive theater experience, I have argued that the novel's fragmentary sections (i.e., 'interruptions') heighten the interaction between the work itself and its readers. The next chapter will focus on the interrelationship among the novel's many narrators and how the concept of immersive theater could explain the significance and meaning of Mitchell's use of multiple narrations in *Cloud Atlas*.



Chapter Four

The Consistent Theme: Predatory Behaviors

To draw out the point more thoroughly that *Cloud Atlas* does, indeed, incorporate elements of metafictional technique while also utilizing techniques in common with immersive theatre, I will briefly introduce the masterpiece of metafiction: Calvino's *If on A Winter's Night A Traveler*. Furthermore, I differentiate between Calvino's work and Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas*. Next, I argue that the interrelationship of each of the six stories cannot be explained by metafiction techniques alone, and I base my claim on two key points : first, the stories contain a continuity of motifs and themes; and, second, the narrators switching positions from story to story, sometimes assuming the role of a reader and sometimes that of a narrator. By exploring Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas* through the angle of immersive theater, I note that readers might connect with a deeper literary understanding of the six stories, such as the continuity provided by characters sometimes being the narrator and sometimes being a 'reader'. Finally, I would indicate that the novel's continuity resides in the theme of predation.

In Italo Calvino's *If on A Winter's Night A Traveler*, the narrator (which is called 'you') buys a novel that is erroneously bound, and the narrator returns to the bookstore, asking for a new novel. To 'you's' surprise, the book 'you' receives is also misbound and has the wrong page number of the novel. The primary plotline of *If on A Winter's Night A Traveler* is that of the narrator's personal story; additionally, the plot is interwoven with these erroneously bound book, and within the physical book are many stories, each of which is written in a different genre. However, these stories

are unfinished, each having only its first half. In addition to the main storyline, the narrator's story, and the story-within-a-story technique, readers can easily distinguish each individual story. 'You's' story is interwoven with the embedded stories, and 'you' even discusses the process of changing books for the correct one until the end of Calvino's novel. Such interweaving creates a noticeable distinction between the primary plot and the secondary storylines.

Like Calvino's novel, *Cloud Atlas* is also comprised of many stories, each of which is written in a different genre. However, Mitchell's six connected stories are different from Calvino's story-within-a-story technique. That the stories in *Cloud Atlas* are not embedded stories is demonstrated by the fact that the narrators interact with content (such as novels, music, and so on) from the previous stories within the novel; furthermore, such continuity furthers the novel's overarching plot. In contrast, a character of a story-within-a-story, in Calvino's novel, does not influence a character in the primary story; in *Cloud Atlas*, the narrators respond emotionally to the meaning of the objects they encounter, thus altering the plot's development. In other words, a character will be a narrator in one story and then, in another story, will be participating in another character's story (for example, by reading a novel or listening to music).

When examining *Cloud Atlas* from the angle of metafiction, I think that it is more productive to analyze *Cloud Atlas* from the perspective of the immersive theater. Akin to characters assuming diverse roles in *Cloud Atlas*, the actors in immersive theater also assume different roles; sometimes, the actors perform as characters in the play and sometimes they perform as an audience member. Additionally, fragmentary sections (i.e., 'interruptions') in *Cloud Atlas* are similar to individual scenes in

immersive theater, in that each story engages with the same motif and theme. In contrast, while metafiction (and here I take *If on A Winter's Night A Traveler* as an example) also has many stories and narrators, the stories do not relate to each other and rarely create continuity through motifs and themes.

When explaining *Cloud Atlas*'s meaning, Mitchell, in the interview with Begley, says that “one of my serial-repeating themes is predacity” (Begley 186). Furthermore, Mitchell points out that “the ethical distance from good to evil can be crossed creepingly, by a long series of small steps” (Begley 186). On this point, Mitchell uses the example of a documentary in which a cheetah pursues an antelope. Mitchell's notion of good and evil is not based on binary opposition, nor is his definition of predation:

An innocent antelope got ripped to shreds—but what about poor Mrs. Cheetah and her six adorable cheetah cubs? Did I want them to get so thin and hungry that the hyenas pick them off one by one? Then what about the poor baby hyenas? And on we go . . . arriving, eventually, at questions like, What is cruelty? What is evil? (Begley 186)

According to *Cambridge Dictionary*, the word *predation* is defined as “the fact that an animal hunts, kills, and eats other animals” (noun). This definition situates the primitive behaviors of predation in nature. Mitchell emphasizes the similar idea of predation in *Cloud Atlas*. Moreover, he stresses how predatory behaviors happen within human society—not simply within the animal kingdom. Furthermore, *Cambridge Dictionary* explains that the word *predatory* indicates behaviors from “a . . . person or organization [that] tries to get something that belongs to someone else” (adjective). In *Cloud Atlas*, Mitchell portrays both forms (the external and

internal) of predatory behaviors when a character takes another character's belongings from him or her.

Mitchell portrays the pervasiveness of predation in society throughout *Cloud Atlas*, and he does so from a comprehensive perspective. This seems to indicate that no matter what, a person, an organization, a government, or a nation would be inclined, in various circumstances, to take something that belongs to someone else (whether that 'something' is a visible object or an invisible 'good'). Mitchell says, "As a human being, I believe that this series of steps [that lead toward committing evil] must be understood" (Begley 186). Examples of external predatory behaviors come in the first and sixth stories, "The Pacific Journal of Adam Ewing" and "Sloosha's Crossin' an' Ev'rythin' After." These stories emphasize different ethnic groups and tribal violence. The other remaining stories demonstrate forms of internal predatory behavior, such as plagiarizing another's idea, harming social welfare because of an unequal Right to Know, restricting another's physical freedom by imprisoning him in a nursing home, and violating someone's right to education and learning.

Precisely, one of the stories in *Cloud Atlas*, "The Pacific Journal of Adam Ewing," describes the aboriginal history of the Moriori, who were conquered by the Maori in New Zealand. As commerce and trade emerged, the Maori's population decreased because of infectious diseases.

In another story, "Letters from Zedelghem," Robert Frobisher's fight against Vyvyan Ayr's plagiarizing his idea furthers Mitchell's theme of predation in the form of passing off another's knowledge as one's own. However, Frobisher does commit adultery with Ayr's wife, which is another form of predation because of the resulting,

violent deconstruction of Ayr's family.

The third story, "Half-Lives: The First Luisa Rey Mystery," exemplifies the unequal distribution of information between a government and its citizens.

Additionally, in this story, few scientists follow their conscience to disclose the dangers posed by a new nuclear power plant. Luisa Rey, a reporter, secretly gathers and cooperates with the scientists and finally exposes the corruption to the public.

Here, the theme of predation takes the form of threatening public welfare, but is successfully prevented by Rey's reporting and the scientists who are assassinated by Bill Smoker, a professional killer.

In "The Ghastly Ordeal of Timothy Cavendish," Timothy, an aged publisher, encounters a series of seemingly insane incidents. In response, he asks his older brother for help escaping from the mob who come to collect on Timothy's debt, and his brother obliges by secretly arranging for Cavendish to hide out at a nursing home (however, Cavendish thinks he will be relocated to a hotel, not a nursing home). At the home, Cavendish encounters unacceptable treatment and restrictions on his freedom. Again, the theme of predation creates continuity among these stories; in this case, in the form of taking one's freedom and dignity.

"An Orison of Sonmi-451" also furthers Mitchell's theme and is about a fabricant who realizes that the "pureblood" people control all aspects of a fabricant's fate. Sonmi-451, a fabricant who works as a waitress, discovers that her food (which is actually soap) erases her memory and prevents her from acquiring vocabulary, which effectively restricts her freedom of speech. Sonmi-451 then confirms that the restaurant owns her identity; this power dynamic represents the lack of equal rights among citizens and the powerlessness often experienced by persons affected by

racism. This story thus describes the damage caused by stereotyping, which results from a society's complicity in depriving someone of his or her right to decide his or her own destiny.

Predation, as a theme, takes the form of inter-tribal violence in "Sloosha's Crossin' an' Ev'rythin' After," and recounts the story of one tribe eliminating another. This story points to the common human ambition of conquering others, which causes unspeakable trauma. Furthermore, the story explores the deconstruction of one's mental health, demonstrating the aftermath of trauma: rendering one's life full of fear and the loss of security.

In addition to Mitchell's theme of predation, *Cloud Atlas* addresses other social issues such as colonialism, homosexuality, nuclear safety, verbal attack, clone, apocalypse, and so on. This is a common practice on an author's part and, as David Ball notes, plays also present many themes, but not every theme is necessarily essential: "As you do your analytic reading, keep a small list of themes. Some plays have many, though not all are of the same importance" (Ball 78). By approaching the novel from a theatrical angle, I argue that despite the various additional social and personal issues addressed in the six stories, the novel itself conveys one unifying theme: predation. To delineate the various perspective of this theme, Mitchell, in six stories, describes the predatory behaviors that occupy no matter visibly and invisibly exist in human society. Thus, the notion of predatory behavior throughout six stories coheres six short stories as one novel.

Moreover, the narrators perform the roles as speakers and listeners in other stories, which creates cohesion among the six stories. In addition to this, the stories also exhibit a chronological order, ranging from the 1800s to an imagined, dystopian

future. The dominant actions that demonstrate this point are those of the narrators from previous stories interacting with objects in a different story in which they are not the narrator. These objects are then carried over from the story in which the character was originally cast as the narrator. Such actions recast the narrator from one story into the role of a reader, viewer, or listener in another story.

A pertinent example of these shifting roles is when Robert Frobisher, the narrator of the second story, mentions that he is interested in a journal written by Adam Ewing, who narrated the first story:

I [Frobisher] want you [Sixsmith] to track down a complete copy for me. It begins on the ninety-ninth page, its covers are gone, its binding unstitched. From what little I can glean, it's the edited journal of a voyage from Sydney to California by a notary of San Francisco named Adam Ewing. Mention is made of the gold rush, so I suppose we are in 1849 or 1850. The journal seems to be published posthumously, by Ewing's son... To my great annoyance, the pages cease, midsentence, some forty pages later, where the binding is worn through. (Mitchell 64)

As Frobisher reads Ewing's journal, Frobisher's emotions are stirred and his curiosity is piqued. I assume that Ewing's story could stir Frobisher's emotion because they have a similar situation. Ewing, taking on the ship, feels lonely and even needs to endure the unequal treatment in a new place from the ship staff during his journey. Frobisher, also, lives in Vyvyan Ayrs' house and need to pander to Ayrs' favors.

Frobisher's story also influences Luisa Rey—the narrator of the following story. As the narrator of the third story, Rey reads the letter written by Frobisher for Sixsmith and buys a copy of "The Cloud Atlas Sextet," a musical work created by

Frobisher:

Luisa has reread Sixsmith's letters a dozen times or more in the last day and a half. They disturb her. A university friend of Sixsmith's, Robert Frobisher, wrote the series in the summer of 1931 during a prolonged stay at a château in Belgium. It is not the unflattering light they shed on a pliable young Rufus Sixsmith that bothers Luisa but the dizzying vividness of the images of places and people that the letters have unlocked. Images so vivid she can only call them memories. (Mitchell 120)

These letters recount Frobisher's life, yet Rey feels familiar with these incidents. In the third story, when Luisa Rey reads these letters, she is undergoing a situation that her supervisor does not support her from keeping investigating the scandal of a nuclear plant as a news report. Especially when she decides not to report gossip town news but to uncover a scandal for the public welfare, she confronts threats while collecting the information for this news report and without her boss's support. This scenario is like Robert Frobisher, who is treated by a reputable musician, Vyvyan Ayr. These letters express Frobisher's tough situations and also echo Rey's hard times by her reading.

In *Cloud Atlas*, narrators are continuity by the act of reading. At the same time, Rey actively creates her own story. Meanwhile, in the fourth story, Cavendish reads and decides to publish a work of fiction, which implies that Rey's story was written by Hilary V. Hush, a female author under a pseudonym. As Cavendish says:

My editing work on *Half-Lives* hit a natural obstacle when Luisa Rey was driven off a bridge and the ruddy manuscript ran out of pages. I tore my hair and beat my breast. Did part two even exist? Was it stuffed in a shoe box in

Hilary V.'s Manhattan apartment? (Mitchell 357)

In this scene, Cavendish both reads the novel that recounts Rey's story and responds eagerly, wanting to finish the rest of Rey's story. When Luisa Rey is driven off a bridge, she traps in her car and fallen in the water. Rey is stuck the car and seems to unable to escape from the deadly situation. It echoes Cavendish's predicament that he cannot leave the nursing house.

Then, in "An Orison of Sonmi~451", Cavendish's story becomes a movie; later, Sonmi-451, the protagonist of the fifth story, watches the film and enjoys it:

A picaresque entitled *The Ghastly Ordeal of Timothy Cavendish*, made before the foundation of Nea So Copros, in a long-deadlanded province of the European democracy. . . . For fifty minutes, for the first time since my ascension, I forgot myself, utterly, ineluctably. (Mitchell 234)

Sonmi-451 almost becomes fully immersed in the movie, 'The Ghastly Ordeal of Timothy Cavendish', and nearly forgets the time. Sonmi-451 is obsessed with this movie because Cavendish, in the nursing house, and her both are deprived of freedom. The movie implies Sonmi-451's eagerness for freedom.

In the sixth story, Sonmi-451 becomes a goddess called Sonmi; in turn, Zachry (the protagonist of the sixth story) remembers that he had prayed to Sonmi when he was overwhelmed by the memory of witnessing his father's and brother's deaths: "Zachry the Brave Niner he snaky-snuck up a leafy hideynick to snivel'n'pray to Sonmi he'd not be caught'n'slaved too" (Mitchell 127). The relation between Zachry and Sonmi-451 is brave. At the end of "An Orison of Sonmi~451", Sonmi-451 does not fear the upcoming death. Her brave is what Zachry needs, at that moment, he prays to Sonmi. As such, these examples demonstrate the correlation among the

novel's many narrators.

Moreover, from the first story to the sixth, the characters' emotions about the previous story gradually grow stronger. For instance, Frobisher asks his friends to find Ewing's journal and expresses his feelings of "great annoyance" (Mitchell 64). Luisa Rey's memories are awakened by letters: "Images so vivid she can only call them memories" (Mitchell 120) and Timothy Cavendish recounts that he "tore my hair [out] and beat my breast" (Mitchell 357) because he lacked access the second half of *Half-Lives—The First Luisa Rey Mystery*. Even Sonmi-451, a fabricant, demonstrates increasingly strong emotions when she describes that the movie *The Ghastly Ordeal of Timothy Cavendish* makes her "forget myself, utterly, ineluctably" (Mitchell 234). Finally, Zachry believes that Sonmi-451 is the goddess Sonmi.

Such a shifting of roles is similar to what David Ball describes as "a play . . . [being] a series of action[s]" (9). Ball says:

A play is action. Why do you think actors are called actors? Then what is action? For script analysis, action is a very particular entity. Action occurs when something happens that makes or permits something else to happen. Action is two "something happenings," one leading to the other. Something causes or permits something else. I let go of my pencil (half an action); it falls to the floor (the other half of the action). Together those two connected events make an action. (9)

Ball further points out the connection linking two things, which is established by action. In *Cloud Atlas*, each of the six stories is connected, even though they are set in different time periods and geographical spaces. Each story influences the following story, and the shifting roles among the characters say, from narrator to someone

reading a letter or listening to music in another story is similar to actors in immersive theater.

First, the shifting of narrative voices in *Cloud Atlas* can exemplify a performer's shifting role in immersive theater. Such a function can create an immersive effect for the audience because in this performative context, actors and actresses do not always maintain a distance to the audience; sometimes, performers even stand among audience members to watch the play alongside them. For instance, characters read another character's story, and the narrator also reads one of the other narrator's stories. Such interdependence of characters between stories is akin to actors in immersive theater. In a 'typical' dramatic setting, the audience sits passively in the theater while actors perform on stage and the theatrical space itself differentiates between the passive audience and 'active' actors. In immersive theater, the audience can choose how it wants to experience the play and the actors perform in a specific space; actors, furthermore, are then free to roam casually among the audience as long as it is not their turn to perform.

Here, it is important to note that there are three models of repetition in immersive production. First, an immersive production may repeat scenes until the end of a play, so that the audience can watch, repetitively, any scene of the play they want. Second, another form of repetition is when a play repeats itself three times, such as *Sleep No More*, one of Punchdrunk's immersive productions. In Deborah Prudhon's analysis of the play, she indicates that *Sleep No More* repeats three times; she writes: "The show is composed of a loop—or cycle—which lasts for about an hour and is repeated three times over during the performance"(11). However, another immersive production does not repeat in this way, such as *The Speakeasy*, directed by Nick Olivero, which

encourages the audience to return to watch the play again. When indicating about *The Speakeasy*, Charles Kruger says: “Actors perform complex scenes seamlessly, at the bar, at the crap table, in the cabaret. At times, you may not even be sure who is acting and who is not” (“Review: The Speakeasy (*****)”). That is, some actors in immersive theater productions perform in the theatrical space itself while also being able to watch other actors’ performances—they are both a performer and an audience member. These dual roles exemplify my own argument pertaining to the narrators in *Cloud Atlas* who also assume diverse roles throughout the different stories.

However, when a narrator reaches for an object (such as a book) that appeared in the previous story and reads it, then that narrator (who is the speaker in the current story) also becomes a reader. Thus, one character performs two roles: that of a narrator and that of a reader. Because these independent stories are divided into two parts and because each story is intertwined with the others through physical objects, these stories also shift from the form of the unfolding story to the form of a represented object or in the other way round, from a represented object to an unfolding story (from a represented object to an unfolding story). Such a shift in form may confuse readers about the stories’ authenticity, which indicates the metafictional elements of the novel, in that it emphasizes the text’s fictionality. However, this kind of form shifting also expands and diversifies what the novel means to the reader.

For instance, when a reader finishes reading a story, which is only half completed (meaning that although the text ends, the narrative is incomplete), and then encounters that same story as a represented object in the next story (which occurs during the last half of the current narrative), the reader may infer that the changeable form suggests that the events are not merely taking place in the text (a represented

object) but in reality as well. That is, Mitchell creates an overarching narrative through the “half story” form, repeating objects, and the second “half story” form to emphasize an important point: that when someone reads *Cloud Atlas*, he or she has singular experiences the novel akin to a character experiencing one of the represented objects in the fictional text. However, the way the reader situates his or her world is similar to how this happens in each story, which implies that predatory behaviors still plague society. Moreover, this narratological technique actually reinforces predatory behavior; as such, one deduces that the theme of *Cloud Atlas* (i.e., predation) might not happen merely in the fictional realm of a novel.

By weaving the overarching theme of predation throughout *Cloud Atlas*, Mitchell thus creates a unified structure similar to that of an immersive performance piece in which actors and actresses take on shifting roles of speaker and spectator, or narrator and participant. In addition to engaging with objects that appear in another narrator’s story, the protagonists also perform the act of reading, which demonstrates the powerful influence of being both a narrator and a listener. Furthermore, the shifting form of the stories also stresses the theme of predatory behavior, which Mitchell achieves by utilizing this innovative narratological form. As such, Mitchell offers the reader a choice and raises the issue of predatory behaviors: by engaging with *Cloud Atlas*, readers are given choices, such as how one interprets the novel and one’s preferred reading sequence, thus deciding independently how to react to various difficulties and atrocities including predatory behaviors in their life.



Chapter Five

Conclusion

In this thesis, I have argued that *Cloud Atlas*, despite its generic complexity, also employs metafictional elements. The novel's metafictional aspects are seen when Adam Ewing describes how terrified he was of the Moriori's relics while in a cave. In this scene, Adam's son notes that "My father never spoke to me of the dendroglyphs and I learnt of them only in the manner described in the Introduction" (Mitchell 21). Moreover, metafictional elements are present when Cavendish reads Rey's story (which is a piece of fiction written by Hilary V. Hush). These metafictional elements intentionally confuse readers about the authenticity and fictionality of details of storylines. Rather, this thesis asserts that *Cloud Atlas*, like metafiction, emphasizes the interaction between the reader and the text. Yet unlike metafiction, *Cloud Atlas* creates an optional reading model and, furthermore, depicts many narrators who tell their own stories but are also spectators of others' stories. Thus, these two points go beyond the definition of metafiction, and overlooking them would deny the power Mitchell gives to his reader, as well as the uniqueness of *Cloud Atlas*'s characters. Like immersive theatrical work, *Cloud Atlas* retains readers' attention by employing an intentional structure.

Begley, in his interview with Mitchell, proposes his explanation of interruption in the first story *Cloud Atlas*. "The first chapter—the first half of Ewing's narrative—is itself cut in halfway the narrative of the savage Autua (whose name is a palindrome), so that the first chapter mirror the shape of the book as a whole. Or is

this a case of overreading? (185). Mitchell replies: “Is there such a thing as overreading? Just because it wasn’t part of my grand design doesn’t mean it isn’t there” (185). Seemingly by design, Mitchell thus leaves readers to have their own subjective interpretation of the novel.

In conclusion, my research provided in this thesis indicates that the structure of *Cloud Atlas* has two fine points of differentiation from metafiction: the optional reading pattern and the consistent theme of predation. The complexity of multiple genres in *Cloud Atlas* may partially be explained by the following, tentative conclusion, namely that these two points are similar to an immersive theatrical work. By analyzing *Cloud Atlas* from this angle, the mutable nature of the text itself shapes and readers’ experience, and like the journey undergone in an immersive theater, is irreplaceable.

Mitchell elevates the novel’s importance by designing such complex but interconnective stories; this attracts readers and critics alike to analyze the work repeatedly. The context of dealing with the issue including countries, socials, and even individuals and itself indicates that it was not merely written for readers to interact with. Also, the reader retains the freedom to create his or her own subjective reading experience. By utilizing similar techniques as immersive theater, Mitchell thus promotes the position of the novel itself, along with the reader’s individual power. Here, I intend that my argument will thus equip readers to interpret both this multi-feature, postmodern novel and to clarify the reader’s relationship to texts. Such an analysis is worth further investigation and I argue that additional research is needed, particularly regarding the genre hybridity of postmodern fiction. In light of the results obtained in my research, there remains a critical need for employing the

theatrical perspective to rectify the lack of critical consensus about *Cloud Atlas*'s genre. As such, additional research could certainly make great strides in addressing this gap in the critical literature.





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